1990

Vol. 2 FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon

FARMS Review

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Available at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol2/iss1/33

This Full Issue is brought to you for free and open access by the All Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011 by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
Editor's Introduction:

By What Measure Shall We Mete?

Daniel C. Peterson

Hodgson's Test

"What serious and intelligent persons over many generations, and in preference to many available alternatives, have held to be significant," Marshall G. S. Hodgson noted some years ago, "rarely turns out, on close investigation, to be trivial."¹ Speaking specifically of Islam, Thomas Carlyle put what was essentially the same point in another way: "Are we to suppose that it was a miserable piece of legerdemain, this which so many creatures of the Almighty have lived by and died by? I, for my part, cannot form any such supposition. I will believe most things sooner than that."² Islam has, of course, long since met Hodgson's test, and it should grow clearer with each passing year that Mormonism, too, is a legitimate and serious religious option. Yet this fact, to me incontrovertible, is evidently not clear to many people. In his important book Faith and Reason, for instance, faced with the great number of religions claiming to embody divine truth and with our desire to choose between them, the noted British philosopher Richard Swinburne argues that "what a man thinks worth giving his life to serve deserves at least a passing inspection from us, if he assures us that it is of deep significance for us." So far, so good. This agrees nicely with Hodgson and Carlyle, as well as with common sense. But Swinburne's qualification of that proposition is somewhat surprising. "The Mormon . . . who knocks so unwelcome at our door," he continues, "is entitled to a small initial amount of serious attention. But I suggest that for most of us there is not nearly so much point in investigating the credal claims of religions which have not spread throughout the

globe and into which we do not bump, as in investigating the other religions. The failure of the former to spread among those who do come into contact with them is some evidence that they are not worth more serious attention."

Now, it is possible that Prof. Swinburne is talking about a different group than the Mormons I know. For it seems clear to me that Mormonism is spreading among those who come into contact with it. And, indeed, spreading very rapidly. "It is possible today," writes the eminent non-Mormon sociologist of religion Rodney Stark, "to study that incredibly rare event: the rise of a new world religion." (He sees Mormonism as the first new "world religion" since the call of the Prophet Muhammad in the early seventh century A.D.) "The Mormons," Stark argues, will soon achieve a worldwide following comparable to that of Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and the other dominant world faiths." To be specific, he predicts a membership of between 60 and 265 million Latter-day Saints by the year 2080.

Scholarly Indifference

Such a phenomenon as this should attract study and attention from the outside world. Has it? On the whole, no. At the recent annual joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, papers were given on topics including "Ecofeminism, Food and Pets," "Howard Thurman and the Civil Rights Movement: Interpreter and Enabler from the Underside of History," and "Over the Rainbow: Utopian Configurations in Hollywood Fantasy Films"—to choose entirely at random from the more than one thousand titles—but nothing, nothing whatsoever, dealt with Mormonism. Not a single session, not one paper, was devoted to the fastest growing major religion in America.

5 Ibid., 26: "The ‘miracle’ of Mormon success makes them the single most important case on the agenda of the social scientific study of religion."
However, the problem is not merely one of indifference. In the introduction to last year's edition of the present Review, I alluded to W. D. Davies's 1986 article in the Harvard Theological Review, "Reflections on the Mormon Canon," as one hopeful sign of growing scholarly interest in Mormonism. I now suspect that my rejoicing may have been premature. Apparently Professor Davies, a distinguished Protestant scholar of the New Testament, has received considerable criticism for having wasted his time and talents on so unworthy a subject. "The rapid growth of the Mormons," writes Professor Stark, "has gone amazingly unremarked by outsiders. There are probably many reasons for this, including the persistence of considerable prejudice against Mormons and the seeming inability of the mass media to cover adequately much of anything that happens West of Chicago."

I would be willing to wager that many of those who make such criticisms as Professor Davies has allegedly received know nothing or next to nothing about Mormonism. And they probably do not care to know anything. Or, rather, they know just enough about Mormonism to know that they do not want to know any more. "Indeed, the Book of Mormon has not been universally considered by its critics as one of those books that must be read in order to have an opinion of it." Little can be done with, or for, such people. But my concern in the present essay is with those who do read the Book of Mormon—and it is receiving some increased attention, both from believers and skeptics—but who do not, frankly, think much of it. Some, at least, of the detractors of W. D. Davies probably fall into this group, and there are many others. Why do they react so negatively? Is their reaction justified? Is there any way to judge the Book of Mormon's literary and conceptual merit objectively?

Compare the opinions about the Book of Mormon of two quite intelligent writers. First, the late Edmund Wilson, a distinguished literary critic: "The 'translation,' " writes Wilson, "is a

---

7 Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," 22. On p. 27, Professor Stark says, "I continue to be astonished at the extent to which colleagues who would never utter anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, or even anti-Moslem remarks, unself-consciously and self-righteously condemn Mormons."
farrago of balderdash of which the only passages that possess any dignity are borrowings from the King James Bible." Now, I don’t really know whether Wilson ever actually studied the Book of Mormon, or if he even skimmed a page of it. But his view could not possibly contrast more sharply with the evaluation of Bruce Hafen, a prominent Latter-day Saint legal scholar and educator: “The Book of Mormon,” Hafen declares, “contains without question the most profound theological treatment of the Atonement found in any book now available on any shelf anywhere in the world.” Are these two men talking about the same book?

Presuppositions

The clear difference between the two approaches, it seems to me, rests in the presuppositions that the two writers bring to their subject. Edmund Wilson found belief in the supernatural virtually incomprehensible, and in fact almost contemptible. His attitude toward Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon is not fundamentally unlike his attitude toward Jesus Christ and the New Testament. But how can Wilson’s dismissal of the Book of Mormon possibly allow for the fact that hundreds of thousands of people—lawyers, scientists, farmers, bereaved parents, confused adolescents—have found guidance and comfort and deep wisdom in its pages? How can Wilson account for the testimonies included in Eugene England’s Convened to Christ through the Book of Mormon, reviewed in this volume?

The power of presuppositions was illustrated very clearly for me by an experience I had while a missionary in Switzerland. I was working in a deeply traditionalist Catholic area which was notoriously resistant to proselytizing—my companion and I were reputedly the first missionaries there since

an earlier pair of elders had been run out of town at gunpoint seven years before—and even to the immigration of Swiss Protestants. We found ourselves speaking with a woman who had first mistaken us for a pair of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and was relieved to find we were not. She had been visited some weeks before by two of their representatives, and had received from them a book which was, she said, full of the most bizarre things. We agreed with her that their theology was implausible, but I at least began to feel more and more uneasy as she proceeded to describe the book in greater detail. It was, she recalled, dreadfully dull despite all its silly stories and its outlandish names. When she offered me the book, which she no longer wanted, I eagerly accepted it. And I was not entirely surprised when what she gave me turned out to be the Bible (in the Watchtower version). What had so amused this woman, in a region not given to the reading or even the owning of Bibles, was nothing peculiar to the Jehovah’s Witnesses, but the Bible itself. It was unfamiliar to her, foreign to her world and concerns, and she viewed it as a worthless farrago of nonsense.

Her reaction was not so very different from that of St. Jerome (subsequently the translator of the Latin Vulgate Bible), who admitted that, at first, when he "began to read the prophets, their style seemed rude and repellent. I failed," he said, "to see the light with my blinded eyes; but I attributed the fault not to them, but to the sun."\(^\text{11}\) Jerome's contemporary, St. Augustine, also acknowledged that his appreciation of the Bible had only come after deeper understanding supplanted an earlier disdain. "I decided," he later recalled in his *Confessions*, "to turn my mind to the Holy Scriptures and to see what they were like. And behold, I see something within them that was neither revealed to the proud nor made plain to children, that was lowly on one's entrance but lofty on further advance, and that was veiled over in mysteries. None such as I was at that time could enter into it, nor could I bend my neck for its passageways. When I first turned to that Scripture, I did not feel towards it as I am speaking now, but it seemed to me unworthy of comparison with the nobility of Cicero's writings. My swelling pride turned away from its humble style, and my sharp gaze did not penetrate into its inner meaning. But in truth it was of its nature that its

meaning would increase together with your little ones, whereas I disdained to be a little child and, puffed up with pride, I considered myself to be a great fellow."12

**Opinions Vary**

What, then, are we to say of the intrinsic quality of the Bible, or of the Book of Mormon, or, indeed, of any book? Is this issue merely a matter of arbitrariness, of choosing between two attitudes, neither one of which can be rationally demonstrated to be superior to the other? The history of literature certainly offers plausible evidence for such a conclusion. "There are," Hugh Nibley has pointed out, "people who loathe Bach and can’t stand Beethoven; it was once as popular among clever and educated people to disdain Homer and Shakespeare as barbaric as it is now proper to rhapsodize about them in great-book clubs."13 "It is said that John Stuart Mill, the man with the fabulous I.Q., read the New Testament with relish until he got to the Gospel of John, when he tossed the book aside before reaching the sixth chapter with the crushing and final verdict, ‘This is poor stuff!’"14 "M. de Balzac’s place in French literature," Eugene Poitou wrote in 1856, "will be neither considerable nor high." An editor at the *San Francisco Examiner*, rejecting a submission in 1889, implied that the author did not have much of a future in *belles lettres*: "I’m sorry, Mr. Kipling, but you just don’t know how to use the English language." "Do you not know," exclaimed Samuel Taylor Coleridge in disgust, "that there is not perhaps one page in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in which he has not borrowed his imagery [sic] from the scriptures?" For partisans of the Book of Mormon, there is a certain satisfaction—the Germans call this *Schadenfreude*—in seeing its detractors themselves reap the wrath of the critics: Surveying the works of Mark Twain, one authority predicted in 1901 that "a hundred years from now it is very likely that ‘The Jumping Frog’ alone will be remembered." And if the Book of Mormon is "dull," Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is "tedious." As one critic said of Ibsen’s great

14 Ibid., 221.
play *A Doll's House*, “it was as though someone had dramatized the cooking of a Sunday dinner.”

Fashions and tastes are notoriously variable. Enthusiasts for the music of Johann Sebastian Bach will scarcely need reminding that his wide popularity today is of relatively recent date; Albert Schweitzer played an important role in the Bach revival early in this very century. Virtually any good book on Beethoven will testify to the derision his *Seventh Symphony* received from contemporary critics. It was T. S. Eliot who helped to restore John Donne and the metaphysical poets to an important place in the history of English literature. Rudyard Kipling—he who did not “know how to use the English language”—won the Nobel Prize for Literature and then suffered a long decline in (literary) reputation as his (political) views went out of fashion; now, he seems to be enjoying a resurgence of critical esteem.

An entire book could be devoted to the ebb and flow of critical opinion on Shakespeare. Leo Tolstoy’s disdain for the great playwright is well known. But he was not alone. Of *Hamlet*, Voltaire said that “it is a vulgar and barbarous drama, which would not be tolerated by the vilest populace of France, or Italy. . . . One would imagine this piece to be the work of a drunken savage.” “Pure melodrama,” wrote George Bernard Shaw of *Othello*. “There is not a touch of characterization that goes below the skin.” And Shaw’s opinion of *Antony and

---


16 Tolstoy himself was the object of strange critical misperceptions. He lived through the awarding of the first ten Nobel Prizes in Literature, and was passed over every time. Those who won instead are, in order: René F.A. Sully-Prudhomme (1901), Theodor Mommsen (1902), Björnstjerne Björnson (1903), Frédéric Mistral and José Echegaray (1904; shared), Henryk Sienkiewicz (1905), Giosuè Carducci (1906; chosen unanimously over Tolstoy, Mark Twain, Rainer Maria Rilke, George Meredith, and Henry James), Rudyard Kipling (1907), Rudolf C. Eucken (1908), Selma Lagerlöf (1909; beating out Tolstoy and Strindberg), and Paul J. L. Heyse (1910). Of the last-named winner, one of the judges remarked that “Germany has not had a greater literary genius since Goethe.” See David Wallehinsky and Irving Wallace, *The People’s Almanac* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 1098-1100.
Cleopatra was no higher: "To say that there is plenty of bogus characterization in it . . . is merely to say that it is by Shakespeare." After seeing a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in 1662 London, Samuel Pepys confided to his diary that it was "the most insipid, ridiculous play that I ever saw in my life." "Shakespeare's name, you may depend on it," Lord Byron assured James Hogg in 1814, "stands absurdly too high and will go down. He had no invention as to stories, none whatever. He took all his plots from old novels."17 Shakespeare, like Milton and like the Book of Mormon, fails the originality test.

**A Friendly Critic**

In the Autumn 1988 issue of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, a non-Mormon doctoral candidate at the Claremont Graduate School published an article entitled "Mormon Christianity: A Critical Appreciation by a Christian Pluralist."18 Missionary-minded Latter-day Saints should, I think, welcome the serious attention that John Quiring has evidently given to Mormonism. There is always much to be learned from the observations made about us, personally and as a group, by sympathetic critics. Quiring's criticisms, along with those of a number of other friendly outsiders, offer a means of gaining a better perspective on ourselves, on the Church, and on its attendant culture. Several of his comments are precisely on the mark. (Although I suspect that it was not people like Mr. Quiring that Pres. Hinckley had in mind when he remarked that "we don't need critics standing on the sidelines.")19 His perspective as a "pluralist"—and perhaps (I am guessing) as a student of John Hick—is extremely interesting. Nevertheless, I take strong exception to some of his observations. Particularly, I take exception to his evaluation of the Mormon canon—an evaluation directly relevant to the concerns of this *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, and one which, I think, rests clearly upon the liberal theological presuppositions he brings to that canon.

To Quiring, the "narrative material" of the Book of Mormon "seems flat, monotonous, imitative of the King James Version

---

of the Bible, and lacking in vitality in contrast to the Bible itself and other scriptures of Penguin Classics stature.” In his Penguin canon, Quiring includes such works as the Bhagavad Gita, the Analects of Confucius, the Tao Te Ching, and the Qur'an.20 I could comment upon my experience with several of these world scriptures, but it is the Qur'an, with which I have been seriously involved in a fairly continuous way over the past decade or so, to which I wish mostly to address myself. Quiring is simply mistaken if he thinks that reader reactions to his Penguin canon have been uniformly awestruck or reverential, and the case of the Qur'an provides abundant illustration of that fact:

The Qur'an as a Case Study

"The Alcoran of the Turks (I speak without prejudice) is an ill composed Piece, containing in it vain and ridiculous Errors in Philosophy, impossibilities, fictions, and vanities beyond laughter, maintained by evident and open Sophisms." So wrote Sir Thomas Browne in his little seventeenth-century classic, Religio Medici.21 He was not alone in his view of the Qur'an, for "the opinion almost unanimously held by European readers [is] that it is obscure, tiresome, uninteresting; a farrago of long-winded narratives and prosaic exhortations, quite unworthy to be named in the same breath with the Prophetical Books of the Old Testament."22 Indeed, the preface to the English translation of the Qur'an that appeared in 1649 described the book as "so rude, and incongruous a composure, so farced with contradictions, blasphemies, obscene speeches, and ridiculous fables" that "I present it to thee ... not doubting, though it hath been a poysen, that hath infected a very great, but most unsound part of the Universe, it may prove to be an Antidote, to confirm in thee the health of Christianity."23 A century later, George

20 Quiring, "Mormon Christianity," 154, and 154 n. 4.
Sale, introducing his own hugely influential version of 1734, remarked that, “They must have a mean opinion of the Christian religion, or be but ill grounded therein, who can apprehend any danger from so manifest a forgery. . . . It is absolutely necessary to undeceive those who, from the ignorant or unfair translations which have appeared, have entertained too favourable an opinion of the original.” Having read Sale’s competent translation, which continues in print to the present day, Edward Gibbon was able to speak of the Qur’an’s “endless incoherent rhapsody of fable, and precept, and declamation, which seldom excites a sentiment or an idea, which sometimes crawls in the dust, and is sometimes lost in the clouds.” Thomas Carlyle, who shared with Gibbon not only Sale’s English version but also a liberal attitude toward Islam which was quite remarkable for their age, joined in Gibbon’s denigration of the Qur’an: “I must say, it is as toilsome reading as I ever undertook. A wearisome confused jumble, crude, incondite; endless iterations, long-windedness, entanglement; most crude, incondite;—insupportable stupidity, in short! Nothing but a sense of duty could carry any European through the Koran. . . . One feels it difficult to see how any mortal ever could consider this Koran as a Book written in Heaven, too good for the earth; as a well-written book, or indeed as a book at all; and not a bewildered rhapsody; written, so far as writing goes, as badly as almost any book ever was!” (Has the Book of Mormon received any harsher literary judgment than that?)

Not all European readers have reacted so negatively, of course, although it must be admitted that few positive voices, if any, could be heard until just a few decades ago. While not himself wholly positive—one might think of him as something of a transitional figure—Alfred Guillaume well expresses the more appreciative stance of modern Islamicists when he notes that “the Qur’an is one of the world’s classics which cannot be translated without grave loss. It has a rhythm of peculiar beauty

24 Cited in Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, 1:10-11. In the edition of Sale’s translation in my personal library, the original introduction has wisely been replaced by one written by Sir Edward Denison Ross. See George Sale, The Koran Translated into English from the Original Arabic (London: Frederick Warne, n.d.).


and a cadence that charms the ear. Many Christian Arabs speak of its style with warm admiration, and most Arabists acknowledge its excellence. When it is read aloud or recited it has an almost hypnotic effect that makes the listener indifferent to its sometimes strange syntax and its sometimes, to us, repellent content. It is this quality it possesses of silencing criticism by the sweet music of its language that has given birth to the dogma of its inimitability; indeed it may be affirmed that within the literature of the Arabs, wide and fecund as it is both in poetry and in elevated prose, there is nothing to compare with it.”

More positive still is the English Muslim convert, Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall, who lamented that even after his best efforts at translation, “the result is not the Glorious Koran, that inimitable symphony, the very sounds of which move men to tears and ecstasy.” Perhaps the greatest of all translators of the Qur’an into English, the late A. J. Arberry, could speak of “those rhetorical and rhythmical patterns which are the glory and sublimity of the Koran”—“thrilling,” he called them—and of “the glittering splendour” and “radiant beauty of the original,” which is “mysterious and compelling.” Each chapter, Arberry contended, “is a rhapsody.” “Those notorious incongruities and irrelevancies,” he wrote, “even those ‘wearisome repetitions’, which have proved such stumbling-blocks in the way of our Western appreciation will vanish in the light of a clearer understanding of the nature of the Muslim scriptures.”

In coming to such evaluations of the scripture of Islam, these Western orientalists have simply begun to approach a bit more closely to the attitude which has always characterized believers. For Muslims, the Qur’an is peerless, beyond compare, beyond the capacity of mere humans to duplicate. This belief, formalized in the doctrine of i‘jāz, or “inimitability,” extends not merely to the content of the book but, and perhaps especially, to its style—the very style so ridiculed by many Western readers. To Muslims, each verse of the Qur’an is a miracle. Indeed, the verses of the Qur’an are actually called, in Arabic, ayāt (“signs,” “miracles”)—reminiscent of the sēmeia,

29 Arberry, The Koran Interpreted, 1:24-25, 28.
the “signs” or “miracles” performed by Jesus in the Greek New Testament.30

Still, it would be wrong to suppose that a knowledge of Arabic, coupled with a freedom from the hostility of earlier generations of Western Christian scholarship, leads necessarily to appreciation of the Qur’an as literature. Many highly competent Arabists privately admit—as the eminent Italian scholar Francesco Gabrieli has done publicly—that they can scarcely bear to read the book.31 And Arberry was obliged by his own views to condemn Reynold Nicholson, the great Edwardian translator of Arabic poetry, as rhythmically “deaf”—rather an absurd charge, really—because Nicholson thought only the final chapters of the Qur’an to have much poetic or literary merit. “One may, indeed,” Nicholson had written, “peruse the greater part of the volume, beginning with the first chapter, and find but a few passages of genuine enthusiasm to relieve the prevailing dullness.”32

The point of all of this is certainly not to attack the Qur’an, but rather to suggest that appreciation of the literary merits of scripture tends to be very much a subjective thing. Thousands upon thousands of Jews over many centuries have found great significance and spiritual nourishment in the very regulations of Leviticus that I find almost unreadable. (Quiring places the Bible above the peculiarly Latter-day Saint canon—but surely he is only referring to certain parts. Is Exodus 37, say, demonstrably superior to Doctrine and Covenants 88, or to Moses 7, or to 2 Nephi 4?) And although I read the Qur’an in the original Arabic, and although I find it endlessly intriguing as an object of study, and even despite some passages which have great impact upon me, I find the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures vastly more appealing. Bernard DeVoto’s dismissal of the Book of Mormon as “a yeasty fermentation, formless, aimless, and inconceivably absurd” would strike me, for instance, as quite unfair if reapplied to the Qur’an, but it is downright ludicrous when applied as he

30 The Iranian Shi‘ite title “Ayatollah”—or, more accurately, ayatullāh—means “sign [of] God” in Arabic.
31 Gabrieli’s response to the Qur’an was related to me by my former teacher, Seeger A. Bonebakker, a leading authority on classical Arabic poetry who, I suspect, shares his opinion.
intended it. Furthermore, I am convinced, just as was Arberry with reference to the Islamic scripture, that a “clearer understanding” of the nature of the revelations received by and through Joseph Smith—an understanding based on such things as the recognition of complex and meaningful chiasms, for example—will lead to a yet greater appreciation of their strengths as literature. (This despite the restricted working vocabulary of their translator and receiver, which can hardly compete with that of King James’s Oxbridge scholars, who frequently managed to improve upon the koiné Greek of the New Testament.)

**Originality Is Not the Test**

Perhaps somewhat less subjective is an estimate of the originality of scripture. Alas, though, John Quiring and I disagree here too. The texts of the Doctrine and Covenants, says Quiring, “are not sufficiently fresh to be taken as new revelations but are derivative.” However, he implicitly believes the Qurʾan to possess originality of a level to merit its recognition as legitimate “revelation” (in whatever sense he would define that word). I myself am somewhat less convinced. The Qurʾan certainly does not claim to be original, and Muhammad would probably have been upset to be identified as an innovator. He saw himself rather as restoring the pristine religion of the earlier prophets. As Marshall Hodgson observed of one aspect of the book, “The specific moral ideals were in no case unprecedented and rarely departed from moral norms upheld, in principle, in the older Bedouin society. (The Qurʾan made no attempt to lay down a comprehensive moral system; the very word for moral behaviour, al-маʿruf, means ‘the known’.)” And, I might add, the usual Arabic word for “heresy” is bidʿa, which means, literally, “innovation.”

Quiring’s allegation of a “derivativeness” in Joseph Smith’s revelations reminds me somewhat of Fawn Brodie’s complaint that Mormonism offered “no new Sermon on the Mount, no new

---

33 For the phrase, see DeVoto, “The Centennial of Mormonism,” 5.

34 For one thing, the rhymed prose style of the Qurʾan, known in Arabic as saj’, was simply the vehicle used by contemporary Arabian soothsayers, or kāhins.

saga of redemption.”36 I had thought the old ones good enough! Quite seriously, though, I believe that both Mr. Quiring and Mrs. Brodie underestimate the presence of original elements within Mormonism and its scriptures, and that Quiring overestimates the originality of the Qur’an.

**Literary Merit Is Largely Irrelevant**

There is, of course, a sense in which the literary merit of the Book of Mormon, or the lack thereof, is wholly irrelevant. “Its literary or artistic qualities,” Hugh Nibley has remarked, “do not enter into the discussion: it was written to be believed. Its one and only merit is truth. Without that merit, it is all that nonbelievers say it is. With that merit, it is all that believers say it is. And we must insist on this truism.”37 It would be foolish, would it not, to disregard a warning that your home was on fire simply because that warning had not been couched in iambic pentameter? In a very real sense, our house is on fire, and the prophets are warning us. If they can do so in literarily appealing ways, well, so much the better. But the message itself is the important thing.38 And that message does seem to be getting across to some extent, as Rodney Stark’s numbers would seem to imply. (It is partially for this reason, but also for many others, that I see no cause now to retreat from traditional claims for the historical and revelatory character of the Book of Mormon. I am far less sanguine than John Quiring and some of my acquaintances within the Church that Mormonism would remain just as vital—or, indeed, grow yet stronger—if we were to “devalue the Book of Mormon to the status of edifying, amateur fiction.”39 I see little glory or dynamism in the path taken by liberal Protestantism. At this point in the history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the suggestion that we might begin to flourish by imitating, say, progressive Episcopalianism, is every bit as convincing as the notion that the

---


37 Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 86.


San Francisco Forty Niners would have performed more impressively in the 1989 Superbowl had they only swapped quarterbacks and offensive lines with the Denver Broncos.

**Intrinsic Merit**

Many have seen the Book of Mormon, as Mark Twain is well known to have done, as "chloroform in print." Its alleged "dullness"—which recalls the alleged "dullness" of the Qur'an, a member of Mr. Quiring's Penguin canon—is a frequent point of criticism. "The small number of people who have tried to read the book declare that it is dreadfully dull," wrote Hilel Ragaf. "Surely," remarked Sir Richard Burton, "there never was a book so thoroughly dull and heavy; it is as monotonous as a sage-prairie." "In nothing," says M. H. A. Van Der Valk, "does the line, style, invention, conception, content and purpose reveal the hand of a master, let alone of Divine inspiration." Yet one nineteenth-century British clergyman felt that he had to reject the Book of Mormon in spite of "all its air of sincerity and truth [and] all the striking and often beautiful passages that it contains." There is admittedly little doubt that many readers do find the book dull. But this admission requires comment: Most ordinary people—my Swiss Hausfrau is a case in point—find the Bible "dull," as well. How many copies of the Bible decorate bookshelves unread in Christian homes around the world? Is Leviticus really more of a page-turner than Alma? Why, if the Nephite scripture is so unreadable, do many members of the Church find its "Isaiah portions"—notoriously close to the King James Version, as we are often reminded by our enemies—the major stumbling block to their attempts at getting through it?

---

40 On the context of this much-quoted phrase, see Richard H. Cracroft, "The Gentle Blasphemer: Mark Twain, Holy Scripture, and the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 11 (Winter 1971): 119-40. Cracroft argues persuasively that "Twain was obviously one of the multitude who had not read the book . . . . If Twain read the Book of Mormon at all, it was in the same manner that Tom Sawyer won the Sunday School Bible contest—by cheating."


43 M. H. A. Van Der Valk and George Wotherspoon are cited by Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 189-90.
Of course, it has also been argued that form and content cannot really be neatly separated in any human creation, and that to do so is both artificial and misleading. This seems an implausible proposition to me, but I will not deny that it does contain certain elements of truth. Can anything, then, be said about the form of the Book of Mormon? Or is it really, as Bernard DeVoto said, "formless"? Several scholars have argued in print for a high level of literary sophistication and complexity in the Book of Mormon. Jeffrey R. Holland, referring to Aristotle's Poetics, has expressed his opinion that "by Aristotle's standard the Book of Mormon is not only a good book; it is a classic . . . unified, whole, verses fitting with verses, chapters fitting with chapters, books fitting with books, and always that strong beginning." (Richard Dilworth Rust's article, in this volume, is yet another contribution to the ongoing discussion of the book's literary quality.)


There Is Hope

Are we left, then, with pure subjectivism? Is there no hope of approaching the question of the stature of the Book of Mormon on the basis of anything beyond personal preference and sheer whimsy? I think there is. Even Fawn Brodie, no friend of Joseph Smith, had to admit that Bernard DeVoto’s evaluation of the Book of Mormon was inadequate: “Dull it is, in truth, but not formless, aimless, or absurd. Its structure shows elaborate design, its narrative is spun coherently, and it demonstrates throughout a unity of purpose.”

And if her perception of the book’s entertainment value is debatable—I, at least, find it fascinating, although I admit that neither it nor the Bible can or should be read like a Tom Clancy novel—surely Brodie was right about its structural sophistication. And this can be—and increasingly is—demonstrated on quite objective grounds. Up until now, the prime exhibit for this argument has clearly been the phenomenon of chiasmus. But there is mounting up a considerable body of analysis demonstrating that at least something of the strangeness of the Book of Mormon is due to the presence in it of other ancient and complex literary forms which Joseph Smith is highly unlikely to have discovered on his own, and showing as well that its contents are rich and subtle beyond the suspicions of even the vast majority of its most devout readers.

46 Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 69.
As we learn more about the Book of Mormon, our appreciation for it increases. This is not surprising, since it reflects human experience generally. I well remember, as a student in high school, visiting one of the large art museums in Los Angeles in order to attend an exhibit of work by the Norwegian painter and graphic artist Edvard Munch. I walked briskly through the exhibit and came out both bored and uncomprehending. Then a docent outlined for us some of the basic elements of Munch’s life and work, and escorted our school group through the exhibit. Within minutes, I had come to an appreciation of Edvard Munch which has remained with me ever since. When we know more, we see more. Again, an example from my own experience: I was raised in the city; my father was raised on a North Dakota farm and, for a time, studied forestry. When we have driven through rural areas together, I have seen flat spaces of green or brown, with palm

trees or pine-like trees or (the largest category) "other trees." My father, however, sees alfalfa at various stages of maturity, wheat, oats, corn, elms, oaks, firs, spruce, pines, and much, much more. Because of his greater familiarity with the subject, he sees more richly and appreciates more deeply. Landscapes that to me are terribly dull, he finds interesting and even beautiful.

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, which publishes this Review, is dedicated to the exploration of the Book of Mormon because those associated with the Foundation deeply believe that it contains treasures of insight and wisdom of immense value to both Church and world. We are convinced that the Book of Mormon deserves the closest analysis by every means that heart and mind can summon up, that it will be better appreciated when it is better known. "Students of the Christian scriptures in all faiths," Bruce Hafen has written, "cry out to grasp the grand secrets of the Atonement, which can unlock the further mysteries of man's nature and life's purpose. If only they could know what truths lie buried before their eyes in the plain and precious language of the Book of Mormon. These truths are in some sense inaccessible to those whose tools of language and discourse are limited to the terms of art embodied in the academic and jargon-laden discipline of contemporary Christian theology. Great revelations—literally—await those who will let the Book of Mormon speak for itself about its central message, Christ's Atonement, 'according to the plainness which is in the Lamb of God.' "49 We know that to be true. We have also begun to know, through experience, that, as Lowell Bennion has said of the Book of Mormon, "we can learn from it all our lives without exhausting its resources."50

All whose reviews and articles appear in the present volume are believing members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who fully accept the Book of Mormon as what it claims to be and are firmly convinced of its divine significance. I wish to thank them for their willingness to participate in this enterprise. Thanks are also due to Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, who assisted in the editing process; to Melvin J. Thorne and Donald W. Parry, who helped with the production

49 Hafen, The Broken Heart, 26.
of the volume; to Lois Richardson, who helped at many points along the way. And once again, as last year, Shirley S. Ricks was indispensable in working out the mechanics of the volume—in truth, arguably the one indispensable person to the whole project.

Opinions expressed in the Review of Books on the Book of Mormon are not necessarily those of its editor, nor of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, nor of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies. Nor should the individual writers be regarded as speaking for the institutions with which they may be affiliated. The attempt has been made to be comprehensive. Every book published on the Book of Mormon during 1989—so far as known to me—has been taken into account. Books which have not been covered in this volume will, we hope, be treated in the next issue. The one exception is a frivolous volume, utterly devoid of merit, that we finally decided not to dignify with a review. One other book appeared in 1989 that will not be reviewed in this volume (because it is a reprint), but which deserves special mention because it is among the finest and most important things ever published in the field. That is Richard Lloyd Anderson’s Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses, first issued in 1981. Its reappearance, this time in paperback, is cause for some rejoicing.

The bibliography at the end of this volume represents an effort to record everything published during 1989 that deals primarily or substantially with the Book of Mormon. It also reaches further back into the past for some items which were missed in last year’s edition. My thanks go to Adam Lamoreaux for his work in this regard.

---

The Book of Mormon, Designed for Our Day  

Annual F.A.R.M.S. Lecture  
27 February 1990  

Richard Dilworth Rust  
University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

It's a pleasure to speak with you this evening; I'm grateful to Noel Reynolds and the other directors of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies for inviting me. I wish to share some thoughts about how literary elements are a part of the fabric of the Book of Mormon to help meet its purposes of reaching Lamanites, Jews, and Gentiles today.

"The Book of Mormon . . . was written for our day," President Benson asserted recently. "Under the inspiration of God, who sees all things from the beginning," he said, Mormon "abridged centuries of records, choosing the stories, speeches, and events that would be most helpful to us."\(^1\) Hugh Nibley, who might be called the patron saint of F.A.R.M.S., has similarly said that "the matter in the Book of Mormon was selected, as we are often reminded, with scrupulous care and with particular readers in mind. For some reason there has been chosen for our attention a story of how and why two previous civilizations on this continent were utterly destroyed."\(^2\) Our own world at the end of the twentieth century, Nibley believes, "is

---

1 Ezra Taft Benson, "The Book of Mormon: Keystone of Our Religion," *Ensign* (November 1986): 4-7. In October 1986, President Benson reaffirmed what he had said in the April 1975 General Conference: "The Book of Mormon was written for us today. God is the author of the book. . . . Mormon, the ancient prophet after whom the book is named, abridged centuries of records. God, who knows the end from the beginning, told him what to include in his abridgment that we would need for our day" ("The Book of Mormon Is the Word of God," *Ensign* [May 1975]: 63). Daniel H. Ludlow expressed much the same view in his article, "The Book of Mormon Was Written for Our Day," *The Instructor* (July 1966): 265: "Through the power of vision and prophecy, these writers were shown the people of our day, for whom they were writing their records. Thus, from the voluminous records at their disposal, they were able to select those principles and experiences which would be most useful in helping us to meet our challenges and solve our problems."

the world with which the Book of Mormon is primarily concerned." 3

Looking at this world, Moroni declares, "I speak unto you as if ye were present, and yet ye are not. But behold, Jesus Christ hath shown you unto me, and I know your doing" (Mormon 8:35). Writers such as Moroni and his father are, however, actually secondary authors of the Book of Mormon; the primary author is Jesus Christ. As Mormon affirms, "I . . . do write the things which have been commanded me of the Lord" (3 Nephi 26:12). Likewise, the premortal Savior told Joseph the Patriarch that Joseph Smith would write "the words which are expedient in my wisdom should go forth unto the fruit of thy loins" (2 Nephi 3:19).

The Book of Mormon, then, is prophecy designed specifically and intentionally for our day. When I say "designed," I mean not only planned with a purpose but shaped artistically so that form and content are totally integrated as in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Handel's *Messiah*, or Michelangelo's Sistine chapel paintings. My love of great literature and my testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ converge in a consideration of the Book of Mormon as literature. I have come to realize that the literary aspects of the Book of Mormon are essential to its purposes. In the book, God speaks to us in the most powerful, effective way possible by interconnecting truth, goodness, and beauty.

To speak of beauty in this way is to say that literary elements such as form, imagery, poetry, and narratives help teach and motivate us in ways that touch our hearts and souls as well as our minds. We "see feelingly," as Gloucester puts it in another context in Shakespeare's *King Lear*; we gain what Nathaniel Hawthorne calls "heart-knowledge."

By looking at the intended latter-day purposes of the Book of Mormon, let us see some ways the Book of Mormon is a work of immediacy which, as great literature does, *shows* as well as *tells*. These purposes are set out in the title page—which Joseph Smith says Moroni put on the last leaf of the plates. They are (1) to show a remnant of the House of Israel—the Lamanites—the "great things the Lord hath done for their fathers" and help them know "the covenants of the Lord," which assure them "that they are not cast off forever," and (2) to convince "the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the

---

3 Ibid., 500.
Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations.” Of course, what is true for one of the three audiences for the Book of Mormon can be applied to another.

To show “what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers”

To show “what great things the Lord hath done for their fathers” (title page). The initially most important “great thing” is the Lord’s deliverance of Lehi and his family from destruction in Jerusalem and miraculously bringing them across waters to the promised land in a manner reminiscent of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt (see 2 Nephi 1:1; Mosiah 27:16; Alma 9:9; 3 Nephi 5:20; and Ether 7:27). To have a feeling for this deliverance—which is also a spiritual deliverance—it is first essential that modern-day Lamanites know their cultural history. Just as the brass plates had been essential to the cultural and spiritual preservation of the Nephites, so the Book of Mormon is necessary to the ultimate spiritual preservation of Lehi’s living descendants. Lamanites today can “arise from the dust” (2 Nephi 1:23) in learning their true identity from the precious record which itself is brought forth “out of the dust” (Moroni 10:27).

Although readers might not recognize it as such, the literary form of the epic is part of the design of the Book of Mormon to involve latter-day Lamanites in a discovery of their origins and history, of their possibilities for physical and spiritual fulfillment in the land of promise in which they have been placed, and of God’s relationship with them in times past, present, and future. Especially as we consider the Book of Mormon as a living epic, we can see how the book helps the children of Lehi realize that the “great things” the Lord has done for their fathers are continuing for them today.

So how is the Book of Mormon an epic? First, an epic comes out of a crisis. This is certainly true here: Mormon is abridging the entire history of the Nephite nation at the time when that civilization is being annihilated. And the Book of Mormon contains the elements characteristic of an epic: amplitude; nationalistic emphasis, with narrative motifs including warfare and rulership; an historical impulse, with allusions to key events in the life of a nation; a supernatural
context in which the action occurs; and an epic structure of episodic plot with recurrent patterns or situations.4

We can see five main features that Meyer Abrams notes literary epics commonly have:

1. The hero is a figure of great national or international importance.
2. The setting is ample in scale, sometimes world-wide, or even larger.
3. The action involves heroic deeds in battle or a long and arduous journey intrepidly accomplished.
4. In these great actions supernatural beings take an interest and an active part.
5. An epic poem is a ceremonial performance and is deliberately given a ceremonial style proportionate to its great subject and architecture.5

Some other characteristics of most epics are that events are related to a central action or theme, a muse is invoked, and the narration starts in the middle of the action and at a critical point.

1. Hero

The word “hero” in connection with the Book of Mormon brings a number of persons immediately to mind: great prophet-warriors such as Nephi, Gideon, Ammon, Captain Moroni, Moronihah, and Mormon. Lehi himself, as Hugh Nibley has shown in An Approach to the Book of Mormon, is a product of an Heroic Age.6 The book contains many captivating individual

---

6 Hugh Nibley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon, vol. 6 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, 3d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 29-35. In “Tenting, Toll, and Taxing,” The Western Political Quarterly 19 (1966): 599, Nibley says regarding an epic milieu, “It was not until early in the present century that H. M. Chadwick [in The Heroic Age] pointed out what should have been obvious to everyone, namely that epic literature, a large and important segment of the human record, is the product not of unrestrained poetic fancy but of real years of terror and gloom through which the entire race has been forced to pass from time to time. We now have good reason to believe . . . that the
deeds of valor, courage, and strength such as Nephi's lone quest for wild game, Alma's hand-to-hand combat with Amlici, Ammon's protecting the king's flocks at the waters of Sebus, and Captain Moroni's bearing valiantly his title of liberty at the head of freedom-loving forces. Yet unlike heroes in an epic such as Homer's *Iliad*, Book of Mormon heroes humbly give credit to the Lord whenever strength or resourcefulness is shown. Moreover, like Captain Moroni, they seek peace and do everything they can to avoid bloodshed.

In an epic there is a vicarious attachment of readers or hearers to the hero; in this respect, it is important for latter-day Lamanites to acknowledge Nephi as their hero and leader. Just as the Lord used Nephi the person as the leader of Lehi's family to the promised land, so the record of Nephi will do a great thing in leading the Lamanites to a heavenly promised land. It is appropriate, then, that all mortal heroes are contained within one hero, Nephi, and that he, in turn, is a representative of Christ. At the fountainhead of his nation and people, Nephi is a prophet-king after whom subsequent kings are titled (much as "Caesar" also became synonymous with "emperor") and from whom the central Book of Mormon group is named. Further, we find leaders such as Alma, Amulek, and Mormon claiming to be pure descendants of Nephi and identifying with him (see Mosiah 17:2; Alma 10:2-3; Mormon 1:5).

"I, Nephi," the first words of the Book of Mormon, thus suggest not only "I, individual," but "I, king," and "I, people"—indeed, a whole race of people going down through time. In the frame of the book, Mormon becomes in effect the last Nephi, a spokesman for his nation who comments on its main spiritual events and, with his son, concludes its record and preserves it in condensed form for future generations.

The truly central hero of the Book of Mormon is Jesus Christ. It is he who gives direction to the other heroes and whose redeeming power is affirmed throughout the book, climaxing at his personal visit. He is the hero whom the others represent. As Ammon declares, "I know that I am nothing; as to my strength I am weak; therefore I will not boast of myself, but I will boast of my God, for in his strength I can do all things"

violence of the elements that forms the somber backdrop of the 'Epic Milieu' was more than a literary convention."
Throughout the book, it is Jesus Christ who lifts, heals, and redeems.

2. Setting

Looking at the second major element of epics, we recognize at once that settings in the Book of Mormon are indeed vast and involve large-scale migrations of peoples and populations of whole lands and islands of the sea.

The setting of the main story is implicitly the known Mideastern world, the Indian and Pacific oceans, and the promised land of America. The Jaredite story has a similarly vast setting, and is a concentrated epic contained within the Nephite story as a second witness to the extremes of the Nephite rise and fall of a civilization.

Each setting also has a spiritual plane, the world of God’s eternal purposes “prepared from the foundation of the world” and the ultimate destiny of mankind (Alma 42:26).

3. Action

As there are both physical and spiritual dimensions to the setting, so the action of the Book of Mormon takes place on human and divine levels. The human is mainly a cycle of humbling leading to repentance leading to prosperity leading to pride leading to destruction; on the divine level, ultimate blessings or punishments are promised.

In this story of a people (indeed, of any people who possess the land) there is a firm connection between righteousness and existence as a nation. This is evident on the larger scale with the Nephite civilization, and is shown in a relatively brief example in the fate of the Jaredites, who “did not repent; therefore they have been destroyed” (Alma 37:26). As with the Nephite civilization, this is the dark end of an earthly society—but against that is the continuation of a divine society: Ether and Moroni end their records with references to being “saved in the kingdom of God” and having “rest in the paradise of God.”

While the book’s epic stories do not actually begin “in the middle of the action,” we are told what will happen in the future before getting the details of major events such as the destruction of the Nephites, the annihilation of the Jaredites, the coming of Christ to the Nephites, the destruction of the wicked city Ammonihah, and the success of the sons of Mosiah. Especially
at the beginning of his record, Mormon focuses on why the Nephites were destroyed and on the question of the eventual eternal destiny of the people, a remnant of whom, Mormon prays, will receive the life-giving message of his sacred record. For all who receive the record, especially the Lamanite “remnant,” this epic device tempers the Lord’s great deliverance of the fathers with the ultimate self-destruction of their descendants; it concentrates attention on the reasons for success and failure and points the way to avoid the fate of this people. One can have the perspective of Alma: He always remembers the captivity and deliverance of his fathers, he rejoices in the present repentance of many of his brethren, and he looks forward to bringing some soul to repentance, with the hope that his redeemed brethren will enter the timeless state of the heavenly kingdom of God to “go no more out” (Alma 29:17: cf. 1-17).

4. Supernatural Beings

As for Abrams’ fourth characteristic, the hallmark of the Book of Mormon is the way supernatural beings are involved in events, from Lehi’s initial vision of God’s dealings with man in the duration of the earth’s existence to Moroni’s declaration that at the judgment bar God shall affirm the truth of his writings.

There is hardly a page of the Book of Mormon that does not contain some reference to divine intervention or revelation. In the initial pages we are told of Lehi’s vision of God on his throne and see the angel protecting Nephi against the physical abuse of Laman and Lemuel; we learn of Alma the Elder’s people fleeing their captors during the day while their guards were in a profound sleep caused by the Lord, and of Alma’s son being confronted by an angel. Most noteworthy are the appearances of Jesus Christ.

Overarching all the interrelationships of heavenly powers and men are revelations given to Lehi, Nephi, Mormon, and others of the world from the beginning to the end thereof. One effect of this is to extend the epic scope of the Book of Mormon to include all mankind; another is to illustrate that past, present, and future are one eternal round with the Lord.

5. Ceremonial Performance

As for the fifth characteristic, at first glance, the Book of Mormon is hardly a poem, let alone a ceremonial performance.
Yet the pattern of divine revelations as well as prayers and many other impassioned declarations or appeals is actually related to Hebraic poetry.

The ceremonial quality of the book is supported, too, by the numerous formal occasions in which people often are taught, such as Lehi’s last injunctions to his sons, King Benjamin’s address, and the parting testimonies of Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni. In one of those occasions, the incident of Mosiah’s reading the records of the people of Zeniff to those gathered at Zarahemla, we see a parallel with the Book of Mormon as a whole: they (and thus the reader) learn about a people through their records. Mosiah’s audience had mixed feelings about what they heard—they rejoiced over those Zeniffites who had been delivered out of bondage, and shed tears of sorrow over their brethren slain by the Lamanites; they were grateful for God’s power in behalf of Alma and his people, and were pained for the plight of the sinful Lamanites. That same degree of deep feeling is possible to present-day descendants of Lehi who learn about the peoples of the Book of Mormon.

Paradoxically, then, the record brought forth “out of the dust” of centuries past becomes a living epic in appealing to descendants of the people treated in the record, in showing them their past, present, and future. It gives them their origins, presents the truth about the heroic Nephi (the people as well as the man and his subsequent representatives), shows God’s dealings with their people over a millennium of time, and challenges them to “come forth out of obscurity” (2 Nephi 1:23).

As an active epic, the Book of Mormon story of a people has yet to be completed. For the Lamanite (and also for the Jew and the Gentile), the Book of Mormon is both history and prophecy. It says to the Lamanite of today: See who you are! Know that you are a part of an illustrious covenant people. Know that while you can see the end of your earlier history from the beginning, the final end has not been reached. The epic story is still alive in you. Know that like your fathers the Anti-Nephi-Lehies, you can repent, receive the gospel, and not only prosper in the land temporally, but, more importantly, be rewarded with life everlasting in the eternal promised land.

Looking at our day, Lehi prophesied that the plates of brass would come forth to his seed as well as to all nations and people, not “dimmed any more by time” (1 Nephi 5:19; cf. 5:18). Likewise, the Book of Mormon plates, as Alma instructed his son Helaman, were destined to “retain their
brightness" (Alma 37:4-5). And how do they retain their brightness? They come alive for the audience which receives them. They are a continuing epic of Lehi’s people. On an even larger scale, they give meaning to man’s general destiny.

“That they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever”

“That they may know the covenants of the Lord, that they are not cast off forever” (title page). While the word “covenants” in the second purpose can refer both to the Abrahamic covenant and to individual covenants such as baptism, it first of all refers to the Lord's promise to Lehi and his posterity down to the Lamanites today. As Lehi says, “We have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord” (2 Nephi 1:5; see also 2 Nephi 10:7). Implicit in the covenant, as Nephi is told by an angel, is “that the Lord God will not suffer that the Gentiles will utterly destroy the mixture of thy seed, which are among thy brethren” (1 Nephi 13:30; see also 2 Nephi 9:53). Nephi further understands that when the fulness of the gospel is brought from the Gentiles to the remnant of Lehi’s family, then, he says, “shall the remnant of our seed know that they are of the house of Israel, and that they are the covenant people of the Lord; and then shall they know and come to the knowledge of their forefathers, and also to the knowledge of the gospel of their Redeemer, which was ministered unto their fathers by him; wherefore, they shall come to the knowledge of their Redeemer and the very points of his doctrine, that they may know how to come unto him and be saved” (1 Nephi 15:14).

Poetry is one of the literary elements that convey this covenant in a memorable and persuasive way to the hearts of latter-day Lamanites. Especially when Nephi and other prophets quote the voice of the Lord, prose turns to poetry of an impassioned, even exalted nature appropriate to convey divine meanings to the soul. As Robert Alter says in The Art of Biblical Poetry, “Since poetry is our best human model of intricately rich communication, not only solemn, weighty, and forceful but also densely woven with complex internal
connections, meanings, and implications, it makes sense that
divine speech should be represented as poetry."

In light of Nephi’s comments on his “plain” style (e.g., 2
Nephi 25:7; 33:6), we may initially be surprised to find Nephi
writing poetry. What he intends by the word “plain” is “easy to
understand” (1 Nephi 14:23, 16:29)—indeed, “not to be
misunderstood” (see 2 Nephi 25:7, 28). This is contrasted with
the writings of Isaiah, which are hard to understand except with
prophetic keys. But as Nephi loved the poetry of Isaiah, so he
himself wrote poetically.

Let’s look at this first of some twenty instances of the
essential Book of Mormon promise and curse which goes
directly to the heart of the covenantal relationship between God
and man and which has immediate relevance for our day. Here,
the poetry has the Hebraic characteristic of “a rhyme of
thoughts, or a music of ideas” or what might be called semantic
parallelism. As we read this, notice also the shift from Nephi’s
prose to the Lord’s poetry:

But, behold, Laman and Lemuel would not
hearken unto my words; and being grieved because of
the hardness of their hearts I cried unto the Lord for
them. And it came to pass that the Lord spake unto
me, saying:

Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith,
for thou hast sought me diligently, with lowliness of heart.

And inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments,
    ye shall prosper,
and shall be led to a land of promise;
    yea, even a land which I have prepared for you;
    yea, a land which is choice above all other lands.
And inasmuch as thy brethren shall rebel against thee,
    they shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord.
And inasmuch as thou shalt keep my commandments,
    thou shalt be made a ruler and a teacher over thy
brethren.

---

For behold, in that day that they shall rebel against me,
I will curse them even with a sore curse,
and they shall have no power over thy seed
except they shall rebel against me also.
And if it so be that they shall rebel against me,
they shall be a scourge unto thy seed,
to stir them up in the ways of remembrance.
(1 Nephi 2:18-22)

We feel here a rhythm of cause-and-effect relationships (following the pattern “inasmuch as ye or they do this, ye or they shall receive that”); there is repetition with an ascending order of significance (the “land of promise” becomes the “land which I have prepared for you” and “land which is choice above all other lands”); and rebellion against Nephi is transformed into rebellion against God, with the real conflict being not between Nephites and Lamanites but rather a matter of keeping or not keeping the commandments.

For Lamanites in the latter days, this confirms in a memorable and elevated way that this covenant with Nephi comes from the Lord.

Those Lamanites are also part of the intended audience to whom Nephi declared poetically,

My soul delighteth in the covenants of the Lord
which he hath made to our fathers;
yea, my soul delighteth in his grace,
and in his justice,
and power,
and mercy
in the great and eternal plan of deliverance from death.
(2 Nephi 11:5)

Poetry is part of the fabric of Nephi’s final testimony directed to peoples living when the Book of Mormon would come forth. After testifying of his own redemption, he speaks first to “my people,” the remnants of Israel who are assured that through Christ they are not cast off forever.

I glory in plainness;
I glory in truth;
I glory in my Jesus,
for he hath redeemed my soul from hell.
I have charity for my people,
and great faith in Christ that I shall meet many souls
spotless at his judgment-seat.
I have charity for the Jew—
I say Jew, because I mean them from whence I came.
I also have charity for the Gentiles.

But behold, for none of these can I hope
except they shall be reconciled unto Christ,
and enter into the narrow gate,
and walk in the strait path which leads to life,
and continue in the path until the end of the day of
probation.

And now, my beloved brethren,
and also Jew,
and all ye ends of the earth,
hearken unto these words and believe in Christ;
and if ye believe not in these words believe in Christ.
And if ye shall believe in Christ ye will believe in these
words,
for they are the words of Christ,
and he hath given them unto me;
and they teach all men that they should do good.

(2 Nephi 33:6-10)

This poetic close to his record is both Nephi’s personal
testimony and his solemn admonition to future generations. The
resonating word in the first stanza is “glory” as the parallelism
moves in a staircase or climactic manner. Personal redemption
is followed by charity for others in the second stanza. In the
third stanza, possible reconciliation with Christ intensifies in a
dynamic way from “enter” to “walk” to “continue,” with the
length of the last line also suggesting continuity.

The fourth stanza presents the audience in a heightened
manner: the earlier phrase “my people” becomes “my beloved
brethren” and “the Gentiles” becomes “all ye ends of the earth.”
The echoing word here is “believe,” with the simple admonition
to “hearken unto these words and believe in Christ” moving to a
more complex response to the relationship of “these words” and
Christ.
As I trust you have felt, Book of Mormon poetry is intended to be heard as well as read (and this is true in any language in which the book appears). Particularly, in many parts of the Book of Mormon it is implied that the Lamanites will hear the message of the book, perhaps more so than read it. Moroni ends his witness to his brethren the Lamanites (including dissident Nephites) by anticipating the Lord as saying at the judgment bar, “Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27). Might, then, the spoken word appeal significantly to a people attuned to poetry and the processes and rhythms of nature? to a people whose legends have come down through oral transmission and aural reception?

In respect to individual covenant-making which will restore Israel to the Lord, “Have faith, repent, and be baptized” is the message of most of the great discourses and parting declarations of the Book of Mormon (e.g., 2 Nephi 31, Alma 5, Alma 32, 3 Nephi 30, Moroni 7); it is the first major instruction of the resurrected Christ; and it is the climax of the Savior’s directions to Moroni in the book of Ether. “Come unto me, O ye Gentiles, ... Come unto me, O ye house of Israel. ...” Moroni quotes Jesus as saying; “then shall ye know that the Father hath remembered the covenant which he made unto your fathers, O house of Israel. ... Therefore, repent all ye ends of the earth, and come unto me, and believe in my gospel, and be baptized in my name” (Ether 4:13-15, 18). As is epitomized in these simple words, ultimately all of the Book of Mormon is centered in Jesus Christ and his gospel.

As literary elements, striking narratives in the Book of Mormon reinforce these principles and ordinances. The extensive account of Nephi and his brothers retrieving the brass plates gives point to the oft-quoted scriptural gem about faith that begins, “I will go and do the things which the Lord hath commanded ...” (1 Nephi 3:7). We imaginatively share with the sons of Helaman their missionary experiences among the Lamanites and thus see faith in action. Faith is demonstrated in Alma and Amulek’s dramatic release from prison, in the brother of Jared’s experience in seeing the premortal Savior, and so forth. Likewise we are engaged extensively and memorably in the inner lives of those who repent, such as Alma the Younger who was visited by an angel and then “was three days and three nights in the most bitter pain and anguish of soul” (Alma 38:8);
Lamoni, the Lamanite king converted through the ministrations of Ammon, who had a movement through the hell of his soul into the joy of redemption similar to Alma’s; and Zeezrom, the smooth-tongued lawyer who suffered a burning fever for his iniquities before being healed by Alma. Baptism is figuratively presented in the process of the Lehites and Jaredites gaining redemption by going across or through water, and it is shown to us in the narrative of Alma at the waters of Mormon and the portrayal of Christ’s disciples baptizing. The gift of the Holy Ghost is shown in scenes such as those of Nephi and Lehi in prison and of Jesus blessing the little children in which fire comes from heaven, surrounding holy persons.

Imagery, too, helps teach memorably and vividly the covenants of the Lord. Repeated references to literal or figurative images such as trees (especially the tree of life), water, dust, light, and fire confirm the purpose and power of covenants.

For example, faith in Jesus Christ the Creator, the Son of God, is shown in the contrast of light and dark and in reference to the four major elements of earth, air, fire, and water. These are brought together in the section of the Book of Mormon that prefigures the Second Coming of Christ. The chaos of things splitting apart and intense darkness—the opposite of creation—is associated with the death of the creator. Cities are sunk in the sea, Zarahemla is burned, and Moronihah is covered with earth. We are told:

It was the more righteous part of the people who were saved. . . . And they were spared and were not sunk and buried up in the earth; and they were not drowned in the depths of the sea; and they were not burned by fire, neither were they fallen upon and crushed to death; and they were not carried away in the whirlwind; neither were they overpowered by the vapor of smoke and of darkness. (3 Nephi 10:12-13)

Those elements that had been destructive before now bring great uplifting and salvation at the coming of “the Son of God, the Father of heaven and of earth, the Creator of all things from the beginning” (Helaman 14:12). Water is represented by baptism by immersion, air and fire by the Holy Ghost, and earth by people being instructed to build on the solidity of Christ’s rock.
The Savior’s coming to the Nephites out of darkness and great destruction is a miracle of light, establishing order where previously there had been chaos: After the earth “did cleave together again, that it stood” (3 Nephi 10:10), a Man descends out of heaven “clothed in a white robe” (3 Nephi 11:8) and declares, “I am the light and the life of the world” (3 Nephi 11:11). In a series of unforgettable instructions, the Savior teaches the gathered multitude to be “the light of this people” (3 Nephi 12:14), to realize that “the light of the body is the eye” (3 Nephi 13:22), that “I am the law, and the light” (3 Nephi 15:9), and that they should hold up their light “that it may shine unto the world” (3 Nephi 18:24). Then he causes the “light of his countenance” to shine upon his disciples, “and behold they were as white as the countenance and also the garments of Jesus” (3 Nephi 19:25).

Imagery also helps show latter-day Lamanites they are not cast off forever. Some of the most prominent images that do this are light and darkness, captivity and deliverance, wilderness or wandering, water or fruitfulness, and dust.

Let’s look for a moment at the first, light and darkness: Helaman’s sons Nephi and Lehi—whose names are particularly appropriate since they are representing the “fathers” to the Lamanites—are taken by Lamanites who initially are bloodthirsty but ignorant. These Lamanites are contrasted with the apostate Nephites who earlier had imprisoned Alma and Amulek. Feeling imperiled by the shaking earth and frightened by the voice which speaks to them three times, the Lamanites ask the crucial question: “What shall we do, that this cloud of darkness may be removed from overshadowing us?” (Helaman 5:40). The answer is, “Repent . . . until ye shall have faith in Christ” (Helaman 5:41). Doing so, they are brought into the light and each is encircled about by a pillar of fire (signifying the Holy Ghost). This powerfully presented event echoes the previous condition of the Lamanites being in spiritual darkness and anticipates the darkness and the thrice-repeated voice from heaven prior to the Savior’s descent at Bountiful. As a pattern of conversion of latter-day Lamanites, this event images forth the prediction of Nephi that “the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them [“the remnant of our seed”]; wherefore, they shall be restored unto the knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus Christ, which was had among their fathers. And then shall they rejoice; for they shall know that it is a blessing unto them from the hand of God; and their
scales of darkness shall begin to fall from their eyes; and many
generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be
a pure and a delightsome people” (2 Nephi 30:5-6).

A parallel transition might be seen in the temple where one
learns about the origin and fall of man—necessary knowledge
for us to appreciate fully our need for the rise of man through
Christ, the Savior. In order to come into the light, the Lamanites
need to know of the darkness into which their ancestors
plunged.

As another example, dust is an image associated in the
Book of Mormon with captivity, obscurity, destruction, and
death. The wicked, Nephi prophesied, would be “brought low
in the dust” (1 Nephi 22:23). The power of this metaphor is in
the emergence of something precious out of nothingness. We
discover that the Book of Mormon itself is prophesied to come
“out of the dust” (Moroni 10:27), with other great blessings as
well coming from the dust. Echoing Isaiah, Moroni cries:
“Arise from the dust, O Jerusalem; yea, and put on thy beautiful
garments” (Moroni 10:31). Laman and Lemuel are exhorted to
“arise from the dust” (2 Nephi 1:14), to “awake from a deep
sleep, yea, even from the sleep of hell” (2 Nephi 1:13). And
after the Lamanites have been brought “down low in the dust,
... yet the words of the righteous shall be written” (2 Nephi
26:15), and the Lord God shall speak concerning them “even as
it were out of the ground; and their speech shall whisper out of
the dust” (2 Nephi 26:16). In other words, latter-day Lamanites
shall obtain renewal through repentance from a voice considered
dead; life shall come out of death, words of eternal life from the
voice out of the dust.

In its overall structure, the Book of Mormon begins and
ends with concern for the Lamanites receiving the gospel.
Reiterating the main points from the title page, Nephi says that
through the Book of Mormon the Lamanites shall know they are
of Israel and through it “they shall be restored unto the
knowledge of their fathers, and also to the knowledge of Jesus
Christ” (2 Nephi 30:5; see 30:1-6). Then toward the end,
Mormon says much the same thing: “Know ye that ye are of the
house of Israel. . . . Know ye that ye must come to the
knowledge of your fathers, and repent of all your sins and
iniquities, and believe in Jesus Christ” (Mormon 7:2, 5). At the
physical center of the book is the narrative of the conversion of
the Lamanites. This central part begins with the decree of the
king of the Lamanites that Ammon and his brethren should be
free to preach the word of God throughout all the land, and ends with gratitude by these great missionaries for the thousands of Lamanite souls "brought to behold the marvelous light of God" (Alma 26:3). The narrative high point of the book is the ministry of the resurrected Savior. While discoursing to both the Lamanites and Nephites before him, Jesus as well speaks to their descendants, saying that the Book of Mormon "shall come forth of the Father, from [the Gentiles] unto you" (3 Nephi 21:3). He confirms the prophecies of Isaiah that in the last days the children of Lehi will be gathered both physically and spiritually. "Then is the fulfilling," he says, "of the covenant which the Father hath made unto his people, O house of Israel" (3 Nephi 20:12).

"Convince that JESUS is the Christ" (Messiah)

To the Jew, the Book of Mormon testifies that "Jesus is the very Christ," the Messiah; to the Gentile, that "Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God" (2 Nephi 26:12). A literary element New Testament writers used in appealing to the Jew was typology, comparisons or similitudes drawn from Old Testament persons or events which pointed to Christ or his gospel. (See "Jesus Christ, Types of" in the Topical Guide of the 1981 LDS edition of the Bible.) We might think of a type being like the printed impression left on a sheet of paper by a solid piece of metal or wood with a raised character on it; the solid character is like the antitype.

The Savior called attention to Old Testament typology by, for example, referring to manna as a similitude of him, saying, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51). Nevertheless, most Jews were not able to see how the Mosaic law and rites prefigured Jesus Christ. As Paul said to the Corinthians, "When Moses is read, the vail is upon their heart. Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away" (2 Corinthians 3:15-16).

While the veil is penetrated to some extent in the New Testament, the Book of Mormon makes the veil transparent through clarifying typological interpretations.9 First, the double

---

9 As George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in Neal E. Lambert, ed., Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience (Provo: Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245-62, has shown so well, Book of Mormon "typology is more conscious because the narrators are understood to possess the Christological
and triple meanings and typologies of Isaiah are oriented toward Christ in the Book of Mormon, making Isaiah a premier and convincing witness to the Jews that Jesus is the Messiah. A voice out of Israel’s past, Isaiah establishes the grand connection with the House of Israel in the Old World, the remnant of Israel in the New World, and modern-day Israel. Moreover, Isaiah will be clearly understood at the time his prophecies are fulfilled (see 2 Nephi 25:7-8). That time, the Savior says, is when the Book of Mormon comes forth (3 Nephi 21) and the fulness of the gospel shall be preached to the Jews.

And they shall believe in me, that I am Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and shall pray unto the Father in my name. Then shall their watchmen lift up their voice, and with the voice together shall they sing; for they shall see eye to eye. Then will the Father gather them together again, and give unto them Jerusalem for the land of their inheritance. (3 Nephi 20:30-33)

All God-given events or God-directed persons in the Book of Mormon are types of Jesus Christ or his gospel. This is Nephi’s point in saying, “Behold, my soul delighteth in proving unto my people the truth of the coming of Christ; for, for this end hath the law of Moses been given; and all things which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]” (2 Nephi 11:4). Nephi’s brother Jacob puts it this way: “And for this intent we keep the law of Moses, it pointing our souls to him [Christ]; and for this cause it is sanctified unto us for righteousness, even as it was accounted unto Abraham in the wilderness to be obedient unto the commands of God in offering up his son Isaac, which is a similitude of God and his Only Begotten Son” (Jacob 4:5). Again, Moses’ lifting up a brass serpent to heal the people was a type of Christ’s being lifted up on the cross. “And behold a type was raised up in the wilderness,” Alma taught the Zoramites,

key to the fulfillment of the types from Nephi’s vision forward, a fulfillment underscored by the patterning of 3 Nephi around the Exodus.” Focusing on the Exodus, he finds it “reverberates through the book, not only as theme but as pattern; and the overall design of the book generalizes the patterning of community in history while at the same time concentrating the Exodus in individual conversion” (ibid., 257).
that whosoever would look upon it might live. And many did look and live” (Alma 33:19). Regarding the ordinances of the Melchizedek priesthood, Alma taught that they “were given after this manner, that thereby the people might look forward on the Son of God, it being a type of his order, or it being his order, and this that they might look forward to him for a remission of their sins, that they might enter into the rest of the Lord” (Alma 13:16; cf. 13:2-3). Abinadi recalls for King Noah’s court that all performances and ordinances in the Mosaic law “were types of things to come” (Mosiah 13:31), and insists, “If ye teach the law of Moses, also teach that it is a shadow of those things which are to come” (Mosiah 16:14). Amulek taught that “this is the whole meaning of the law, every whit pointing to that great and last sacrifice” (Alma 34:14). And Mormon says that the Anti-Nephi-Lehies “did look forward to the coming of Christ, considering that the law of Moses was a type of his coming... Now they did not suppose that salvation came by the law of Moses; but the law of Moses did serve to strengthen their faith in Christ” (Alma 25:15-16).

To a Jew who reads it with an open mind and spirit, the Book of Mormon suggests manifold connections with the Old Testament. Regular reference to the deliverance of Lehi and his family from Jerusalem evokes the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. One is put in remembrance of Noah by Lehi and of Joseph the Patriarch by Joseph the son of Lehi as well as by Nephi—who is resisted by older brothers who do not want him to be a ruler over them, is bound and threatened with death, fulfills his father’s mission, and helps preserve the lives of those who earlier tried to take his life. Desiring to “be strong like unto Moses” (1 Nephi 4:2), he several times likens his situation to Moses (see 1 Nephi 4:3; 17:23-33); his brothers dare not touch him because of the power of God within him (see 1 Nephi 17:52); and like Moses he guides his people towards the promised land (see 1 Nephi 18:22).

A person attuned to typology can see how all the Book of Mormon prophets are types of Christ. Stilling the storm like Christ, Nephi was also directly like him in being an obedient son, a forgiving brother, a skillful carpenter, and a pilot. Mosiah is like Moses and Lehi, both of whom typify Christ’s leadership, in leading his people into the wilderness (see Omni 1:12). His son Benjamin also typifies Christ in shadowing the heavenly king (see Mosiah 2:19). Abinadi typifies Christ indirectly and directly: “His face shone with exceeding luster,
even as Moses’ did while in the mount of Sinai” (Mosiah 13:5, which in turn reminds us of the luster of Christ at the Transfiguration and in Lehi’s vision—1 Nephi 1:9); Abinadi is cast into prison for three days (Mosiah 17:5-6); his persecutors shed innocent blood (Mosiah 17:15, 19); and at death, Abinadi cries, “O God, receive my soul” (Mosiah 17:19). The three-day trance and conversion of Alma the Younger is a type of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection. Ammon is a type of Christ in saving many Lamanites who were “in darkness, yea, even in the darkest abyss, but behold, how many of them are brought to behold the marvelous light of God” (Alma 26:3); and like Moses, he leads his people through the wilderness to a promised land, giving the glory to Christ.

Type and antitype converge when the resurrected Savior says: “Behold, I am Jesus Christ, whom the prophets testified shall come into the world” (3 Nephi 11:10). “I have come to fulfill the law” (3 Nephi 15:5). “Behold, I am he of whom Moses spake, saying: A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me” (3 Nephi 20:23).

**Convince “that Jesus is the CHRIST”**

For the Gentiles, a purpose of the Book of Mormon is to convince “that Jesus is the CHRIST” (title page). The Book of Mormon would come forth, Moroni declares prophetically, “in a day when it shall be said that miracles are done away” (Mormon 8:26). For Gentiles who profess a belief in Jesus but deny his power (see Mormon 8:28), the Book of Mormon convincingly testifies of a “God of miracles” (Mormon 9:11). In addition to a spiritual witness, various elements of design confirm Christ’s divinity and power.

The book itself is a miracle, coming, Moroni says, “even as if one should speak from the dead” (Mormon 8:26). Its most prominent parts affirm the miraculous: the repeated exodus theme, including the escape by day of Alma and his people from their taskmasters (Mosiah 24:19-21); the freeing of prophets from prison; angelic visitations to Nephi, Alma, Amulek, and others; and, the most miraculous event of all, the personal visit of the resurrected Christ to the people.

As artistically designed for our time, the Book of Mormon does more than warn us about disbelief in miracles, it shows us, in ways that appeal to our imagination and memory, how to deal with that disbelief. Particularly, the intense dramatic dialogues
between Jacob and Sherem and Alma and Korihor present vivid responses to agnosticism. With this in mind, we might look at the first encounter. Through it, we can identify with Jacob in knowing a way to counter skeptical challenges to faith.

Sherem tries to subvert the three central tenets of Jacob’s life and teachings. At the beginning of his book, Jacob had accepted Nephi’s charge to engrave on the plates “preaching which was sacred, or revelation which was great, or prophesying . . . of Christ and his kingdom, which should come” (Jacob 1:4, 6). Now Sherem disputes Jacob’s authority as a prophet who could know by revelation concerning the future. Jacob’s recounting of the event shows both the source of his knowledge as well as an effective coping with Sherem.

But behold, the Lord God poured in his Spirit into my soul, insomuch that I did confound him in all his words. And I said unto him:

Deniest thou the Christ who shall come?
And he said:
If there should be a Christ, I would not deny him; but I know that there is no Christ, neither has been, nor ever will be.
And I said unto him:
Believest thou the scriptures?
And he said,
Yea.
And I said unto him:
Then ye do not understand them; for they truly testify of Christ. Behold, I say unto you that none of the prophets have written, nor prophesied, save they have spoken concerning this Christ. And this is not all—it has been made manifest unto me, for I have heard and seen; and it also has been made manifest unto me by the power of the Holy Ghost; wherefore, I know if there should be no atonement made all mankind must be lost. (Jacob 7:8-12)

Jacob strikes right at the heart of Sherem’s position, challenging him to defend his denial of Christ. Sherem’s response is one of intellectual pride, saying he knows there will never be a Christ. In opposing this, Jacob not only exposes the limitations of Sherem’s understanding of the scriptures but also
affirms his own knowledge which has come through divine means. Then, exercising the gambit of a bold challenger, Sherem in sarcastic scornfulness asks Jacob to produce a sign:

Show me a sign by this power of the Holy Ghost, in the which ye know so much. (Jacob 7:13)

Here the arrogant Sherem takes one step too far in this conflict regarding knowing and knowledge. Jacob’s response defines the issue and leaves the outcome to God:

What am I that I should tempt God to show unto thee a sign in the thing which thou knowest to be true? Yet thou wilt deny it, because thou art of the devil. Nevertheless, not my will be done; but if God shall smite thee, let that be a sign unto thee that he has power, both in heaven and in earth; and also, that Christ shall come. And thy will, O Lord, be done, and not mine. (Jacob 7:14; italics added)

The humble preacher (“what am I . . .”) accepts revelation (“if God shall smite thee”) and prophecy (“that Christ shall come”). In response to Jacob’s words, Sherem is struck down—a miracle in itself to one who had denied miracles. Some days after this he reverses himself and assumes, at his death, the position Jacob had taken: He speaks plainly to the multitude (as would a humble preacher, not using much flattery and power of language), he confesses the Christ (showing a belief in prophecy), and he acknowledges the means of acquiring spiritual knowledge, the revelatory power of the Holy Ghost.

Finally, the Book of Mormon is a miracle in its power of the numinous, in its meeting of God and man. The reaching up of man is exemplified by Mormon’s identification with Alma in a desire to “speak with the trump of God, with a voice to shake the earth” (Alma 29:1). This identification is more apparent in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. At first we recognize Mormon’s commentary to his latter-day audiences, marked by phrases such as “and thus we see.” Mormon’s voice merges with Alma’s cry of the heart, not recognizable as Alma’s until his later references to his “brethren, who have been up to the land of Nephi” (Alma 29:14). With an intense concern for style and tone, that is, for his manner of communication and desire to
reach his audience, Mormon through Alma laments that “I am a man, and do sin in my wish. . . . I do not glory of myself, but I glory in that which the Lord hath commanded me” (Alma 29:3, 9). Especially on the part of the last writer, Moroni, there is a feeling of inadequacy in written expression. In a prayer he laments, “Lord, the Gentiles will mock at these things, because of our weakness in writing. . . . Thou hast also made our words powerful and great, even that we cannot write them; wherefore, when we write we behold our weakness, and stumble because of the placing of our words” (Ether 12:23, 25). Moroni’s closing words to a future audience, however, are the opposite of what one might consider weak. In cadences of ascending power he boldly exhorts his audience:

Come unto Christ, and be perfected in him, and deny yourselves of all ungodliness; and if ye shall deny yourselves of all ungodliness and love God with all your might, mind and strength, then is his grace sufficient for you, that by his grace ye may be perfect in Christ; and if by the grace of God ye are perfect in Christ, ye can in nowise deny the power of God.

And again, if ye by the grace of God are perfect in Christ, and deny not his power, then are ye sanctified in Christ by the grace of God, through the shedding of the blood of Christ, which is in the covenant of the Father unto the remission of your sins, that ye become holy, without spot. (Moroni 10:32-33)

As we look at the detail from Michelangelo’s painting of the creation of Adam, we are reminded that, reaching out to man again and again in the Book of Mormon, Jesus pleads: “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive” (3 Nephi 9:14).

While the mortal Book of Mormon prophets may have come short of being angels, I’m grateful for the near-angelic voices in the book they wrote, for the power of its poetic expressions, compelling narratives, epical rhythms, dramatic dialogues, typologies, intricate structures, and the like. These literary elements conjoin with the influence of the Spirit to give in the most stirring and memorable way possible a testament of identity and purpose to modern-day Lamanites and testimony to Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ.
Reviewed by Shirley S. Ricks

This small volume features, in its largest section, a dictionary of over 1,000 terms with definitions and scriptural references (only one for each term) from the Book of Mormon. Claiming the book to be for adults and children alike, the authors (twelve are mentioned on the second page of the book) indicate it can serve as a learning or teaching tool. One of the most useful aspects of the dictionary, at least for older readers (who would be more likely to have a greater familiarity with simple nouns, verbs, and adjectives), includes the identification of proper nouns, both names and places. Place terms are identified by their distinguishing features such as cities, hills, valleys, and rivers. Names of individuals are clearly and accurately differentiated where more than one person bears the same name. Sprinkled throughout the dictionary are simple illustrations, which may appeal particularly to the younger reader. The reader is referred to the Pronouncing Guide in the scriptures for the suggested pronunciation of names.

Additional features of the volume include an illustrated reading chart with a box to mark off each chapter as it is read (clearly designed with the younger reader in mind); a children’s reading guide that shows where some of the main stories are located; a graphic depiction of the various parts and writings comprising the Book of Mormon (although the graphics may be misleading in that there is no attempt to match the proportion of the book taken up by each part—the introductory material appears to take up as much room as does the section representing the small plates of Nephi); maps of the land southward and land northward (which are only approximations and not to be compared to any modern areas)1 meant to give a general sense of location; a chronological chart portraying the temporal relationships between the Jaredites, the Mulekites, and the Nephites and Lamanites; and suggested projects and crafts to be completed at

---

1 The maps bear a general locational resemblance to figures found in John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies, Review of F. Richard Hauck, Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon," Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1 (1989): 20-70. Although "lands" are generally identified, some of the major cities bearing identical names as the lands do not appear on the maps.
the end of each individual book (to entice the younger reader to continue reading).

Despite the Companion's claim of usefulness to readers of all ages, it appears to be designed more with younger readers in mind, although, given the general disinclination of that particular age group to actually use a dictionary, the role of the adult reader may be to guide the younger reader in using this book.

Reviewed by Gary P. Gillum

It is not at all surprising to me that Peter warned all readers of scripture that what they read should not be interpreted privately (2 Peter 1:20). The Book of Mormon is the purest and most correct example of divine thought and meaning clothed in human words and language. This difference in God’s and man’s communication is the reason scriptures often serve as ambiguous catalysts to discover not our own private and temporary meaning, but—through sincere communication with deity—the Lord’s eternal message, given in his own language which only the spiritual man can understand. In this way, our scriptures serve as testing grounds for our faith and free agency. As for semantic, historical, and other difficulties with scriptures, A Sure Foundation is a good beginning to understanding some of the more difficult questions which Mormons and non-Mormons alike puzzle over.

A Sure Foundation contains some of the best of the “Questions & Answers” from issues of the Ensign and New Era. A collection whose selections have apparently been chosen by a committee, it suffers from the same problem recognized by other reviewers with this type of book: whom to blame or praise. One wonders who the compiler or editor was. Fortunately, an index was included, listing both contributors and subjects. On the debit side, however, there is no bibliography in the book telling in which issues of the Church magazines these pieces originally appeared. Only painstaking research will reveal these things; to wit, that none of these articles is any newer than the September 1987 Ensign.

Secondly, like other books with many contributors, the literary quality is uneven. In this case, however, the editors chose the best and most helpful responses for this volume. And I must admit that this compilation is the least uneven I have yet read. I looked at other pieces which were left out in the past few years. What kinds of questions were they? Mostly descriptive and exegetical types, or those which any scripture-reading Latter-day Saint could discover with his own efforts.

A Sure Foundation consists of answers to questions on six other topics besides the Book of Mormon—Doctrine and
Covenants, New Testament, Old Testament, the Church, Church History, and Doctrines and Principles. Yet the Book of Mormon questions comprise 30% of the book. Authors dealing with the Book of Mormon range from my children's favorite Mormon novelist, Jack Weyland, to Robert J. Matthews, Daniel H. Ludlow, and John W. Welch. This is not to say, however, that any of them have a better writing style than another. Rather, each author of the forty-some pieces handled the difficult questions in his own unique way. The fact that Welch's piece on B. H. Roberts was approved by the correlation committee and included is significant. It probably would not have been twenty years ago. I feel that this is due to Welch's sensitive handling of this delicate subject. Some pieces did not come to the point as quickly as I would have liked, but they left none of my own questions unanswered. The following fourteen pieces on the Book of Mormon are enough reason to have this book in your library—unless, of course, you are willing to wade through ten years' worth of Church magazines.

Why does the Book of Mormon say that Jesus would be born in Jerusalem? (see Alma 7:10) D. Kelly Ogden. This is one of the earliest questions of a convert, and it is ubiquitous in anti-Book of Mormon literature. What Ogden offers is not proof, but convincing evidence and scholarly sources to assuage the concerns of any audience, no matter what the level of educational sophistication.

Some passages in the Book of Mormon seem to indicate that there is only one God and that he is a spirit only. How can we explain this? Roy W. Doxey. There was an uncomfortable amount of time following my own conversion when this question popped into my mind often. I now realize that my earlier confusion over the belief of the Trinity in my former Lutheran background made resolution more difficult. Brother Doxey explores the question very well and proceeds even further: Is there more than one God? Is the Son of God the Eternal Father? Is God a Spirit?

Why do we say that the Book of Mormon contains "the fulness of the gospel" (D&C 20:9) when it doesn't contain some of the basic teachings of the Church? Why doesn't it include such doctrines as the three degrees of glory, marriage for eternity, premortal existence of spirits, and baptism for the dead? Daniel H. Ludlow summarizes his explanations in one simple sentence: "The fulness of the gospel means that it
contains those instructions a person needs to observe in order to be worthy to enter the presence of God in the celestial kingdom” (p. 15).

**Why are the words adieu, Bible, and baptize used in the Book of Mormon?** These words weren’t known in Book of Mormon times. Edward J. Brandt. His answer is also easily summarized: “The intent of the message in the ancient record is clear, because it is after the manner of our language so we might understand” (quoting D&C 1:24; p. 18). His is the type of article which elicits the response: “Why didn’t I think of that?”

A friend of mine says he has prayed about the Book of Mormon but has not received a testimony of its truthfulness. Shouldn’t Moroni’s promise **always** work? Daniel H. Ludlow. This question is probably the most difficult of all to explore, a difficulty which a Lutheran friend of mine experienced. He talked to me in frustration several times about his inability to get an answer concerning the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. After reminding him of some of the theological roadblocks inherent in the Lutheran background we shared, he tried the Moroni 10:4 formula again—and succeeded.

Since the Book of Mormon is largely the record of a Hebrew people, is the writing characteristic of the Hebrew language? John A. Tvedtnes pulls out all the linguistic stops in this excellent, scholarly article. It is an interesting contrast with Brandt’s answer concerning adieu. Tvedtnes, however, makes a deeper foray into the Hebrew language: What can be said about the literary style of the Book of Mormon? What about Hebrew idioms and syntax? Word-play and range of meaning? New words? Isaiah variants?

**What are the best evidences to support the authenticity of the Book of Mormon?** Ellis T. Rasmussen. His article is consistent with his deep spirituality and contains one of the truest statement in the entire book: “The best support for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is the testimony of the Holy Spirit” (p. 27). He then elaborates with seven subpoints, a list which could serve for anyone searching for the truth in the Book of Mormon.

**Why have changes been made in the printed editions of the Book of Mormon?** Robert J. Matthews. Those who complain about this problem irritate me the most. None of the changes are theologically significant, except for those who like the medieval game of trying to discover how
many angels could dance on the head of a pin. This subject is one area of Dr. Matthews's expertise, and he handles it thoroughly. He includes the Book of Mormon documents, the printed editions, and the editing of biblical texts. Drawing from my many years of experience with the Bible as a ministerial student, I feel that the Book of Mormon has changed very little compared to the Bible. Moreover, the 1981 edition is the most correct yet.

Did Oliver Cowdery, one of the three special witnesses of the Book of Mormon, express doubt about his testimony? Richard L. Anderson. The quintessential expert on the three witnesses has answered this question admirably, leaving no subquestions in my own mind. In fact, the story of evangelist R. B. Neal and his "Confession of Oliver Overstreet" in 1906 was news to me.

What is the meaning of the Book of Mormon passages on eternal hell for the wicked? H. Donl Peterson. I was brought up on heaven and hell. This article's discussion of the two types of hell should convince any doubter that the traditional views are as outdated as the Catholic church's denunciation of Galileo.

What is the approximate weight of the gold plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated? Roy W. Doxey. Joseph Smith himself called them "golden," not "gold." Interesting how a little change in a short word can get so many people worked up! Doxey's discussion of the possibility of lightweight tumbaga, an alloy of gold and copper, is an extremely plausible explanation.

Why were the Book of Mormon gold plates not placed in a museum so that people might know Joseph Smith had had them? Monte S. Nyman. Yet another fitting summary: "Those who lack faith are usually the same ones who want or expect material or physical evidence. That evidence will come, but only after they have passed the test of faith" (p. 54).

Would you respond to the theories that the Book of Mormon is based on the Spaulding manuscript or on Ethan Smith's View of the Hebrews? Bruce D. Blumell. It is as absurd for anyone to argue that the Book of Mormon was derived from either of these sources, as it is to explain the origin of the Bible or the Bhagavad-Gita by each other. Blumell points out many of the historical and factual differences.
What is B. H. Roberts’s “Study of the Book of Mormon” and how have critics used it to discredit the Book of Mormon? John W. Welch. This piece is the *magnum opus* of the volume. This study was made both possible and necessary because of Truman G. Madsen’s watershed work, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts’ Story*.1 Much could be said about this “lightning rod” of the General Authorities and his feelings about the Book of Mormon. But I will allow the reader to feast at this banquet of words on his or her own, giving only a small appetizer from B. H. Roberts himself:

This [power of the Holy Ghost] 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 of scripture, is God’s evidence to the truth; and will ever be the chief reliance of those who accept the Book of Mormon, and expect to see its acceptance extended throughout the world.2

Most of the answers I have received in my study of the Book of Mormon have come in spiritual ways. *A Sure Foundation* has helped to answer others. Furthermore, it has reminded me that the number of problems in the Bible is considerably greater than those in the Book of Mormon. Twenty years of study have convinced me that if the Book of Mormon isn’t the word of God, then neither is any other sacred writing. That is sufficient evidence for me.

---


Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

A few years ago, I came across the catalog of a San Francisco-based Roman Catholic publishing house called Ignatius Press. Since then, I have enjoyed a number of their offerings and have recommended them to my friends. In fact, I will recommend them again here: G. K. Chesterton is always worth reading, and Ignatius has undertaken not only to republish his complete works but also to distribute useful collections of quotable passages from those works.¹ They have also brought back into print Mark Twain’s delightful and delightfully unexpected biographical novel about Joan of Arc, which he considered his best work.² They are particularly strong in Thomistic philosophy.³ *Before Abraham Was,* a challenge by two Berkeley professors to the so-called documentary hypothesis and a strong assertion of the unity of Genesis 1-11, is a provocative addition to the literature on the Hebrew Bible.⁴ Karl Keating’s well-argued *Catholicism and Fundamentalism* is a defense against some of the same types of people who have been assaulting the Latter-day Saints in recent years, and even on a few of the same issues.⁵ Furthermore, Ignatius has reprinted Peter Kreeft’s fine and provocative book entitled *Heaven: The Heart’s Deepest Longing.*⁶

¹ The two volumes, *The Quotable Chesterton* and *More Quotable Chesterton,* were edited by G. J. Marlin, R. P. Rabatin, and John L. Swan. The two were published by Ignatius in San Francisco in, respectively, 1986 and 1988.
³ Among their philosophical books in my collection are Etienne Gilson, *Thomist Realism and the Critique of Knowledge* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1986), and the textbook *Love of Wisdom: An Introduction to Christian Philosophy* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1988), by Ronda Chervin and Eugene Kevane.
These excellent books are merely representative of what has become quite a distinguished catalog of publications. Unfortunately, though, Ignatius has also recently begun to distribute Peter Bartley’s polemic against The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, originally published by Veritas Publications in Ireland. This little volume represents a distinct falling off in quality, as well as in tone, from their other books I have seen. Indeed, its presence in their catalog is a bit of a shock.

Bartley’s is an across-the-board attack on Mormonism—which he includes, oddly, among “American fundamentalist sects” (p. 9), who would not appreciate our comradeship!—carried out, as he himself puts it, “in a critical and fair-minded spirit” (p. 10). Bartley’s general attitude toward the Latter-day Saints is that they are very nice people (p. 9) who are ignorant and stupid. For instance, he notes “their blindness in the face of the evidence” for unbroken apostolic succession, and attributes it to “their ignorance of Church history” (p. 71). Indeed, citing Hugh Nibley (of all people!), Mr. Bartley assures his audience that the Latter-day Saints actually take a perverse satisfaction in their ignorance: “Mormons . . . pride themselves on their lack of proficiency in scriptural exegesis” (p. 68). Bartley cites Gordon H. Fraser’s charge that Joseph Smith failed to comprehend the significance of scriptural language and values, and then asserts that, “In this regard, Smith set a precedent that has been faithfully observed by Mormon commentators who have followed him” (p. 81). (How Mr. Bartley, who appears to have read little Mormon writing and, it must be said, understood still less, feels himself competent to make such a judgment is not precisely clear.)

But the Latter-day Saints are not only theologically uninformed; their ineptitude extends into secular spheres as well: “Mormons appear to have no conception of what the study of comparative linguistics involves” (pp. 41-42). Implicitly, too,

---

7 A quick glance at Hugh W. Nibley, No Ma’am, That’s Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie’s Reluctant Vindication of the Prophet She Seeks to Expose (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946), 45, at the passage which supposedly proclaims the proud ignorance of the Mormons, shows clearly that Mr. Bartley has redirected Nibley’s argument to make it more congenial to himself.

8 It is undoubtedly true that the typical Utah wheat farmer has
in what has to be a very strange put-down for any Catholic or
indeed any theist to use (p. 46), the Book of Mormon is
presented as "a classic illustration of what Glyn Daniel has
termed 'the tendency in mankind to seek for the comforts of
unreason'." (How often has this type of comment been made
about, say, the Christian hope for immortality?) The Latter-day
Saints are so benighted that they are hardly likely to benefit from
Mr. Bartley's arguments: "It is probably too optimistic," he
wearily remarks at one point (p. 63), "to expect these chapters to
produce a dramatic change in attitude, should any Monnons read
them." After all, theirs is a "kindergarten theology" (p. 80).9

minimal competence in comparative linguistics—perhaps no more than is
possessed by the typical Rome taxi driver. But if Mr. Bartley wishes to
argue that even Latter-day Saints holding Ph.D.s in Semitic philology and
historical linguistics are somehow disqualified by their theology from ever
really grasping their academic specialities, he should perhaps offer some
evidence. And he should share this disturbing discovery with graduate
admissions officers and doctoral committees on both coasts of North
America.

9 Bartley has, it would seem, read neither Mormon Doctrine of
Deity, by B. H. Roberts (Bountiful: Horizon, 1982), originally published in
1903, nor the collection of materials made by Gordon Allred under the title
God the Father (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1979). He is apparently also
unfamiliar with studies such as Truman Madsen's Eternal Man (Salt Lake
City: Deseret Book, 1966), or Madsen's "Can God Be Pictured?" in BYU
Studies 8 (Winter 1968): 113-25, or David Paulsen's 1975 dissertation at
the University of Michigan, "Comparative Coherency of Mormon
(Finitistic) and Classical Theism," or the articles subsequently published by
Paulsen in professional philosophical journals. (I say nothing of Lowell
Bennion, Eugene England, Bruce Hafen, Arthur Henry King, Dallin Oaks,
and Dennis Rasmussen, to name only a few of the believing Latter-day
Saints whose recent essays seem to me to go considerably beyond the
kindergarten level of sophistication which Bartley says typifies the
Mormons. See too the collection of essays edited by Philip R. Barlow, A
Thoughtful Faith: Essays on Belief by Mormon Scholars [Centerville, UT:
Canon, 1986], for professions of faith by Mormons who can hardly be
described as "kindergartners.") Nor has Bartley taken note of the volume
edited by Truman G. Madsen, Reflections on Mormonism: Judaeo-Christian
Parallels (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), in which twelve
internationally renowned non-Mormon theologians and scholars of religion
seriously consider aspects of Mormon theology. He seems likewise to have
missed W. D. Davies, "Reflections on the Mormon 'Canon'," Harvard
Theological Review 79 (1986): 44-66, republished by F.A.R.M.S. as DAV-
86.
What can you expect of such fools? (He is at his gentlest when, on p. 83, he chides Elder James E. Talmage as "somewhat lacking in logic.") "The issues are clear," Bartley asserts, "the conclusion hardly in doubt. Where a critical faculty is lacking, the evidence for Mormonism might sometimes seem persuasive. Probe beneath the surface, however, and it is seen to be superficial, facile, and in every sense unscientific" (p. 91).

"The Mormon doctrine of God is ... crudely anthropomorphic," writes Mr. Bartley (p. 80). (He would certainly have the majority of thinkers on his side in this matter. For, among those few scholars and theologians to whom anthropomorphism is not wholly beneath mention, the term is seldom used without there being prefixed to it some deprecatory adjective, usually selected from a very brief inventory of condescensions: Anthropomorphism is almost invariably either "naive," "crude," "coarse," "primitive," or "vulgar." One has to wonder at the defensiveness implied by such habits of usage.) Mormonism is revealed to be "a travesty of Christianity, its teachings the bizarre outpourings of an imagination run riot" (p. 91).11

Of course, when you get right down to it, maybe the Mormons are not even very nice, either. Their view of Christian history, where it is not merely illiterate, is well described as "mind-boggling effrontery" (p. 77). Orson Hyde’s speculations about Jesus’ marital state are "absurd, if not blasphemous. . . . Christian sensibilities recoil from such views" (p. 87).12

10 For rather different evaluations, given in these cases by non-Latter-day Saints who had spent time studying Mormon theology, see Edmond LaB. Cherbonnier, "In Defense of Anthropomorphism," in Madsen, Reflections on Mormonism, 155-73, and Ernst W. Benz, "Imago Dei: Man in the Image of God," in ibid., 201-21.

11 Of course, Mormonism is precisely not merely the “outpourings of an imagination run riot.” Its consistency and lucidity are among its most notable (and humanly inexplicable) features. (Hugh Nibley makes this point eloquently in No Ma’am, That’s Not History, 61-62.) Even Sterling M. McMurrin’s The Theological Foundations of the Mormon Religion (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1965) would have sufficed to warn Mr. Bartley against such a hasty judgment.

12 Without necessarily subscribing to Elder Hyde’s theories, one is surely justified in asking whether Christ had any bodily functions at all? Did Jesus eat? Are digestion and elimination more godlike, more worthy, than is sexuality? Is Mr. Bartley advocating a docetic christology which denies the full and literal incarnation of the Son? Why does he find the body so repellant? Does he still look forward to a physical resurrection? Why?
Furthermore, as is illustrated by Mr. Bartley's tendentious misreading of the 1890 Manifesto proscribing plural marriage (p. 76), the Mormons always have their eyes out for the main chance, and apparently do not hesitate to yield up any belief or moral commitment when there is profit in doing so.  

But enough of Peter Bartley's attractive personality. It is time to examine his discussion of the Book of Mormon, which is central to his case against Mormonism and which constitutes the only conceivable reason for taking up space in the present Review with an evaluation of his book. Moreover, Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult is a representative specimen of a certain genre of anti-Mormon writing, so that an examination of a few of its arguments can possibly be justified as having an importance transcending the rather worthless volume itself.  

Bartley's summary of the career of Joseph Smith and the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (pp. 13-20) is, on the whole, fair. Then he launches his assault. The eleven witnesses to the gold plates are unreliable, he says, since "it would appear that Smith deceived them in some way, either by trickery or by hypnosis" (p. 24). He offers no evidence for this proposition except the distastefulness of the alternative. But there is little need for argument, granted his dogmatic certainty that the eleven were "lamentably lacking in credibility, being without exception credulous, superstitious, highly impressionable people. For this reason, if for no other, their testimony stands utterly discredited" (p. 24).


13 Bartley does not mention Pres. Wilford Woodruff's claim that he was guided by revelation in issuing the Manifesto. (See the excerpts from three addresses by Pres. Woodruff, following Official Declaration - 1 in the Doctrine and Covenants.) But, then, Bartley also complains that the Latter-day Saints claim too many revelations on too many subjects (p. 89). Unlike Mormon revelations, which can be on all manner of "purely mundane matters," biblical revelations deal only with the most exaltedly spiritual subjects. (In an effort to be helpful, I suggest 1 Samuel 9:2-6, 20, and 10:14-16 as illustrations of Bartley's view; also the purely abstract and otherworldly spirituality represented in Exodus 25-28. Many other instances could be cited.)
The nature of Bartley’s research on Mormonism cries out here for parenthetic comment. In his discussion of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, he never cites Richard L. Anderson’s classic work on the subject, which was first published in 1981 and has recently been reissued in paperback. Is Bartley ignoring it, or is he merely—to borrow a word from his lexicon—ignorant of it? Whatever the case, a very different view of the witnesses emerges from Anderson’s painstaking research than from Bartley’s slash-and-burn polemic. Bartley is also evidently not aware of Eldin Ricks’s *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, published in 1961. Furthermore, he fails to cite Milton V. Backman’s fine collection of primary materials entitled *Eyewitnesses of the Restoration*, which would also supply a corrective to his bias. Does he make use of Richard Bushman’s *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*? 

---

14 Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989). Professor Anderson, with his doctorate in ancient history from Berkeley and his Harvard law degree, seems, by the way, an unlikely example of alleged Mormon ignorance and inability to reason. But Peter Bartley has apparently never heard of Richard L. Anderson, or of any other contemporary or even recent Latter-day Saint scholar, and so is free to make sweeping generalizations. (One of his main sources for supposed state-of-the-art Mormon scholarship and apologetics is George Edward Clark’s 1952 minibook, *Why I Believe.*) Acquaintance with Anderson’s book, incidentally, would have spared Bartley the embarrassment of having quoted (on p. 24) from Oliver Cowdery’s alleged pamphlet, *Defense in a Rehearsal of My Grounds for Separating Myself from the Latter Day Saints*, which Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*, 171-72, 178 nn. 59 and 60, quite plausibly identifies as a late forgery.

15 Eldin Ricks, *The Case of the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Olympus, 1961). Rhett Stephens James’s heavily annotated biographical drama about Martin Harris, published as *The Man Who Knew* (Cache Valley, UT: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), is also of great interest.


17 Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984). Again, Professor Bushman, winner of the Bancroft Prize, holder of a prestigious chair in history at Columbia University, seems difficult to dismiss casually as ignorant and irrational—even though he is a Mormon, indeed a former bishop and stake president.
No. What are Bartley’s sources? Well, E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unveiled*—the orthography of its title has been silently corrected from the original *Mormonism Unvai/ed* [sic]18—is “an early and most devastating anti-Mormon book,” and Fawn Brodie’s is the “definitive biography of Joseph Smith” (p. 24).19 And while such evaluations might perhaps be understandable in a writer clearly none-too-well informed about his subject, what are we to make of Bartley’s dependence upon the late but still notorious pseudo-scholar “W. R. Martin, in his highly informative book, *The Maze of Mormonism*” (p. 61)?20

Perhaps the most amusing bit of documentation in *Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult*, is Bartley’s citation (p. 75) from an anti-Mormon book of that book’s citation from Irving Wallace’s typically lurid historical potboiler *The Twenty-Seventh Wife* of a comment critical of Joseph Smith’s moral character attributed to Brigham Young. Here is Bartley:

> When once relating the moral failings of the young Joseph Smith, Brigham Young concluded with these words: “That he was all of these things is nothing against his mission. God can and does make use of the vilest instruments.” (p. 75)

Through no help from Mr. Bartley, it was possible to track the full passage (ostensibly from Brigham) to its location in

---

18 Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: or a faithful account of that singular imposition and delusion, from its rise to the present time* (Painesville, OH, 1834).


Wallace’s novel:

Mormon colleagues did not deny Smith’s prophetless habits and manners. In fact, Brigham Young was once said to have remarked, “That the Prophet was of mean birth, that he was wild, intemperate, even dishonest and tricky in his youth, is nothing against his mission. God can, and does, make use of the vilest instruments. If he acts like a devil, Joseph has brought forth a doctrine that will save us, if we abide by it. He may get drunk every day of his life, sleep with his neighbor’s wife every night, run horses and gamble, ... but the doctrine he has produced will save you and me and the whole world.”

It will be noticed, incidentally, that our author manages even to distort the wording of Irving Wallace’s purported quotation from Brigham Young. Wallace, of course, does not footnote such things, but with some exertion the apparent original of the alleged Brigham Young quotation was located in the Journal of Discourses, only to reveal that Wallace’s use of the quotation is wildly out of context, and, most astonishingly, that the portion of Wallace’s quotation cited by Bartley (regarding “the vilest instruments”) does not exist at all in the original. This is what Brigham actually had to say:

I never preached to the world but what the cry was, “That damned old Joe Smith has done thus and so.” I would tell the people that they did not know him, and I did, and that I knew him to be a good man; and that when they spoke against him, they spoke against as good a man as ever lived. I recollect a conversation I had with a priest who was an old friend of ours, before I was personally acquainted with the Prophet Joseph. I clipped every argument he advanced, until at last he came out and began to rail against “Joe Smith,” saying, “that he was a mean man, a liar, money-digger, gambler, and a whore-master;” and he charged him with everything bad, that he could find language to utter. I said, hold on, brother Gillmore, here is the doctrine, here is the

---

21 Irving Wallace, The Twenty-Seventh Wife (New York: New
Bible, the Book of Mormon, and the revelations that have come through Joseph Smith the Prophet. I have never seen him, and do not know his private character. The doctrine he teaches is all I know about the matter, bring anything against that if you can. As to anything else I do not care. If he acts like a devil, he has brought forth a doctrine that will save us, if we will abide it. He may get drunk every day of his life, sleep with his neighbor's wife every night, run horses and gamble, I do not care anything about that, for I never embrace any man in my faith. But the doctrine he has produced will save you and me, and the whole world; and if you can find fault with that, find it.  

So much for Mr. Bartley's primary research. Brigham Young does not admit any sinfulness on the part of Joseph Smith. On the contrary, he denies it. "They found fault with Joseph Smith," he continues in the same sermon, "and at length killed him, as they have a great many others of the Latter-day Saints. What for? Because of his wickedness? No. . . . Did they hate him for his evil works? No. If he had been a liar, a swearer, a gambler, or in any way an evil doer, and of the world, it would have loved its own, and they would have embraced him, and nourished and kept him."  

In view of the remarkable performance just sketched, readers of Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult


22 JD 4:77-78. Contrast the misleading impression one can derive from Bartley's citation of M. C. Burrell's citation of Irving Wallace's misleading citation of Brigham Young talking about Joseph Smith, exhibited here, with the clearly positive evaluations of Joseph's character given by Brigham at JD 4:77, 14:203, and so on. Brodie, No Man Knows My History, 145-46, with her notable gift for insinuation, misuses the same quotation in a much more subtle way.

23 JD 4:78. President Young did not approve of those who told untruths about the Latter-day Saints and their leaders. In the same 1856 sermon as that quoted above, he said, "I preached during twenty-four or twenty-five years among the wicked, and I never yet saw a man that I was afraid to tell that he was saying that which was not so, when I knew better; frequently they would turn and say to me, 'You had better tell me that I lie,' and my prompt reply would be, you do, sir, and that before God" (JD 4:76). One can only wonder how he might have responded to Peter Bartley or Irving Wallace.
would do well not to expect much in the way of rigorous and well-grounded arguments from its author. They can, however, confidently expect sweepingly dogmatic assertions. For instance, Bartley informs his readers that, "so far from the evidence confirming the credibility of the Book of Mormon, as Mormons contend, it impugns it at every point." But what does Bartley seem to know of the evidence for the historicity of the Book of Mormon? Precious little.24 The reader will look in vain in Mr. Bartley’s book for any mention of John Sorenson, or Sidney Sperry, or Stephen Ricks, or Bruce Warren, or John Welch. Bartley does not cite Noel Reynolds’s compilation on Book of Mormon Authorship. He is manifestly unaware of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.). Even Hugh Nibley, far and away the most prominent defender of the Book of Mormon in the twentieth century, makes only a peripheral (and distorted) appearance in the form of his early pamphlet No Ma’am, That’s Not History, and is never cited in connection with the Book of Mormon. Instead, it is the late Milton R. Hunter who is “the Mormons’ foremost authority on archaeological matters” (p. 35). This is very convenient, and greatly simplifies Mr. Bartley’s self-

24 Not unrelated is Bartley’s reluctance, in his treatment of scriptural prophecies of the apostasy of the Christian church (67-69), to deal with the more formidable arguments advanced by Latter-day Saints. Thus, he mentions the books of Daniel and Revelation as well as Isaiah 24, and focuses on Amos 8:11—incidentally using, in the latter instance, an exegetical rule which would condemn not only the Mormons but also the gospel of Matthew for “prooftexting.” He does not deal with such stronger texts as Matthew 24:9-13; Acts 20:29-30; Galatians 1:6-8; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4, 7-12; 1 Timothy 4:1-3; 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 4:3-4; 2 Peter 2:1-3; Jude 3-4. It hardly needs saying also that Bartley betrays no knowledge of the writings on this subject of Hugh Nibley, to cite only the most prominent Latter-day Saint writer on the apostasy. (As a consequence, he naively imagines that his assertion on pp. 69-74 of administrative continuity in ecclesiastical history refutes Mormon belief in an apostasy.) Nibley’s work has been relatively widely distributed and reprinted. See his The World and the Prophets, vol. 3 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), first published in 1954, or his collection Mormonism and Early Christianity, vol. 4 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1987), which includes, among other things, articles originally published during the sixties in Vigiliae Christianae, Church History, and the Jewish Quarterly Review. I might additionally note that, to me, the apostasy is perhaps the most evident fact in Christian history.
BARTLEY, THE PROPHET, THE BOOK AND THE CULT (PETERSON) 41

assigned task.

Bartley's critique of the Book of Mormon falls into three chapters. The first of them, entitled "Are the Arguments Convincing?" (pp. 39-45), attempts to render powerless a selected group of arguments which have at one time or another—usually at a time considerably in the past—been advanced by certain Latter-day Saints. These arguments are sketched with greater or lesser fidelity—Bartley praises his own work here as "a candid presentation" (p. 10)—in a separate chapter of their own (pp. 33-38). There then follow two chapters on, respectively, "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon" (pp. 46-55), and "The Internal Evidence" (pp. 56-64). I shall attempt to evaluate a few of the counterarguments advanced against the faith of the Latter-day Saints by Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult. For reasons of space and because many of these issues are already well treated in the literature, I shall only discuss a representative number of his contentions. I welcome this as an opportunity to suggest some of the books and articles one should read, in order to be better informed. The titles I recommend are only a sampling of what has now become a quite considerable literature on the Book of Mormon and on Mormon studies in general.

One of Mr. Bartley's most useful weapons in his attack on the Book of Mormon is the claimed Latter-day Saint belief that "all American Indians are . . . the descendants of the Lamanites" (p. 34). "It is alleged that archaeology and ethnology reveal the Indians to be Jews," he helpfully informs his readers (p. 35). He then points out that Amerindians are of not merely one physical type, but of several, and declares that this fact cannot be reconciled with the Mormons' supposed insistence on a unitary origin for New World populations (p. 40). Further, he notes, "there never was a time when all Indians of the American continent spoke the same language," and, indeed, their languages are of vastly different families, quite distinct and unrelated. Clearly, then, "the enormity of the language problem alone militates against such an uncomplicated view of Indian origins as that held by Mormons" (p. 42).

Now it is true that many early Latter-day Saints held to the point of view sketched by Mr. Bartley. And undoubtedly many continue to do so. But the Book of Mormon nowhere says or requires any such thing, and Bartley himself—even on the basis of his out-of-date research—knows that most Mormons who have given the subject sustained attention do not hold to such an
“uncomplicated view of Indian origins” as that represented by the straw man he himself has set up. (He grudgingly admits this vital fact on pp. 47-48.) Why, then, does he treat folk beliefs as if they had been canonized? How would he respond if a similar approach were taken to Roman Catholic theology and history? Why does he pretend that the Book of Mormon must be false if the theory is true that the Americas were peopled by migrants from Asia to Alaska across the Bering Strait? Why does he claim that a Jaredite migration to the New World circa 2200 B.C. is incompatible with a series of Bering Strait migrations ending about 8000 B.C.?25 (See his discussion at pp. 46-47.) Where, please, is the contradiction? If Julie reports that she saw Tom at the party, and Laura claims to have seen Jack, must we conclude that one of the girls is either a liar or mad? It seems to be Peter Bartley, not the Mormons, who wants to insist on a unitary origin for the Amerindians. Where the Book of Mormon can accommodate other coexisting populations of various origins, Bartley’s dogmatic insistence on an arrival via the Bering Strait of the ancestors of all “indigenous” Americans fails to explain the very diversity which he exhibits as a decisive refutation of Mormon claims.

Related to this is the implicit denial that Hebrew was ever spoken in the New World, because Bartley sees no evidence of Semitic linguistic elements surviving into colonial times. (contrast pp. 36-37 and 41-42). His failure to observe such elements is not universally shared, and preliminary finds raise the possibility of Hebrew words in Uto-Aztecan.26 But let us, for a moment, grant him his contention that there is no evidence of ancient American Hebrew. At a certain stage of his argument, when he wants to stress the linguistic variety which characterized pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, Bartley unwittingly undercuts his own contention by observing that “Precisely how many languages were spoken in the Americas will never be


known, for many of them have become extinct” (p. 42). But if unnumbered languages have disappeared from Mesoamerica without leaving even sufficient traces to testify that they once existed, does this not open the door to Hebrew having once been among them even if no traces of it remain? Our author cannot have it both ways.

Mr. Bartley’s claim that plausible alternative explanations exist for alleged parallels between Mesoamerican beliefs and beliefs attested in the Hebrew Bible (pp. 42-43; cf. 39-40 for a slightly different application of the same basic argument), even if accepted, does not prove any purported Mormon claims false on this matter. It merely indicates that they are not conclusively established as true, and may be false. But even if they were false, even if no parallels between Mesoamerica and the Near East existed by the end of pre-Columbian times, this would not in and of itself demonstrate that such parallels had never existed. Likewise, Bartley’s claim that Quetzalcoatl is not a garbled recollection of Jesus but rather a memory of the tenth-century Toltec ruler Topiltzin (pp. 43-45) cannot possibly prove the Book of Mormon inaccurate, since the Book of Mormon nowhere mentions Quetzalcoatl, and obviously therefore never equates him with Christ. At most, Bartley’s claim would, if true, indicate that certain contemporary Latter-day Saints who have made that equation are mistaken. But it is not clear that Mr. Bartley’s explanation of Quetzalcoatl is adequate, and there is still some reason to think that the mythical figure of Quetzalcoatl draws to at least some extent on distorted memories of Christ.


28 For some recent Latter-day Saint discussions of Quetzalcoatl, see Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 326-30, 334-35; David A. Palmer, In Search of Cumorah (Bountiful: Horizon, 1981), 191-95; Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, The Messiah in Ancient America (Provo: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), passim; Diane E.
Charles Anthon’s account of his meeting with Martin Harris is adduced by Bartley, and is preferred by him (pp. 21-22), despite the fact that it was Anthon, clearly embarrassed by his connection with the unpopular Mormons, who had reason to lie, despite the fact that Harris was moved by his interview with Anthon to mortgage his farm in order to support the publication of the Book of Mormon—a rather unlikely outcome if Anthon really tried to discourage him as he claims—and despite the fact that Anthon’s multiple retellings of the incident are laced with contradictions at many points.29

Citing Fawn Brodie, Bartley thinks it likely that Joseph Smith used Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews in the production of the Book of Mormon (pp. 28-29). He is evidently unaware of any Latter-day Saint writing on the subject.30

Bartley reads the Book of Mormon as describing a people who built numerous cities, which he pictures—without clear justification—as massive urban centers (pp. 34, 53). Yet, he says, pre-Columbian Mesoamerica was virtually devoid of true cities (pp. 49, 53). Indeed, citing G. H. S. Bushnell, Bartley


speaks of "the impossibility of building cities in the forests where the great Maya centres were located" (p. 53). However, Bartley is wrong. Part of the problem involves a dispute among social scientists about just what constitutes a "true city." Even Bartley admits (p. 49) that large ceremonial centers did exist in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica, and that, in the immediately pre-colonial period, some of these centers possessed "urban populations." Why should these not be considered cities?31 (If it walks like a duck, and it quacks like a duck... ) The National Geographic Society's archaeological site in northern Guatemala, El Mirador, is estimated to cover sixteen square kilometers (six square miles)—in Bushnell's impossible forests—and to have contained at its height a population in the tens of thousands.32 Why should this not be termed a city?

In fact, it is so widely recognized in the academic community that true cities existed in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica that such ideas can be found even in introductory textbooks.33 Teotihuacan, the only pre-Hispanic site which even Bartley will grant to have been an actual city, represents no minor exception to his dismissal of Mesoamerican urban life: It was evidently

31 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 158-59, discusses what the Book of Mormon itself says about its "cities," and concludes among other things that they were not necessarily very large and that they were, precisely, "ceremonial centers." His discussion suggests that the Book of Mormon data fit Mesoamerica rather well.

32 See Ray T. Matheny, "El Mirador: An Early Maya Metropolis Uncovered," National Geographic Magazine 172 (September 1987): 316-39, for an interesting discussion about and speculative reconstructions of this vast Mayan city. (The word "city" is repeatedly used throughout Matheny's article. Matheny is an archaeologist at Brigham Young University.)

larger in area than imperial Rome. In a section entitled "Teotihuacán: An American Metropolis," one major archaeological atlas notes that, in A.D. 500, "Teotihuacán was the sixth largest city in the world." Now, it is true that Teotihuacán, near Mexico City, was once thought by many Americanists to be not merely the pre-eminent Mesoamerican urban center, but the first one. Recent discoveries, however, have clearly shown such beliefs to be incorrect. El Mirador, for instance, flourished from about 150 B.C. to A.D. 150—long before the few immediately pre-Columbian quasi-urban concentrations that Bartley grudgingly acknowledges. Ongoing excavations conducted by the University of California, Los Angeles, at Nakbe, in El Petén, Guatemala, have revealed "a highly developed city" dating back to approximately 500 B.C. and sitting "in the heart of the lush forests of Central America." And, within only the past few years, excavators have unearthed what is now termed the oldest city in North America, an Olmec center in Mexico called Teopantecuanitlan ("The Place of the Jaguars' Temple"). This site, which appears to have been inhabited from at least 1500 B.C. to 600 B.C., and which may indeed date back to 2000 B.C., covers an area of 241.5 acres and probably served as the residence for approximately 15,000 people. (This was a sizeable population for the period, almost anywhere.) The homes of the city's people line the local river banks. Two stone irrigation canals, each half a mile long and five feet deep, tell of a rather highly developed agricultural life at Teopantecuanitlan. "Large architectural complexes forming the centres of Maya cities were fundamental to their civilization. The plan of such ceremonial centres was established in the earliest days of the Maya, dating back to 2000 B.C."

---

36 Thus Millon, "Teotihuacán," 38.
37 See Harlan Lebo, "Mayan Mysteries," *UCLA Magazine* 2 (Spring 1990): 29-33. The dig at Nakbe is directed by Richard Hansen, a graduate of Brigham Young University, and includes scientists from both UCLA and BYU, as well as from the University of San Carlos in Guatemala.
38 See the account given in the Chicago *Tribune*, 13 July 1986, sec. 6, p. 1, col. 4.
Peter Bartley is, however, perhaps not wholly to blame for missing urban life in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica. "Only in the last thirty years," David Carrasco points out, "have scholars begun to focus intensely on the urban character of the ancient Mexican world."40 Archaeologist Jeremy A. Sabloff has just published a book entitled The Cities of Ancient Mexico: Reconstructing a Lost World, with no apparent shame.)41 An obsolescence of thirty to forty years seems about typical for the scholarship cited in Mormonism: The Prophet, the Book and the Cult, where Milton R. Hunter and George Edward Clark represent the latest and most advanced Latter-day Saint thinking.

For reasons known with certainty only to him, however, Mr. Bartley remains hypnotized by Teotihuacán. Probably it serves his purposes to imagine that it was the only urban area in Mesoamerica and, thus, to link it with the Book of Mormon's (to him mythical) cities. With deliberate irony, he joins the ranks of Book of Mormon geographers in order to identify what he terms "Teotihuacán" as "the cradle of [Nephite] Christianity." Of course, he does so only to set up yet another straw man: "Nothing remotely connected with the Christian gospel has ever been uncovered at Teotihuacán [sic]," he triumphantly observes, "though many gods of the Mexican pantheon are represented there" (p. 52). He betrays no awareness of the writing done by the Latter-day Saint authors on the relationship between Teotihuacán and the Book of Mormon, which comes to a rather different view than that which he wants to impose upon them. Who, besides the tongue-in-cheek Peter Bartley, identifies Teotihuacán as "the cradle of Christianity" in the Nephite New World?42


42 See for instance, Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 129-34, 341-43, 346; also Palmer, In Search of Cumorah, 188-99. F. Richard Hauck's Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), representing a view of Book of Mormon geography alternative to that of Sorenson, does not even refer to Teotihuacán in his index.
“New World archaeology reveals a complete absence of metals” (p. 49). This statement is, of course, simply false. Virtually any work on pre-Columbian art will show numerous objects (such as breastplates, necklaces, and the like) made of gold. Almost everybody knows about the effect of pre-Columbian gold upon the conquistadores, and many will not need to be reminded of its role in the rise of Spain to international wealth and prominence or in the inflation which followed its introduction into the Mediterranean region. Other metals are also well-attested. So it is no surprise to discover, on the same page of Bartley’s book, that what he really is referring to is an absence, not of metals, but of metallurgy. Even here, however, he further qualifies his assertion when he admits that metallurgy was not absolutely nonexistent in the Americas before the arrival of the Europeans. (How, in view of the superabundance of evidence, could he possibly argue for such a proposition?) No, what he means to say is that the art of metallurgy did not appear in Mesoamerica until about 900 A.D. But this is a very different claim than an assertion of absolute nonexistence. Even so, Bartley shows no awareness of the problems which surround the question of metallurgy in the Americas before Columbus. There is, for instance, no mention of John Sorenson’s published discussions of this issue.43

No swords or shields or breastplates have ever, Bartley says, been recovered from pre-Columbian archaeological sites. Nor has “any form of armour” ever been found (p. 50). He

does not refer to Sorenson’s writing on the subject, which would seriously undermine his argument. Nor does he show any awareness of military historian William Hamblin’s paper on “Handheld Weapons in the Book of Mormon,” which deals with Mesoamerican evidence and which has been available since 1985. Hamblin’s newer paper, on “Armor in the Book of Mormon,” publicly circulated since 1989, was possibly published too late to have come to Bartley’s attention—but the Mesoamerican evidence briefly surveyed in it was surely available to him and should have been consulted by him before he opted to publish his opinions on military technology in pre-Columbian America.44

The Book of Mormon is clearly incorrect, declares Bartley, in claiming for its early American inhabitants “wheat and barley” and “all manner of grain,” since these were not present in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica (p. 50). He takes no notice of the work on this and on related problems which has been done recently by Latter-day Saint and other scholars.45 He is unaware of the discovery, first reported in the magazine Science in December of 1983, of cultivated pre-Columbian barley at a

44 See Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 184-87; William Hamblin, “Handheld Weapons in the Book of Mormon,” currently available from F.A.R.M.S. as working paper HAM-85; Hamblin, “Armor in the Book of Mormon,” available as HAM-89. See also Hamblin, “The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon,” F.A.R.M.S. working paper HAM-87, published in 1987. A forthcoming volume on Warfare in the Book of Mormon, edited by Professor Hamblin with Stephen D. Ricks, will contribute significantly to discussion of these matters. The literature on arms and armor in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica is so extensive that only a few references, for which I am indebted to Professor Hamblin, can be mentioned here. For a general study of Maya arms and armor, see Prescott H. F. Follett, “War and Weapons of the Maya,” Middle American Papers, Middle American Research Series, publication no. 4 (New Orleans: Tulane University of Louisiana, 1932). For a general modern study with complete references, see Ross Hassig, Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). In both of these works, swords, shields, and breastplates are mentioned numerous times. A recent book entitled Swords and Hilt Weapons (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989) includes a chapter (at pp. 218-25) by Yale archaeologist Michael Coe on “Pre-Conquest American Swords,” with several illustrations of swords, shields, and armor.

site in Arizona.46

The Book of Mormon speaks of terrible wars occurring among its peoples, as Bartley correctly points out. Yet the Maya "were on the whole a peaceful people. Their ceremonial centres had no fortifications, and were for the most part located in places incapable of defence" (p. 53). Bartley here assumes a simple equation of the Maya with the peoples of the Book of Mormon which may or may not be accurate—but, more importantly, he fails to mention Sorenson's treatment of this issue.47 Nor does he show the slightest awareness of the evidence now available on "the state of war that existed constantly among many Maya cities. The modern myth that the Maya were a peace-loving, gentle people who only tended their milpas and followed the stars has fallen with a thunderous crash."48 Yale Mayanist Michael D. Coe puts it simply: "The Maya were obsessed with war. The Annals of the Cakciquels and the Popol Vuh speak of little but intertribal conflict among the highlanders, while the sixteen states of Yucatán were constantly battling with each other over boundaries and lineage honour. To this sanguinary record we must add the testimony of the Classic monuments and their inscriptions."49 A brief glance at the volume The Blood of Kings: Dynasty and Ritual in Maya Art is all that is needed to show clearly that the Maya were among the most bloodthirsty people in world history.50

46 The discovery was publicized in Latter-day Saint circles by the F.A.R.M.S. Update for December 1984.
47 See Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 132-34, 260-64.
48 Thus Linda Schele and Mary Ellen Miller, "The Blood of Kings: A New Interpretation of Maya Art," Archaeology 39 (May/June 1986): 61. Note the mention of "Maya cities" (emphasis added).
49 Coe, The Maya, 148. Readers of the Book of Mormon can hardly fail to recall here the somber words of Moroni: "After the great and tremendous battle at Cumorah, behold, the Nephites who had escaped into the country southward were hunted by the Lamanites, until they were all destroyed. . . . And behold also, the Lamanites are at war one with another; and the whole face of this land is one continual round of murder and bloodshed; and no one knoweth the end of the war" (Mormon 8:2, 8). Compare, too, 1 Nephi 12:20-21.
Not surprisingly, Bartley is dissatisfied with the Book of Mormon and Mormonism on theological grounds, too. He attempts to show that the Mormon notion of a God somehow in process is irreconcilable not merely with the Bible but also with the Book of Mormon (p. 84). In doing so, he confuses metaphysical immutability with what one might call ethical immutability, failing to demonstrate that either the Bible or the Book of Mormon teaches the former. (It should be added that even some traditional theists are now willing to jettison the purported divine attribute of metaphysical immutability, admitting it to be both incoherent and radically incompatible with the Bible.)

Bartley also faults the Book of Mormon on stylistic grounds. "Considering the limited vocabulary of the book," he remarks, his ironic grin almost visible to the reader, "the Nephite prophets had an uncommon preference for certain words and phrases" (pp. 56-57). But why should a limited vocabulary work against repetition? Wouldn't a limited vocabulary—which the book's translator, the young and uneducated Joseph Smith, indisputably had—tend to force repetition, and to limit variation? One might also say, too, that Homer "had an uncommon preference for certain words and phrases." It would be a very dull reader, indeed, who did not notice recurring phrases in the Iliad and the Odyssey such as "cow-eyed Athena," "the wine-dark sea," "rosy-fingered dawn," and "Odysseus of many counsels." What of it?

Bartley sets up a straw man again when he argues for a completely mechanical translation process in the coming forth of the Book of Mormon (p. 63). (Not surprisingly, he is unaware of the studies of Stephen Ricks on the matter, which do not support him.) This permits him to draw a truly stinging caricature of Latter-day Saint beliefs not only on the Book of Mormon but on the nature of God. The mode of translation which Bartley insists upon "exclude[s] the possibility of error, even the smallest grammatical error, in the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated." But Mormons have in fact occasionally corrected and reedited the text of their scriptures.

---

51 See, for one accessible summary of the current state of the question, Ronald Nash, The Concept of God (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 99-105.
52 Stephen D. Ricks, "Joseph Smith's Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon," written in 1984 and issued, together with another piece, as F.A.R.M.S. paper WRR-86.
"In presuming to correct their bible [sic], Mormon editors have thus represented God as an absent-minded semi-literate whose revelation, even regarding his own Son, they have not scrupled to treat as suspect and subject to revision" (p. 63). It apparently does not trouble Bartley that no Mormons would agree to his characterization of their view of God. Their actions in revising their scriptures simply imply a different view of inspiration and revelation than that which he has assigned to them.

Bartley has read the Book of Mormon with what, from a certain aspect, can be considered commendable care. He identifies certain common phrases and words which recur throughout the book, in all or most of the allegedly many writers who make up the volume. On the basis of this examination, he comes to a strong conclusion: "What is indicated," he insists, "is not diversity, but uniformity of writing style, such as one would expect in a work written entirely by one person" (p. 57). Unfortunately for Bartley, however, such analysis is distinctly subjective. I, for one, am quite confident that I can distinguish several clearly separate personalities among Book of Mormon writers. But is it merely a question of my subjectivity against Bartley's? Not entirely. A book published on this subject in 1989 should take cognizance of recent studies which purport to demonstrate multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon on objectively quantifiable bases. To mention one strand of recent research, see the computer wordprint studies of Larsen, Rencher, and Layton, or of the Berkeley group led by John Hilton.

This is not always true. Attempting on p. 88 to show that the Book of Mormon contradicts later developments in Mormonism, Bartley cites Jacob 2:24, 27, and Ether 10:5 in order to substantiate his claim that "fewer [sic] evils have been condemned more forthrightly in the Book of Mormon than that of polygamy." However, he overlooks the crucial statement of Jacob 2:30, mention of which would not serve his thesis.

Similarly subjective is Bartley's evaluation of the narrative history of the Jaredites given in the Book of Ether as "dull and repetitive for the most part" (p. 58). I could not possibly disagree more strongly. See Hugh Nibley's studies, "The World of the Jaredites" and "There Were Jaredites," reviewed in the present volume, for a glimpse of the richness which can be found in that brief scriptural book. Bartley doesn't think much of the contents of the Pearl of Great Price, either (p. 89). De gustibus non est disputandum. In my "Introduction" to the present Review, I have attempted to offer a perspective on the subjectivity of literary valorizations.

Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, "Who

Bartley is much exercised by the Book of Mormon's alleged plagiarism from the Bible. He reads the book of Ether, for instance, as "a potted history woven from a succession of key events in the historical books of the Old Testament." (The kings Shule and Riplakish were "clearly" inspired by King Solomon.) Bartley provides a brief list of wholly unimpressive parallels between Ether 1-10 and the Old Testament and then, for once, concedes his lack of information: "Whether Mormons puzzle over this unusual catalogue of parallel incidents we know not" (p. 58). Having examined his arguments, I cannot imagine that anyone will lose much sleep over them.

Bartley rightly notes the similarity between the account of Akish and the daughter of Jared, in Ether 8, and the story of Salome in the New Testament (p. 59). Perhaps he imagines himself the first to have noticed this. He should consult Hugh Nibley's fascinating discussion of the question.56 "The Sermon on the Mount," Bartley announces, referring to the King James rendition of that text, "is reproduced word for word in 3 Nephi 12-14" (p. 59). However, there are significant differences.57 He is right, of course, that the similarity between the two


sermons is too close to be mere coincidence (p. 59-61), but to assume that it was the author of the Book of Mormon who was influenced by the King James Bible rather than the translator—and that, therefore, the book had to have been written subsequent to the 1611 publication of the KJV, rather than, as the Latter-day Saints claim, translated after 1611—is merely to assume the book unhistorical. But that is precisely the point at issue, and to assume one’s conclusion as evidence for one’s conclusion is circular reasoning of the most transparently specious sort.

Peter Bartley thinks that the evidence he adduces has "consigned the Nephites to the realm of fiction" (p. 55). However, as quoted above, he is also pessimistic, given the limited reasoning capacity of the Latter-day Saints, that his arguments will have any effect on their superstitions. "Whenever the unreasonableness of their position is pointed out to them, Mormons invariably fall back on their standard reply—they invoke the authority of Joseph Smith as the last word on the subject. In the final analysis the informed judgements of scholars, the mass of accumulated evidence, common sense even, all count for nothing against the word of God’s prophet" (p. 64).

Now, I hope I have made it clear here and elsewhere that I do not see the Latter-day Saint position as unreasonable, as contrary to common sense and the accumulated evidence. If I did, I would not be a Latter-day Saint. Since I do not, I see no more reason to bow to the consensus of scholars (whatever it may be at the current moment) than to base my political philosophy on Gallup polls or my morals on the Kinsey Report. And I am not at all embarrassed to declare publicly that, yes, given the choice between Peter Bartley and "the word of God’s prophet," I unhesitatingly choose Joseph Smith yet again. (Would Bartley have chosen Celsus or Simon Magus over Peter? the Athenians on the Areopagus over Paul?)

I still wonder, however, why Ignatius Press would want to distribute so insulting and ill-informed a book as this. How long will writers persist in not doing their homework? Another of Ignatius’s authors, Karl Keating, in his fine defense against anti-Catholic polemicists already mentioned, notes of one of those critics that "he demonstrates that while fundamentalists can produce tracts, newsletters, and even books in quantity, they rarely make any effort to test their claims against the Catholic version of the facts. They do not seem to know there is a
Catholic version. How simple it would be,” Keating continues, to simply look up some of the relevant issues as they are treated in Catholic discussions, to see if fundamentalist criticisms of the Church of Rome are well-founded. “But checking is not something professional anti-Catholics are inclined to do. They are not so much interested in accuracy as in effect.”

Those Latter-day Saints who have observed the surge in anti-Mormon activity over the past decade or so will certainly sympathize with Keating’s complaint. Time and again, old anti-Mormon canards are dusted off anew as if they were fresh discoveries, despite the fact that they have been answered decades since. Very few critics of the Latter-day Saints, as Hugh Nibley pointed out years ago, are “willing to make the supreme sacrificium intellectus and listen to the Mormon side of the story.” How ironic that Ignatius Press, by distributing Peter Bartley’s attack on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, has fallen to the same level as those fundamentalists for whom Rome is no less the enemy than Salt Lake City.

58 Keating, Catholicism and Fundamentalism, 214.

The Tales of Alvin Maker, including these volumes:


Orson Scott Card: How a Great Science Fictionist Uses the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by Eugene England

In the past twelve years Orson Scott Card has published a huge volume of work and reached the pinnacle of recognition in both science fiction (having won the two top prizes, the Hugo and Nebula, in 1986 and 1987) and also in fantasy (having won the 1987 World Fantasy Award for his novella, "Hatrack River," part of *Seventh Son*, the first of his Tales of Alvin Maker books). Until fairly recently Card's work seemed to have little or nothing to do with his Mormon faith, but in the past three years he has developed a fantasy series based on the life of Joseph Smith, planned a science fiction series based on the Book of Mormon, and written a number of explicitly Mormon stories set in the America that might survive after a limited nuclear war.

I will begin with the last mentioned, *The Folk of the Fringe*. Four of the five stories have appeared in leading national publications like *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. *Fringe* uses for its enabling science fictional "what if" an expressly Mormon gambit: What if the prophecies of the Book of Mormon and modern seers came true, but not in the easy, self-serving way many Mormons sometimes imagine, with everything rosy and themselves at the center of things after Armageddon. What if God has the whole earth, in fact a sentient and wounded earth, and all his children in his hands. What would Mormons experience as they trekked back to a Great Basin covered with water and a submerged Salt Lake Temple and tried to create a new civilization while trying to cope with American Indians as resurgent as Christ in the Book of Mormon promised?

For instance, "America," the ending story, is both a wonderfully entertaining futuristic version of the Quetzalcoatl and Virgin Birth myths but also an extremely challenging
version of the Book of Mormon prophecies and Mormon myths about their own role in the last days. As the Amazon forests are destroyed and the pollution engendered by European technological civilization proceeds apace all over, the American land, which is explicitly equated to God or Christ, calls forth the American Indians to inherit and save: "It sounded so close to what the old prophets in the Book of Mormon said would happen to America; close, but dangerously different. As if there were no hope for the Europeans anymore... Someone else would inherit" (p. 209).

Of course some passages in the Book of Mormon do leave open the possibility that it is the Indians who will inherit; we Europeans just choose to ignore them. But even more important to Card, I believe, is his feeling for the land in the present and our Mormon responsibility to it. "America" could be read as a tract against all the evils we commit against the land, but it is even more an evocation of what might still happen, by giving us a possibility, lodged in the future, for us to contemplate and believe and achieve. As the narrator looks back on what God and the land have used both Mormons and American Indians to achieve, he reflects: "Even if we took twisted roads and got lost or injured on the way, even if we came limping to this place, it is a good place, it is worth the journey, it is the promised, the promising land" (p. 217).

Seventh Son, the first of the Alvin Maker volumes, is the story of a "Maker," claimed to be the first one born "since the one who changed water into wine." His birth year is 1805; he has the same name as his father; is a good wrestler; early in life he has a vision of a man in white, with garment open at the breast, who appears three times and teaches him things crucial to his salvation and the salvation of all others. The boy has a special relationship to American Indians and a sense of their destiny; he suffers from an infected bone in his leg, refuses strong drink when it is operated on without anesthesia, saying he can bear it if his father holds him. Sound familiar? Well, it is very familiar if you are a Mormon or have read a biography of Joseph Smith.

However, I haven't just described a biographical novel about Joseph Smith, but rather a fantasy tale about a folk magician growing up using his "knacks" or gifts based on hidden powers, drawing a perfect hex on his house to ward off danger, splitting stone by feeling its hidden structure, healing the spiritually ill and seeing into the future, barely surviving
constant threats to his life from dark forces because of protection by benign ones, including a young “torch” who can see his heartfire and a “Taleswapper” who senses that his story is the most important one on earth. And that’s enough to make any twentieth-century, rational Mormon uneasy, especially following the Hoffman forgeries and murders and the rearing of a salamander’s head into our comfortable world of rational theology and modern science.

Mormons should be uneasy, not because this book might appear to undermine Joseph Smith’s status as a divinely called prophet (in fact, I believe, on the evidence of the second and third volumes, that the projected sequels to this novel will create for us a very believable as well as challenging prophet). Rather, Seventh Son is challenging because it raises the most fundamental questions about what a prophet, a spokesman for God with divine powers, really is, in fact, what divine power itself is, and how and why it intersects with our mundane, rational world.

Non-Mormons should be uneasy as well, not because this is pro-Mormon propaganda in disguise, but because it raises the most fundamental questions about fantasy itself and injects profoundly religious questions—and implied answers from a Mormon Christian bent—into a genre that seems to me not generally taken that seriously, at least in that way, even by its devotees. The books are not written in service of religion but are religious in the most important way: They challenge serious readers to be religious. They are the only fantasy novels I know about that are, in a sense, profoundly anti-fantasy. And perhaps only a Mormon can see that fact, that the world they create, despite the unusual folk vocabulary and the strange doings that we have learned to deprecate with the word “magic,” is for the author the only “real” world, a world whose spiritual powers form a seamless whole with everything else and reveal the true meaning and possibility of everything else.

Some commentators on the evidence for Joseph Smith’s involvement in “the” magic worldview—the money-digging, amulets, etc.—simply reject all that as rural superstition, quickly outgrown by the prophet as he matured; others show how pervasive that view was in Europe and America, merging easily for many people into their religious beliefs and practices, and continuing for Joseph and many other Mormons throughout their lives.
But the commentators tend to make the fundamental mistake of assuming that all who practiced these hidden arts had the same worldview and that the same practices meant the same to everyone. And for all their sympathy and attempts to show that such practices do not undermine Joseph’s prophetic claims, they don’t seem to me to really believe in the power of such doings. I think Card does, and that he also has a very sophisticated view of how complex the magical-religious world is. Young Alvin’s powers, though similar in form to those of many others in the unusual American-frontier analogue world Card creates, become progressively unique as he matures. The “knacks” of the Whites, in turn, are quite different from the unusual powers of Indians, the Reds, which have to do with living in absolute harmony with the land and its other creatures, even killing for food only when the creatures offer themselves. But in the second novel, The Red Prophet, Alvin develops these powers as well and is recognized by the Indians as having certain powers beyond those of either Whites or Indians. Card is clearly on his way to exploring where the powers of a divinely called prophet fit into this world where there are stranger things than are dreamed of in any of our philosophies—things that are real and which we must come to real, not merely imaginative terms with.

Particularly challenging for serious readers, including Mormons, though they will find the notion is based on Book of Mormon theology, is Card’s stunning evocation of what it is young Alvin, the Maker, has been sent by God to oppose and what power he has to oppose it with: Alvin has a recurring nightmare, “a terrible dream that came on him, waking or sleeping, and spiked his heart to his spine till he like to died. The world filling up with an invisible trembling nothing that seeped into everything and shook it apart. Alvin could see it, rolling toward him like a huge ball, growing all the time” (p. 124). His friend Taleswapper is a marvelous creation by Card of a Romantic poet/seer modeled on William Blake, whose poetry Card even uses for him to declaim as his own. Taleswapper calls the nightmare force the Unmaker, an evil more fundamental and dangerous than the devil (“who can’t afford to break everything down ... or he’d cease to be,” p. 128). This is radical cosmic entropy, the tendency of all being toward nothingness, something Martin Heidegger spent a brilliant career helping us understand and learn how to oppose by increasing being, especially through language. Alvin learns
Alvin knew all kinds of opposites in the world: good and evil, light and dark, free and slave, love and hate. But deeper than all those opposites was making and unmaking. So deep that hardly anybody noticed that it was the most important opposite of all. But he noticed, and so that made the Unmaker his enemy.

(p. 129)

Alvin’s creator, Scott Card, also believes there is more in the universe to fight nonbeing with even than brilliant philosophers and poets, that there are powers beyond man engaged in the fight, who come to earth themselves to help as well as sending humans with special gifts. As Alvin tells Taleswapper:

[The Shining Man] showed me what my knack was for, and now I see it’s the same thing you’re talking about. I saw a stone that I pulled out of a mountain, and it was round as a ball, and when I looked close I saw it was the whole world, with forests and animals and oceans and fish and all on it. That’s what my knack is for, to try to put things in order. (p. 130)

In *The Red Prophet*, the story picks up with the Shining Man of Alvin’s first vision, who turns out to be an Indian born so sensitive to death that he can feel the millions of bees dying in the winter as if each were a wound. When his father is killed in his presence by a white man, the young Indian suffers a debilitating shock from that close death that shuts out the green music of the land that sustains the special powers of Indians, fills his head with blackness, and reduces him to perpetual drunken anguish. Led to Alvin in a traditional Indian search for his dream beast, he is healed and at the same time serves as a kind of dream beast for Alvin, evoking the vision that gives Alvin his first sense of divine mission. As a result of that vision, the Indian receives a new name, Tenkswa-Tawa, and becomes an absolute pacifist Red Prophet. He gathers his people in a huge town near Alvin’s home, preaching the gospel of peace as the only resolution to the growing struggle with the
invading Whites. He advocates total withdrawal across what is called the "Missipy," where the land will protect them from invasion. He teaches they should leave the White man to poison the east and live his own punishments.

But the Red Prophet has a brother, Ta-Kumsaw, who has an entirely different though equally possible and believable vision—of rallying the Indians to a united, total war with Whites, not in massacres or vengeance, but as a just war to drive the Whites back to Europe. Alvin is convinced of the vision of the Red Prophet, and wants to return to stop the impending attack of the Whites, but he is told to send his brother and stay with the Red Prophet’s angry brother to keep him alive with his healing knacks. In obedience to this task he travels with Ta-Kumsaw, unavoidably helping him spread his vision of justified violence. At one point he has a crucial vision, for which Card uses imagery taken directly from the seminal vision of the whole Book of Mormon, Lehi’s dream (p. 220). But meanwhile the Whites attack the Prophet’s pacifist Indian city. This brings about the most remarkable scene in the novel, what I find one of the most unusual and moving in any literature, and it is that, I believe, because it is modeled directly on one of the greatest scenes in the Book of Mormon, the refusal of the people of Ammon to take up arms when attacked and the resulting conversion of their enemies (Alma 24:16-26).

In the massacre, the Prophet leads his people in passive resistance that, just as in the Book of Mormon, shows the unique healing power of love and the enormous cost of such redemptive love. Card creates the scene through the eyes of one of the attacking Whites:

The city turned up empty, and they found the Reds all gathered in Speaking Meadow, just like they was ready for a sermon from the Prophet. . . . He shot his musket, . . . just like the other men, firing and reloading. . . . The bloodlust was on him then, he was crazy with anger and the power to kill. He didn’t notice how some of the other men were getting quieter. Shooting less often. . . .

They were just standing there, men and women and children, just looking out at the White men who were killing them. Not a one even turned his back to the hail of shrapnel. Not a parent tried to shield a
child from the blast. They just stood, waited, died.

During the lulls between cannon volleys, [he] could hear men crying. Not the Reds, the ones still living, huddled in an ever-smaller mass down toward the river. No, the men crying were his neighbors, White men standing beside him, or behind the line. Some of them were talking, pleading. Stop it, they said. Please, stop it. (pp. 241-42)

As Alvin realizes as he struggles to heal the wounded Ta-Kumsaw during the great, doomed battle that Ta-Kumsaw finally achieves, violence only unleashes the Unmaker:

Beyond the edges of his vision, just out of reach, there was the Unmaker like a transparent shadow, shimmering fingers slicing through the wood. Ta-Kumsaw, him Alvin could heal. But who could heal the greenwood? Who could heal the tearing apart of tribe from tribe, Red from Red? All that Ta-Kumsaw had built was shivered apart in that single fraction of an hour, and all Alvin could do was keep a single man alive. . . . Likely enough the Unmaker didn’t begrudge Alvin his friend’s life. What was Ta-Kumsaw, compared to what the Unmaker was consuming at this feast? Just like Taleswapper had said so long ago, the Unmaker could tear down, eat through, use up, and crush things faster than any one man could ever hope to build. (pp. 302-3)

So what do we have in these supposed “fantasy” novels? Books that raise the most realistic questions about the supposed borderline between magic and religion, magicians and prophets, the most sobering questions about the continual encroachment of nonbeing upon being, the Unmaker on all Makers, questions about the role of violence in redemption and about the possibility of pure pacifism, however costly, questions about what Mormonism was, is, and could be. But especially they are books that are a continuing pleasure to read and a continuing evidence that the Book of Mormon is true—because it clearly can be the kind of unique stimulus to the imagination that rich moral and religious history has always been.

Reviewed by Paul Y. Hoskisson

This pamphlet is not harmful, but it certainly does not speak as a good example of the cause of Christ that it claims to champion. The author of Romans 10:2 could have been speaking of pieces like *Christ's Answer* when he said, "For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge." The author can certainly be commended for his zeal.

There are, however, so many problems with this small book that one simply cannot recommend it. It is, for example, rife with typographical and grammatical errors. Consider the statement of purpose on the inside front cover ("Herein may be found new means for warming family and others with reborn gift and glow of Christianity"), and the conditional sentence on the first page ("If... His mission in life is as Christian claim... "). But these are relatively minor when compared with the errors of fact which occur throughout. These range from a misrepresentation of what "many [biblical] scholars" say (namely, that they have proved "the Bible to be historical record [sic]," on p. 2), to unsubstantiated claims about what the Book of Mormon says (on p. 2, the Lehites "landed on the shores of South America"—and never mind that the "they" at the beginning of that paragraph does not have a clear antecedent), and beyond, to blatantly false claims about what the Book of Mormon says. According to p. 2, the most important account in the Book of Mormon is "Christ's resurrected ministry among [the Nephites] which ushered in nearly three centuries of peace." But if Christ came in A.D. 34, and the first dissensions from the Church occurred before A.D. 200 (as indicated by 4 Nephi 18-22), the claim of "nearly three centuries of peace" is simply untrue. Even matters which should be fairly easy to get right are frequently wrong: The note about the author that appears on the inside back cover fails even to give the name of the Church properly.

In his brief book, according to a statement on the inside front cover, the author presents "numerous objective evidencies [sic] of Christ's visit to the Americas." The "empiracal [sic] evidence from hundreds of scholarly studies, here summarized in 52 "evidences, (p. 3; however, the bibliography at the back
of the book lists only thirteen sources) is given uncritically, and ranges from reasonably accurate renderings of acceptable instances (e.g., number 34, chiasmus) to unprovable assumptions (e.g., number 29, where Ixtlilxochitl is said to have intended “Christ” when he recorded “Quetzalcoatl”) and by simple factual untruth (e.g., number 31, where we are informed that “Zac means white... in Hebrew! And in this day white tribes are still to be found”—in Mayan lands?!).

There are other, more reliable sources for Book of Mormon evidence.

Reviewed by Larry C. Porter

Paul Cheesman's publication, *The Keystone of Mormonism: Early Visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, is a title sound-alike to an earlier volume which he published in 1972, entitled *The Keystone of Mormonism: Little Known Truths about the Book of Mormon*. A careful comparison of the content of the two volumes, however, readily reveals that, although there are some chapter materials which are the same, extensive additions of new subject matter, deletions of former information, and a change of emphasis have created two distinctly separate volumes. The student of the Book of Mormon and the early visions of the Prophet will want both books in his collection to cover the labyrinth of excellent instruction peculiar to each text.

Dr. Cheesman's first volume (1972) focused primarily on the physical setting in which the Book of Mormon originated and the means by which it came forth under miraculous circumstances. The new volume (1988) expands its text to include an excellent introductory chapter on the importance of revelatory communication between God and man and a follow-up chapter examining the visitation of the Father and the Son. Though he isolates the primary accounts of the visitation of the Father and the Son and those of Moroni for special scrutiny, Cheesman also cites evidences for a numerous host of other angelic visitors who came to enlighten the Prophet in conjunction with the translation of the Book of Mormon.

For the reader who is interested in the mechanics of the translation of the Book of Mormon, Dr. Cheesman has produced the handbook. The use of the Urim and Thummim, descriptions of that instrument, an examination of the possible methods employed in translating, the time involved in that process, and the respective scribes who aided the Prophet have been spelled out in detail. The various manuscripts of the Book of Mormon have likewise been traced with expertise. Extensive coverage is given to Joseph Smith's personal descriptions of his experiences in producing the Book of Mormon text through the help of the Lord.
In a well-formulated concluding chapter, Dr. Cheesman analyzes the importance of the Prophet's earliest visions at the outset of the restoration. He then cements Joseph's witness with a succession of personal testimonies by his close associates. One of the most significant features of the volume is the inclusion of an extensive appendix containing verbatim accounts of both the First Vision and also early descriptions of the appearances of Moroni. Some of these were recorded at the direction of the Prophet himself and others by contemporaries who obtained their information firsthand from the mouth of Joseph. One of these appendixes, Appendix E, "Wentworth Letter," has an introductory paragraph explaining the origin of the letter with the comment, "Mr. Wentworth was to furnish a Mr. Bastow, his friend, with a copy of this summary [a brief account of the rise of Mormonism by the Prophet] to be used in a history of New Hampshire, which Mr. Bastow was to publish" (p. 165). It might be insightful to note that rather than "Bastow" the man's name was "Barstow," George Barstow. George Barstow did write his *The History of New Hampshire* in 1842, but elected not to include any mention of the Prophet's early residence in New Hampshire nor his participation in the later birth of Mormonism.

Although the table of contents in this publication is quite replete, the reader will miss having an index in the back to assist him in locating the fine points—of which there are a substantial number.

Students of the scriptures, historians, and the casual reader will appreciate having this exceptional resource at their fingertips. It serves as a ready reference to the earliest visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith and constitutes a substantive commentary on the emergence of the Book of Mormon.

Reviewed by David A. Palmer

A booklet entitled "The Land of the Nephites" has been prepared by Delbert W. Curtis. It goes a step beyond the traditional idea of Jaredite and Nephite last battles being in New York. It places the entire cultural histories of these people in the small area of southern Ontario and western New York. The various "seas" are considered to be Lakes Huron, Ontario, and Erie. This is certainly a unique approach, and Curtis expended considerable effort in figuring out a geography to go with his hypothesis.

**Preliminary Comments**

Curtis states that "Sorenson, Warren and Hauck all base much of their findings of [sic] the possibility that Zarahemla was on the Yucatan Peninsula, and at the same time discount the possibility of Lehi landing south of Darin [sic]" (p. iv). 1 Actually none of those books suggests that Zarahemla was in the Yucatan Peninsula. This suggests that he may have read those books with insufficient care.

Curtis further indicates that all three authors used the same premise and came to vastly different conclusions. Actually, Warren and Sorenson are in complete agreement. The work by Hauck was questioned in several previous reviews by this journal. Mr. Curtis is also evidently unaware of my book *In Search of Cumorah, New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico*, published in 1981. 2 It also agrees with the Sorenson theory on the location of Jaredite and Nephite ruins in Mesoamerica.

Many comments could be made about problems with the Curtis geography. For example, there is no consideration

---


REVIEW OF BOOKS ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

whatsoever for the highlands and lowlands, coastal plains, mountains, and so forth. However, that is not the primary issue. The key question is whether or not the overall geography and especially the cultural elements described in the Book of Mormon can be justified in the setting proposed.

Where Were the Jaredite and Nephite Cultures?

Curtis says that “The sacred writings of Mesoamerica suggest that it was cold enough for some to have frozen to death, the hail and storms put out their fire. Hail is mentioned in the Book of Mormon” (p. 22). Actually snow and cold are never once mentioned in the text of the Book of Mormon. More typical were fevers (Alma 46:40). This makes it highly unlikely that any of the text is describing the land of western New York. It is also rather unlikely that a text describing the area of the Book of Mormon would not have described Niagara Falls, a wonder of the world, had the history been taking place there.

The booklet also discusses the great destructions at the time of the crucifixion of the Lord. However, it is clear that there were not only great earthquakes but large volcanic eruptions. Those would be found in a land close to tectonic plate boundaries. Such a land is Mesoamerica, which is dotted with volcanoes. Eruptions of two or three of them can now be dated to the time of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The land spoken of in western New York is not a place where earthquake insurance is needed.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has never taken an official position on issues of Book of Mormon geography. Some unofficial books, written before modern archaeological methods were applied, assumed that Mormon’s Cumorah and the New York hill were the same. This tradition, begun by Oliver Cowdery, has continued to the present. The New York hill came to be known as the one Book of Mormon location known with certainty. However, it was generally believed that Mesoamerica was the cradle of those cultures. Curtis tries to refute the latter idea. He believes that everything took place in upstate New York.

However, the exact statement made by Mormon must be taken into account. He was custodian of a large number of

---

engraved plates, some over a thousand years old! He abridged them to produce what is now known as the Book of Mormon. Mormon said, "Therefore I made this record out of the plates of Nephi, and hid up in the hill Cumorah all the records that had been entrusted to me by the hand of the Lord, save it were these few plates which I gave unto my son Moroni" (Mormon 6:6).

Thus, the original Cumorah is the repository for a great wealth of undiscovered documentary material. However, it was not necessarily the location where Moroni buried the plates in his care.

Curtis also cites one circumstance where Joseph Smith appears to have referred to Cumorah as being in New York. It had to do with the discovery of a skeleton near the top of a Hopewellian culture mound (PK5) along the Illinois River. The mound is near the top of a high ridge overlooking the river. The mound is now difficult to find, but is in fact located as originally described. There are numerous conflicting accounts of what Joseph Smith said after leaving the mound. The original account by Willard Richards is cited in the second edition of the History of the Church, edited by Joseph Fielding Smith.

The first edition, edited by B. H. Roberts, eliminates any reference to last battles, Nephites, or Cumorah. The prophet Joseph Smith had not reviewed that part of his history prior to his death. Therefore, subsequent to the martyrdom, the Quorum of the Twelve directed its continued review. Thomas Bullock made the corrections, directed by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards. At that time the corrections were made and can be seen in the handwritten version preserved in the Church archives. The first edition more correctly reproduced the official handwritten version. Thus, the Zelph incident sheds no light on the location of the last battleground.

Book of Mormon Criteria

The Book of Mormon itself must stand as the best witness of the criteria necessary to locate the Jaredite, Nephite, Lamanite, and Mulekite cultures. Therefore, thirteen geographic/topographic criteria were determined from the text and fifteen cultural criteria. A discussion of the specific references

---

from the Book of Mormon is given in Palmer. The geographic criteria are as follows:

1. near eastern seacoast
2. near narrow neck of land
3. on a coastal plain and near other mountains and valleys
4. one day’s journey south of a large body of water
5. an area of many rivers and waters
6. presence of fountains
7. water gives military advantage
8. an escape route southward
9. hill large enough to view hundreds of thousands of bodies
10. hill must be a significant landmark
11. hill must be free standing so people can camp around it
12. in temperate climate with no cold or snow
13. in a volcanic zone susceptible to earthquakes

The hill in New York meets criteria 2 (minimally), 4, 5, and 11. It does not meet the others. The hill Vigia in Mexico, proposed by Palmer and Sorenson meets all of them. The cultural criteria are listed below:

1. cities
2. towers
3. agriculture
4. metallurgy
5. formal political states
6. organized religion
7. idolatry
8. crafts
9. trade
10. writing
11. weaponry
12. astronomy
13. calendar systems
14. cement
15. wheels

---

5 Palmer, In Search of Cumorah, 28-72.
6 Ibid., 89-123.
7 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 350.
The Cerro Vigía in Mexico meets all of these cultural criteria. The hill in New York meets none of them. Modern archaeological research shows that there was little culture there until A.D. 1100.

An Archaeological Test for Western New York and the Land of the Nephites

Only archaeological studies can serve to evaluate whether western New York State was the land of the Jaredites and Nephites. Certainly, the cultural requirements must be met if it were. A definitive study of the archaeology of New York State was published in 1965 by William Ritchie. He defines a number of archaeological stages which are summarized here:

Archaic Culture (3000 B.C. to approximately 1300 B.C.). The archaic cultures were mobile and without much, if any, social structure. Their sites were small and their dwellings were insubstantial. The largest village had about 100 people. They left no traces of agriculture or pottery. Though they obtained some copper tools, they had no ornaments. They selected their sites according to fishing potential, but they also hunted deer, turkeys, and pigeons. There was some gathering of vegetable foods. The males are described as being about five feet five inches tall, of slender build, and having long, narrow, and oval-shaped faces with narrow noses. During the latter half of this phase, the “Laurentian tradition,” the people were heavy boned and were about the same height. They had broad, round heads, with short and broad noses.

Transitional Phase (1300 B.C. to 1000 B.C.). The transitional phase saw the introduction of pots made of soapstone, plus some early ceramics. Little of this cultural tradition is found in western New York.

Early and Middle Woodland Stage (1000 B.C. to about A.D. 900). During this stage there was a gradually increasing emphasis on agriculture. Burials were mostly cremations. A pottery tradition began and small copper ornaments were developed. There was trade with the Upper Great Lakes area, Quebec, and Pennsylvania. There were also some contacts with the Adena culture from the Mississippi valley.

Ritchie has developed a picture of the life of these people based on archaeological data. In the winter they probably

---

ranged the forests in small groups. No campsites have yielded post molds, so the shelters must have been quite temporary. In the summer they used "a flimsy wigwam affair of poles with bark or mat covers, which rested almost upon the surface of the ground." Overall, the picture we gain of these people, who overlapped Jaredite and Nephite time periods, is one of small bands of semicivilized people with little social organization. It would have presented someone from Mesoamerica, such as Moroni, with an ideal opportunity. He could have come in unnoticed and sealed up his record until the time that he would deliver it as a resurrected personage to Joseph Smith.

The simple fact is, they still did not have agriculture, but subsisted by hunting and gathering. "Projectile points, chiefly of large size, probably for arming javelins and hand-held spears, and bone fish hooks, proclaim the already ages-old basic hunting-fishing economy in our area [upstate New York]. That area has as yet supplied no trace of cultigens, although maize horticulture is now definitely established for the Hopewell culture of Illinois and Ohio." Late Woodland Stage (A.D. 900 to A.D. 1600). Finally, in this late phase, especially after A.D. 1100, the Owasco people in New York began to show signs of moving out of the cultural backwater in which their ancestors had been mired. The bow and arrow finally came into use—arrowheads from the Palmyra area are probably no older than A.D. 1100. The villages developed in size up to 300 people. Pottery was still crude; the vessels did not even have supports. The Owasco culture is the earliest culture in New York State for which the cultivation of corn and beans can be substantiated.

Conclusions

This summary of the archaeology of western New York, developed by a prominent archaeologist, shows that the region of western New York could not have been the scene of the culture described in considerable detail by Mormon. Where are the ruins? Where are all the other cultural facets demanded by his text? They simply are not there. This author fails to show that the Nephites ever lived in that area. By contrast, there is substantial evidence for a Mesoamerican location for those

9 Ritchie, Archaeology of New York State, cited in Palmer, In Search of Cumorah, 85.
10 Ritchie, Archaeology of New York State, 214.
cultures. In fact, there is agreement on a number of site locations being specific Book of Mormon cities. There is also general agreement that the probable site of the Hill Ramah/Cumorah was at the hill called Vigía, in Veracruz, Mexico.

The author of this pamphlet has worked diligently. However, its formal publication as a book does not seem to enhance continuing scholarly research on Book of Mormon geography.

Reviewed by Susan Easton Black

The Book of Mormon has inspired and changed thousands of lives from 1830 to the present. Knowing the conversion impact of this holy scripture, President Ezra Taft Benson stated, "I challenge our Church writers, teachers, and leaders to tell us more Book of Mormon conversion stories that will strengthen our faith and prepare great missionaries."¹ Brigham Young University English professor Eugene England accepted this challenge.

England contacted Deseret Book to ascertain their interest in publishing a volume on conversion stories. Receiving encouragement, he wrote to mission presidents, colleagues, friends, and associates asking for accounts of Book of Mormon conversion stories. The response was favorable and England received a variety of testimonies from a broad spectrum of people. These testimonies have been compiled in *Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon.*

England divided the testimonies into three categories: (1) a history of the Family-to-Family Book of Mormon Program; (2) conversion testimonies of those whose lives were changed by their contact with the Book of Mormon, and (3) reconversion testimonies of those whose faith was rekindled by their reading of the Book of Mormon.

The Family-to-Family category traces the history of sending "The Book of Mormon on a Mission" from its earliest individualist beginnings in 1969 to the present Churchwide, accelerated pace. England's insights into this innovative Church program are enriched by his personal contacts with most of the program originators. Within this section are testimonies that were inserted into copies of the Book of Mormon and sent throughout the world. The variety of responses to the inserted testimonies illustrates gratitude as lives improve through prayerful study of the Book of Mormon.

The conversion category includes thirty-one testimonies from converts who witnessed a noticeable change in their lives

---

as a result of the Book of Mormon. England purports in his introductory comments that these “testimonies span 160 years.” I counted only 147 years, but I am more concerned with the implication of the statement that leads readers to expect a broad range of testimonies from all historical eras. Such is not the case. Only three contributors are not contemporary: Parley P. Pratt (1830), Margaret Schutt (1885), and Karl Ivar Sandberg (1932). Twenty-seven note that their experience with the Book of Mormon occurred between 1966 and 1977.

A careful reading of the conversion stories reveals a two-step conversion pattern. Typically, converts were first impressed with the wholesome decency and example of a missionary, a friend, or acquaintance of the convert. Second, converts read the Book of Mormon and were prompted or inspired to alter their lifestyles. Dustin H. Heuston illustrates this representative pattern. He first noted, “Chuck was Mormon and so intrigued me through his kindness, intelligence, and remarkable character that I was determined to learn about his church” (p. 107). After acquiring a Book of Mormon and reading a portion of its contents, Heuston observed: “More than half a year later we had only read one hundred twenty pages, but our lives had been changed forever” (p. 108).

The reconversion category includes thirteen testimonies of contemporary, lifetime members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Each contributor continues to rediscover the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. For example, Robert A. Rees stated, “My experience with it over the years has been the same as with the other standard works: the more I read them, the more riches they yield” (p. 192).

*Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon* is an important compilation of testimonies from a variety of contributors. However, the title lacks clarity in defining the book’s contents. This is especially true with respect to the words “Converted to Christ.” Although all the testimonies cited refer to the Book of Mormon, very few refer to being converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon. With the exception of Moroni 10:4, there appears little evidence of specific passages from this scripture influencing the convert.

On the whole, England’s editing of the volume was both professional and helpful. I did note a few deficiencies, however. The inclusion of an explanation regarding place names listed next to each contributor would have been useful. Only after careful reading of the testimony does the place
mentioned take on meaning. Most of the places listed describe the location in which the contributor first heard of the Book of Mormon, not the primary residence of the witness. However, this is not consistent. England’s strategic use of place names may cause the reader to assume that the compilation is representative of a worldwide Church. This is not the case, however, as the majority of the contributors are currently residing in the Provo/Salt Lake City area.

The inclusion of a brief biographical sketch highlighting commitment to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on the part of each contributor would help the reader better understand and respond to the expressed testimony. Likewise, a careful index including all of the individuals mentioned would enhance this text. For example, the names of Roman Andrus and his wife Irv, Elder Claypool, Elder McMurtury, and Kurt Vonnegut do not appear in the index. An expanded index that included thematic information other than names would have been appreciated by many readers. The most noticeable editing weakness is the lack of a conclusion. A summary note combining the continued impact of the Family-to-Family Program, conversion stories, and reconversion stories of the Book of Mormon would have strengthened the book.

Despite these weaknesses, Converted to Christ through the Book of Mormon provides a contribution of lay member witnesses that has not previously been gathered. England has made a commendable effort to gather and compile testimonies. His book is a significant initial response to President Benson’s challenge.

Reviewed by John Gee

Part of President Benson’s exhortation to flood the earth with the Book of Mormon was to use the Book of Mormon to teach the gospel.¹ His exhortation also included a challenge to “our Church writers, teachers, and leaders . . . to show us how to effectively use it [the Book of Mormon] as a missionary tool, and let us know how it leads us to Christ and answers our personal problems and those of the world.”² The Fischers’ book is an attempt to accomplish this purpose. Indeed they may be commended for having made one of the first attempts to do this since President Benson’s urge to move the Book of Mormon forward.

The book comes in two parts: a five-page pamphlet containing instructions for the member, and a seventy-two page reading guide for the use of the investigator along with the Book of Mormon. The reading guide is divided into two sections and twelve units; presumably each unit would constitute a reading session. The Fischers advocate either giving the guide with a Book of Mormon to a friend or using the reading guide to read the Book of Mormon with a friend. The latter option is probably the better of the two, and may be among the guide’s better suggestions. Some people might find it awkward to give a friend a book which trumpets “A Simple Way to Teach a Friend” in gold letters on its cover.

On the face of it, the plan seems simple enough. The guide tries to introduce the Book of Mormon as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy and then use it to teach the gospel. Though this may have been the Church’s program in times past, it is not the approach used now. To its credit, the guide does mention four things to the member which should be a *sine qua non* for any approach that attempts to teach the gospel through the Book of Mormon: (1) The Spirit is the most important thing in teaching, and it is absolutely essential that it be present if the gospel is to be taught properly (D&C 42:12-17; 50:10-25; ¹ Ezra Taft Benson, “Flooding the Earth with the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign* 18 (November 1988): 4-6. ² Ibid., 5.)
“Let the Book of Mormon teach its own message” (pamphlet, p. 4). “Be sensitive to your friend’s needs. Answer questions if you can. However, if you don’t know the answers, tell him that you do not know. Avoid discussions over controversial issues” (pamphlet, p. 3). When prompted, ask your friend to take the missionary discussions (pamphlet, p. 4). The Fischers would have been better off had they followed their own guidelines.

To the authors’ credit, the guide is written in a fairly simple manner. The fourth unit is perhaps the best written; it is short, concise, to the point, and shows the Book of Mormon to teach its own message, having almost no commentary. The style of the guide is much like some of the Church’s manuals. Those members who deem the missionary discussions puerile will likely find this approach not to their taste. Those who do not will also likely have some reservations, for there are quite a few concerns which the guide does little to allay: How “simple” is the approach? Since the guide does not advocate using the entire Book of Mormon, how do the selections chosen assist the investigator in understanding the gospel? How well does this method adapt to use with languages other than English? How does this approach fit in with the current standard missionary discussions? Let us consider each of these points in order.

How “simple” is the approach? To follow through with this approach, the individual will likely need the following: Two copies of the guide (one for you and one for the investigator), a copy of Bruce R. McConkie’s A New Witness for the Articles of Faith, three pamphlets, and one to eight videos. This is in addition to the copies of the Book of Mormon and the Bible. This could become a very expensive proposition and seems to complicate the picture needlessly.

As a proselyting tool and teaching aid, the guide also suffers from the common pedagogical flaw of introducing concepts without explaining them. Instead of starting with the present understanding of the student or investigator and adding to that “line upon line,” the Fischers seem to herd the investigator through a complex maze of doctrines of the Latter-day Saints which have little to do with the first principles. The topics they discuss are, in order: scripture, the Catholic church as the great and abominable church, scripture (again, and for

---

3 Cf. Isaiah 28:13; D&C 98:12; 128:21; for examples of this in missionary work, see Alma 18:24-40; 22:5-14.
four more units), the nature of prophecy, free agency, the doctrine of Christ, orthodox thinking, the Church of Jesus Christ, and finally, faith, hope, and charity. Why are the first principles of the gospel postponed until the reader is halfway through the guide? The Fischers could have learned a lot by looking carefully at the way the Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel presents the principles of the gospel. Even looking at the last two versions of the missionary discussions might have helped.

Unfortunately, the Fischers' system often introduces meat before milk. For instance, the guide launches into a discussion about the difference between a prophet and a seer (pp. 9-10), and refers to becoming "like God, our Father in Heaven" (p. 39) before it ever mentions repentance (p. 58) or salvation through the atonement of Christ (p. 49, 59). There is even a unit on "Predictions and Free Agency" (a needlessly loaded title for Unit 7) before the unit on "Christ . . . Presents His Doctrine" (Unit 9). This approach inadvertently shifts the emphasis away from the saving doctrine of Christ to side issues which have only indirect impact, if any at all, on salvation.

Sadly, the result of this sort of approach may be seen about us, as most misconceptions which nonmembers have about the Latter-day Saint Church seem to stem from members having avoided the basics and having discussed other issues instead, a practice specifically forbidden by scripture: "And of tenets thou shalt not talk, but thou shalt declare repentance and faith on the Savior, and remission of sins by baptism, and by fire, yea, even the Holy Ghost" (D&C 19:31). The picture which emerges is like that of a castle with tall towers, where only the tops of the towers are present, standing in the air, without the foundation or the basic structure underneath them—an odd image indeed.

Since the guide does not advocate using the entire Book of Mormon, how do the selections chosen assist the investigator in understanding the gospel? The failure to include reading the entire Book of Mormon as an option must be considered a particular drawback to the Fischers' system. The selections of

4 Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel (Salt Lake City: Corporation of the President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1986).

5 Principles meaning first things, basics and also chief things (Hebrews 6:1-2; Article of Faith); these are the most important.
the Book of Mormon which the guide suggests reading are 1 Nephi 5-6, 9-10, 13; 2 Nephi 2-3, 26-27, 29, 31-33; Mosiah 8; Helaman 14; 3 Nephi 1, 8-12, 15, 17-19, 27; 4 Nephi; Mormon 8-9; Ether 12; Moroni 1-7, 10; and, oddly enough, Isaiah 29 (though not in that particular order). The guide says that this totals seventy-two pages, but it really amounts to nearly ninety pages in the present editions of the English Book of Mormon. Additionally, the investigator is to read the seventy-four pages of the guide, bringing the total up to one hundred sixty-four pages, which would take one up to the record of Zeniff if one were reading the Book of Mormon straight through. If the Fischers were trying to save the investigator time by giving him less to read, it would seem that it would have been better to have a five-page pamphlet for the investigator and leave the seventy-two page book for the member. It seems to this reviewer that the time and effort of the investigator would be better spent in reading the Book of Mormon than in reading the Fischer's guide, particularly since the idea is to "let the Book of Mormon teach its own message" (pamphlet, p. 4).

The Book of Mormon contains a good deal of story matter, but almost all of the narrative has been removed from the selections of the Fischers. Perhaps they think that by doing so, they can concentrate on the "doctrinal matters" of the book. This reviewer recalls a missionary companion who had never read the Book of Mormon until his mission (unfortunately no uncommon occurrence). Early during his mission, by his account, he was cramming, reading the book for the first time and trying to get the "doctrinal content" but found that he did not know the story and so that took the greater part of his concentration. He partially missed the point, but the Fischers seem to have missed the whole point: Though one must have the story before one can concentrate on the "doctrinal matters," many of the important points of doctrine in the Book of Mormon are wrapped up in the story.

An example might help illustrate this point. Moroni 10:3-5 may be a general statement of how one receives revelation, but if our objective is to show the investigator the importance of receiving revelation and instructing him on how to receive this for himself, the Fischers have missed a goodly number of passages on this. To be sure, they have the investigator read Moroni 10, but the Book of Mormon, more than any other of the Standard Works, gives concrete examples of individuals' receiving their first revelation. One immediately thinks of Lehi
(1 Nephi 1), Nephi (1 Nephi 2), Enos (Enos 1), a “multitude” (Mosiah 4:1-3), the sons of Mosiah (Mosiah 27), Alma the Younger (Mosiah 27; Alma 5:46; 36), Amulek (Alma 8, 10), Lamoni (Alma 18), Lamoni’s wife and servants (Alma 19), Lamoni’s father (Alma 22), and “about three hundred souls” of the Lamanites (Helaman 5:49), but none of these is included by the Fischers. Before the Book of Mormon gives its famous general statement on how one receives revelation, it has already cited at least eleven concrete examples of people who have received a wide variety of revelations from God.

The gospel is not just a set of things we are supposed to understand, important as that may be, but it includes actions, else what is the point in being “judged according to [our] works” (Alma 11:41)? The gospel, as the scriptures define it, is a series of actions: Jesus “came into the world, . . . to be crucified for the world. . . . and to cleanse it from all unrighteousness” (D&C 76:41), “the Father commandeth all men, everywhere, to repent and believe in me. And whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved” (3 Nephi 11:32-33). In all these activities, only one (belief) might arguably be claimed to be only an intellectual activity. The story is essential, for the gospel requires action and not just philosophical contemplation. The Book of Mormon, through its story line, is better at demonstrating this than any other book of scripture. These were real people, who actually did things, and whose deeds effected their salvation. The Book of Mormon traces the consequences of many of these actions, but by leaving almost all the story out, the Fischers have unfortunately obliterated this fact. If the Book of Mormon were “inspired fiction” (whatever that may be; see Jacob 4:13; Enos 1:6; Ether 3:12), the examples in the text would be worthless, and we might as well pull them from The Scarlet Letter, The Lord of the Rings, or a Harlequin romance.

Also, the story is essential for understanding the context of the “doctrinal passages.” Although it is understandable to omit 1 Nephi 4 to avoid having to explain the slaying of Laban, omitting the first couple of chapters of 1 Nephi obliterates the entire setting. Under the Fischers’ system, we must wait until chapter 6 to find out who the narrator is, or where the narrative takes place. The guide gives no help here.

Instead of giving a summary of what the reader is missing by skipping through the book, the guide will often pontificate, sometimes at length, on what the reader should be getting from the reading. So much for letting the Book of Mormon speak for
itself. Why do we need a page and a half exegesis of Genesis 49:22-26 to explain 1 Nephi 10:11-13 when the closer literary parallel, which both Lehi and Nephi seem to be making use of, is the parable of the olive tree in Jacob 5?

How well does this method adapt to use with languages other than English? If this approach is to be directed toward the Church’s worldwide missionary efforts to preach the gospel “among all nations, kindreds, tongues, and people” (D&C 112:1), it should adapt to those friends of ours whose native language is not English and might prefer to read it in their native tongue, or might be incapable of reading English. To help facilitate this, in many languages the Church has published selections from the Book of Mormon to be used until the entire work is translated. These selections have been chosen by the brethren for their value and importance. Urdu, Persian, and Cambodian are languages in which this is currently the case, and less than five years ago, Arabic and Greek were also in this situation. Unfortunately, the Fischers have not taken this into account, and Units 1-5, 7-8, and 12 would be adversely affected if the Book of Mormon selections are used (in cases where the entire Book of Mormon has not yet been translated). This is not an idle point. Though the present reviewer served a “state-side” mission, he had the opportunity and obligation to work with individuals speaking each of the languages listed above, who also could not read English. Many proselyting programs work well in theory, or among Americans, or with English-speaking people, but flop when an attempt is made to take them across linguistic or cultural barriers. If our goal is to flood the earth, and not just the English-speaking parts of it, then we should be more sensitive to some of these problems. On the other hand, this problem of the Fischers’ guide might actually be a blessing, for the core of the gospel is presented in Units 6, 9-11, and these are the ones left unaffected by the selections in the abridgment of the Book of Mormon.

How does this approach fit in with the current standard missionary discussions? The following are the suggested reading assignments in the current standard discussions (though specific assignments are left to the missionaries), which are organized in six parts:
Part 1: Moroni 10:3-5; 3 Nephi 11.6
Part 2: 2 Nephi 31; Mosiah 2-5; 3 Nephi 27.7
Part 3: 3 Nephi 11-18; Mormon 7-9.8
Part 4: Alma 11-13, 34; Helaman 14.9
Part 5: No specific passages are suggested, but it is assumed that the investigator is reading the Book of Mormon through from start to finish.10
Part 6: Finishing the Book of Mormon if possible.11

The only overlap between the two approaches to reading is 2 Nephi 31; Helaman 14; 3 Nephi 11, 15, 17-18; Mormon 8-9—a fair amount of the specific recommendations of the missionary discussions, unless you consider that the investigator is encouraged to read all of the Book of Mormon. The discussions present the milk first; the Fischers do not. The discussions do not use concepts until they are explained; the Fischers do. The discussions are flexible; the Fischers’ system is not. The Fischers’ system seems to be completely independent of the missionary discussions, which, if presented as they were conceived, are a far superior system to that of the Fischers. There seem to be many other mistaken notions throughout the book. Some of these become bothersome after a while, at least to this reviewer.

The Fischers have an annoying habit of referring to the Book of Mormon as “the book of Joseph” (book, pp. viii, 6; pamphlet, p. 2). This comes from the Fischers’ emphasis on the prophecy in Ezekiel 37; but the reference might be confusing to those church members who might recall that the book of Joseph was supposed to be a record on papyrus which the prophet Joseph Smith seems never to have to translated.

8 "The Restoration," Discussion 3 of Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel, 3-1.
9 "Eternal Progression," Discussion 4 of Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel, 4-1.
10 "Living a Christlike Life," Discussion 5 of Uniform System for Teaching the Gospel, 5-1.
The Fischers also emphasize that a prophet to be such must write scripture. They use Lehi to illustrate this point: "Lehi made two predictions and he wrote scripture; therefore, he was a prophet" (book, p. 3). By this argument, one could argue that Muhammad and Nostradamus were prophets, but Aminadi (Alma 10:2), Samuel the Lamanite, Lorenzo Snow, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David O. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Ezra Taft Benson are not, for none of their writings is canonized. The situation here is even more ironic because we have none of the writings of Lehi himself, but only excerpts of his sermons recorded by Nephi. Jesus himself left us no book by his own hand, but, for Peter, he was the prophet par excellence (Acts 3:22-23, and Clementine Recognitions, passim). This definition of a prophet must be viewed as highly inaccurate.

Another questionable topic which the Fischers spend time on is finger-pointing at Christianity in general, and the Catholic church in particular (though to their credit they never mention the Catholic church by name), as the great and abominable church of the devil. Yet it is not so for the Book of Mormon. As far as the Book of Mormon goes, one could point fingers at the Greek Orthodox church or any number of Protestant denominations as well as the Catholic church; but then again, we might find that some of the Latter-day Saints meet the description as well (cf. Alma 4:6-12; 3 Nephi 6:21-30). According to the Book of Mormon, however, who are we to point fingers (cf. 3 Nephi 14:1-5; Moroni 7:18)? Each can only examine himself and ask, "To which do I belong" (cf. Mosiah 5:9-14; Alma 5:38-39)? That great and abominable church . . . is the whore of all the earth" (1 Nephi 22:13), yet "he that fighteth against Zion, both Jew and Gentile, both bond and free, both male and female, . . . they are they who are the whore of all the earth" (2 Nephi 10:16); so anyone who fights against Zion belongs to the great and abominable church. Or we might define the great and abominable church by its desires: "The gold, and silver, and the silks, and the scarlets, and the fine-twined linen, and the precious clothing, and the harlots, are the desires of the great and abominable church" (1 Nephi 13:8). In sum "all churches which are built up to get gain, and all those who are built up to get power over the flesh, and those who are built up to become popular in the eyes of the world, and those who seek the lusts of the flesh and the things of the world, and to do all manner of iniquity; . . . belong to the kingdom of the devil" (1 Nephi
22:23; cf. 3 Nephi 6:15). "After all these things do the Gentiles seek" (Matthew 6:32); but the Saints are commanded not to worry about these things (cf. Matthew 6:19-34; 3 Nephi 13:19-34; Jacob 1:15-3:12; D&C 6:6-7). The Nephites were the happiest of all people (4 Nephi 1:15-18) until they sought such things (4 Nephi 1:23-29). Of course, the true church would also have the name (3 Nephi 27:8) and the doctrine (3 Nephi 11:32-40), but it also lacked the desires of the great and abominable church. As far as taking out the plain and precious parts of the scriptures, the Fischers might as well blame the modern textual critics\(^\text{12}\) and the form and redaction critics\(^\text{13}\) for such things just as much as the second-century Christians\(^\text{14}\) or the medieval monks, the last being in many ways the most blameless. Here also the Fischers' discussion is very misleading.

If someone feels inspired to introduce his or her friend to the gospel through the Fischers' system, then by all means he or she should do so. If this guide actually works in introducing people to the Book of Mormon and converting them to the church, then perhaps it will have served its purpose, but it might also show us that the Book of Mormon is successful in "lead[ing] us to Christ and answer[ing] our personal problems" in spite of our best efforts to prevent it.


\(^{14}\) For an example of how drastic the changes in the text can be, see the way Matthew 7:23 is quoted in *2 Clement IV*, 5 (ca. A.D. 110) and then in Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* XVI, 11 (ca. A.D. 150), and compare both with the way it stands in the present editions where the earliest manuscripts to attest this verse (P86, 01 Sinaiaticus, 03 Vaticanus) all come from the fourth century.

Reviewed by Daniel B. McKinlay

The review set forth here is different from the others in this volume, inasmuch as the work under consideration has not been published. The justification for its inclusion is that it addresses a significant issue which stands at the heart of Book of Mormon studies, namely, the relative reliability of methodologies.

A quick glance at the bibliography reveals that Alan Goff has read widely in preparation for this thesis submitted to the English Department. He crosses into other disciplines, notably biblical studies and history, with admirable skill. His focus, as his title suggests, is on hermeneutics, or the means by which sacred texts (i.e., the Bible and Book of Mormon) may be interpreted.

The thrust of Goff’s thesis seems to be aimed in two related directions. First, he issues a scathing indictment of Mormon and non-Mormon scholars who advocate revisionist, positivistic, and naturalistic interpretations of Mormon history and particularly of the Book of Mormon. Secondly, he proposes the value of employing several hermeneutical approaches to understand Book of Mormon texts, and he illustrates these techniques with certain episodes in the Nephite record. The outcome, in my opinion, is an exciting array of possibilities for understanding the Book of Mormon. Due to the constraint of space he is only able to give us a taste of how different hermeneutical devices can provide insight for us. He is not original in these applications; he relies on suggestions from predecessors in the field of biblical interpretation. But the cumulative impact of his examples gives weight to his thesis. The aim of this review is to discuss both sides of Goff’s project.

In the first part of his thesis (and interspersed throughout the work) the author fires off a compelling challenge to revisionist scholars who begin Book of Mormon evaluations with the premise that it was sheerly the product of Joseph Smith’s reaction to his prevailing culture. He renounces the validity of positivism, which holds that one can gather facts, let them speak for themselves, and thereby present objective truth for everyone’s consideration. Similarly, Goff rejects histori-
cism, which he defines as the ability to reconstruct history as it actually was. In this argument he confronts especially Thomas Alexander (largely on his interpretation of Mormon history), Fawn Brodie, William Russell, and Wayne Ham. Repeatedly he uses "superficial," "naive," and "shallow" to describe the attempted analyses of the latter three to explain the Book of Mormon.

In reading Goff's thesis, I am under the impression that he is at least somewhat surprised that the above-named scholars, as well as others he mentions, presume to give authoritative evaluations of Book of Mormon texts by utilizing methods that are now discredited (p. 1). On pp. 6-7 he cites an excerpt of a letter Ron Priddis wrote to The Daily Universe at Brigham Young University, 29 October 1987, in which Priddis criticizes some of Richard L. Anderson's methods in dealing with the question of Joseph Smith and magic. Priddis concludes that "Anderson's approach to history is to align sources in ways that best support preconceived concepts, using the most lenient standards to evaluate data he finds useful and the most narrow allowances for sources which contradict his views." D. Michael Quinn, on the other hand, when dealing with the same subject, "has scrupulously followed his sources wherever they have led, letting history speak for itself." As Goff sees Priddis's position, the latter considers any handling of historical sources that disagrees with his own to be tendentious, whereas the historian who agrees with him is simply appealing to "brute facts," whose understanding is self-evident. The fallacy in this, according to Goff, is that there are no brute facts which in and of themselves present an infallible picture of reality. Any historical scheme we create is an interpretive venture. We take whatever data we can find and try to construct a plausible mechanism whose features cohere and make sense overall. But as Goff rightly says, "We always give the data meaning; evidence doesn't speak for itself" (p. 183). It is ultimately meaningless, even impossible, therefore, to claim objectivity. Hence, "our explanations of the past do not refer to what actually happened or the way things 'really' happen in the world—all our explanations are interpretations based on prejudices and ideologies as we encounter the data left to us from the past. We judge the historical evidence as we see it, not as it actually is" (p. 25). Not only are our conclusions based on prejudices and ideologies, but on value judgments, which are grounded on
“assumptions that cannot be defended, logically or empirically” (p. 29).

Along this line, Goff rejects the absolutist premise of Anthony Hutchinson, who claims that prophecy in the sense of predicting the future is nonexistent in the world of reality. According to Goff, “such a position doesn’t reveal what happens in the ‘real world,’ it reveals a theological understanding that excludes certain possibilities a priori” (p. 15). The best Hutchinson (or anyone else) can do is acknowledge that predictive prophecy is not real to him. But that does not necessarily preclude its existence.

A point that Goff makes with regard to our attempts to recreate the past is too little recognized in scholarship in general. It is that the historian is required to fill in many gaps in his project. H. J. Cadbury pointed out some time ago that we have a paucity of knowledge from which to devise an accurate assessment of earliest Christianity.¹ Yet it is amazing how confidently some scholars propose explanations for sayings attributed to Jesus. Frequently form critics will take a given saying and conclude: Jesus could not have said this; it is, rather, a reflection of the situation in the early church, perhaps in Mark’s or Matthew’s community. Frankly, this kind of exercise amounts to second-guessing the texts. By what standard do we determine what Jesus said as opposed to what must have been invented by the early church and then attributed to Jesus? Does it help to say that the logia came from Christian prophets who understood them to originate from the resurrected Lord, only to be transferred to the mouth of the historical Jesus? Whatever the standard may be, one thing is inevitable: our conclusions depend on our own reasoning and the presuppositions we bring to the text. We fill in the gaps. But regardless of strong justification for our own view, other people seeing the same data may make sense of it in another way. To me Goff may overstate the situation a bit, but nevertheless makes an important point, when he says:

The historian doesn’t just take up the objective record and present it to the audience; he or she adds to the record concepts (such as evolution and theological notions) that the actors never would have considered; he or she makes connections the actors never made; in

[Martin] Marty’s terms, he or she “invents.” The historian invents, tells a story, invents a story based on the historical record. (p. 33)

Goff thinks that historians should let their audience know what assumptions underlie their position, although he admits that they may not always be conscious of some of them. And certainly, given the interpretive nature of history, “we ought to be tentative about our conclusions” (p. 33). This should be stressed. Our perceptions of life are often contingent upon models. Models are the basis by which we apprehend the various disciplines we study. They are convenient because they are attempts to make sense of the world as we see it. The more a model is able to answer questions within its sphere the better it is. I think Goff would agree that Old and New Testament criticism is based on models, and of course there are some givens that govern their use. An example is the documentary hypothesis of the Pentateuch or the Gospels. The division of the Pentateuch into four strains of tradition, designated as “J,” “E,” “P,” and “D,” provides us with a workable model; various pericopes that have points in common may fall into one of the four groups. One wonders, however, about the possibility of grouping slices of the scriptures, which also make sense within their own paradigm, into different categories, thus creating a different model. Historically, models have a way of being replaced by better ones. I suspect that eventually some bright person will come up with a model that will replace the one that is now dominant. But we should keep in mind that the working out of models requires filler or guess work; the plausibility of any model is dependent upon assuming that certain data can be understood in a certain way. But the possibility of those data being seen in other ways is ever present. A good example of this is found in Gospel criticism. Many scholars believe that Matthew and Luke used Mark, as well as another common document or oral tradition, “Q,” as two of their sources. But William Farmer, following the lead of Johann J. Griesbach, has offered some rather cogent arguments which suggest that Mark was dependent upon Matthew. The debate has not ended.2 Both views can make sense, depending upon how one looks at the evidence. It is possible that neither hypothesis is correct and that the story of the composition of the Gospels and their

possible influence on each other is still unknown. There are all kinds of possibilities.

Personally, I believe that the approach of Brodie, Russell, Ham, Hutchinson, and others of like mind—to disregard the possible antiquity of the Book of Mormon on the grounds that some features of the history of Judah prior to the Exile as presently understood by many scholars seem to preclude the book's authenticity—is precarious. It demonstrates restricted scope and does not consider the many possibilities available in understanding the text. Some of those possibilities may not even have occurred to anyone yet. Hugh Nibley in *Since Cumorah* gave some tentative suggestions on the Isaiah problem, and there is still room for further considerations.3

Some thinkers claim they have found parallels between the Book of Mormon and the America Joseph Smith knew. That may be so, but as Goff puts it: "I firmly believe that given sufficient determination and research, environmental parallels could be found to claim that the Book of Mormon would fit into any epoch and location" (pp. 44-45). Nibley has said essentially the same thing.4 In spite of some similarities between the Book of Mormon and Jacksonian America, I believe (and I sense that Goff does) that the Book of Mormon is so exotic that it portrays a civilization "from another age and another culture."5 But ultimately, as Nibley points out, the evidence proving or disproving the Book of Mormon does not exist.6 One's response to it is a matter of faith.

Goff's application of various hermeneutical approaches to selected texts in the Book of Mormon makes for exciting reading. He criticizes the facile assumption of Brodie and Ham that stories in the Book of Mormon were adapted from similar Bible stories (pp. 61-62). Such a conclusion underestimates the

---


5 Nibley, *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, xiii.

extremely complex nature of the narratives, and reveals only a hurried, surface acquaintance with the stories. An example of this is the account in Mosiah 20 describing the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites by the priests of Noah. Both Brodie and Ham see this as an adaptation of the story of the dancing daughters of Shiloah in Judges 21. Vernal Holley thinks the story came from Solomon Spaulding's novel (p. 64). Robert Smith sees greater affinities in this story with the rape of the Sabine women as told by Plutarch than with the story in Judges. Goff analyzes the trio of stories from Judges 19-21, the last one of which resembles in some ways the scene depicted in Mosiah 20; the similarities are "type-scenes" (p. 70). In looking at these common stories from antiquity we find that the stealing of the daughters of the Lamanites fits in with ease, and the behavior of the Lamanite fathers and daughters after the stealing makes good sense in light of the economic value virgin daughters had for their fathers. Having lost their unmarried or virginal status, the daughters lost much of their bargaining value. The only alternative for the daughters was to plead with their Lamanite families for their Nephite husbands (when they were later discovered), even if the priests of Noah were scoundrels. Goff provides a fascinating and fairly extensive discussion on this whole episode.

Drawing on studies by Terrence L. Szink, Leland Ryken, Brevard Childs, Nahum Waldman, and others, Goff analyzes the story of Nephi's broken steel bow. He notes that "the bow was a symbol of strength and leadership" (p. 95). A broken bow symbolized submission in treaties of a subservient king to his superior. The issue in Nephi's episode is submission to God, which Nephi illustrates liberally. The tensions of leadership (i.e., the complaint of Laman and Lemuel that their rightful role of leadership is being usurped) are attested throughout 1 Nephi and the first part of 2 Nephi. An examination of the leadership questions, the murmurings, and the miraculous deliverances suggests resemblances to the Joseph and Moses stories with the same themes. Goff considers this to be deliberate; he holds that Nephi wants to emphasize common patterns. In this regard Goff applies the intriguing thesis of Mircea Eliade in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, that archaic man felt that life was real when it was archetypal; the repetition of the events occurring at the foundation of the nation are 'real' events and ordinary events merely mundane; real events must be
enacted. Thus Goff concludes: "What would surprise us most, then, would be for Nephi not to cast his narrative in the Exodus language and tradition" (p. 101). I find the possibilities in this approach to be attractive.

In the last chapter of his thesis (chapter six), Goff interprets the themes in 1 Nephi by several different hermeneutical avenues. His intention is to illuminate the text, not to prove that it is true (pp. 114-15).

He starts by interpreting "Irreamtum" (many waters, 1 Nephi 17:5) from what he calls a historical approach. To me it is more typological (which he himself mentions on p. 116). He discusses the several threatening images of the great deep in the Old Testament, particularly as they relate to chaos and the sea monster Rahab at the time of the creation of the earth. He then applies these facets of Old Testament imagery to the Lehite voyage on the sea, with emphasis on the near swallowing up of the voyagers into the depths of the sea.

Next Goff gives a structuralist analysis of 1 Nephi. He does this by comparing the themes in 1 Nephi with those narrated in the accounts of Joseph in Egypt and more especially Moses. In these stories he identifies patterns of descent and death, which he arranges in groups of three. Symbols of death are shown when Joseph is cast into a pit, when he goes down to Egypt, and when he is incarcerated. Moses’ symbols of death occur twice. The young Moses is placed in a river (Goff calls it a “sea”), he leaves Egypt (considered to be a symbol of death), and then he goes out to the wilderness. The later Moses goes back to Egypt to gather Israel, moves out to the wilderness, and then crosses the sea. All of these events represent the joint descent to death and then deliverance. Goff compares these citations to the fleeing out of Jerusalem (which replaces Egypt as signifying death), going out into the wilderness, and crossing the sea. He regards the account in 1 Nephi to be a “typological reworking of the Joseph and Moses stories” (p. 130). In this section he takes issue with Russell’s comment that the whole story of 1 Nephi is problematic in that an Israelite in 600 B.C. would never have considered leaving the promised land with the intention of establishing an alternative one. I agree with Goff that Russell’s conclusion is a hasty one and not well thought out.

The author gives an archetypal comparison between many points of the Exodus and of Lehi's journey. Nephi explicitly reminds Laman and Lemuel of these similarities (1 Nephi 4:1-3; 17:23-44), and Goff painstakingly juxtaposes Book of Mormon and Bible passages, some of which have almost identical phrases. Again, Goff convincingly shows the plausibility that Nephi intends his recital to be read against the Exodus pattern.

Another approach Goff takes is literary-formal. He shows how certain words and clauses recur. For example, Nephi records that the women bore children and they also bore the difficulties of the journey. While I suspect that Goff is right in saying that both forms of bearing were "manifestations of God's grace" (p. 155), I am not so sure that the same word was used in the Nephite language for the two meanings. In this section of the thesis he also shows us verses in the Book of Mormon in rhetorical patterns. The way he reconstructs them makes them look especially orderly in ways that are not apparent when we read the straightforward prose in our copies of the Book of Mormon. Some may say that Goff's quasi-poetic recasting of the verses is artificial and was not thought out by Nephi in precisely these forms. Yet Goff demonstrates a clear-cut and neat mode of thought which may give us insight into the workings of the Semitic mind of 600 B.C. A closer scrutiny of Goff's arrangement of the verses suggests that Joseph Smith was not aping Jacobean prose when he translated the Book of Mormon—the positioning of the clauses within the discourses or conversations recorded by Nephi is more complex than that. There is considerable parallelism in those verses.

Finally, Goff discusses the typological approach. He notes that the Book of Mormon is loaded with typological allusions. He emphasizes that Nephi built a ship according to a peculiar pattern revealed by God, just as the building of Moses' tabernacle was specifically revealed. Both in turn were patterned after the creation (though, on p. 181, Goff refers to the view of Bernhard W. Anderson that the creation was understood in light of the building of the tabernacle; some may take issue with that). This section contains ideas similar to those discussed from other hermeneutical angles. Indeed, most of them are closely related: the teaching principle of symbols looms large.

While reading Goff's thesis, I caught a couple of problem areas that should be noticed. On pp. 45-48, he addresses the literary provenance of Lehi's dream. He refers to the fact that Mark Thomas considers the description of the dream to be an
apocalyptic writing. Since it is assumed (Thomas takes it as already settled) that apocalyptic originated in the Hellenistic period, several hundred years after the Exile, the Book of Mormon’s claim to authenticity is undermined. In effect, Goff believes that Thomas looks at the complex relationship between prophecy and apocalyptic superficially and confuses the whole issue. Goff then refers to the watershed study of apocalyptic by Paul Hanson, wherein the author proposes that the roots of apocalyptic reach back to the exile. While Hanson’s thesis has much that is compelling in it, we should be aware that it has been the object of a formidable critique. Recognizing, however, that there is still much to say for Hanson’s argument, many questions about apocalyptic still linger and await more in-depth research.

On pp. 109-11 Goff takes up a difficulty as perceived by Russell. The latter wonders why the Pentateuch is not reflected much in the Book of Mormon (Goff’s thesis demonstrates that many subtle features of the Torah are evident for those who read the Book of Mormon beyond a surface level). Russell asks about the apparent lack of more overt things: the dietary or ritual laws and the detailed legislation. Goff turns to the Old Testament documentary hypothesis and quotes from Robert Morgan, who declares that the priestly stream (P) of the Pentateuch (which theoretically contains those features which concern Russell) was not known before the Exile. Goff reasons that “if we accept the documentary hypothesis” (p. 110), naturally we will not find dietary codes and the like in the Book of Mormon. But if the documentary hypothesis as it now stands is faulty there may be other reasons why Nephi does not allude to them. Actually, Morgan includes “the complex rites of atonement” in the list of peculiar priestly features. Does Goff want to discount the sacrifice and burnt offerings in 1 Nephi 5:9; Mosiah 2:3-4; 3 Nephi 9:19-20, and the many references to the atonement in the Book of Mormon? These questions deserve further attention.

While Goff offers many stimulating possibilities to ponder, I consider his most valuable insight to be stated in these words: “The text has no single meaning. Like all complex

---

texts, the Book of Mormon resists our attempts to claim that we know what God means, finally and completely" (p. 84). The author reminds us that "each explanation of a text is itself a construction" (p. 182). The fact that we can look at the Book of Mormon (and the gospel as a whole for that matter) from all kinds of perspectives only enhances the richness of our literature. Antagonists of the Book of Mormon have tended not to examine that book very closely. As Goff states it: "Because the revisionist critics I have questioned in this study assume that the Book of Mormon is a shallow novel, their interpretations end up demonstrating a superficial book. This shallowness is as much a result of the superficiality of their own approach as it is of anything in the book itself" (p. 184).

I am impressed with the mind and vigor of Alan Goff. I think he has much to offer the Mormon audience. Those who read this review with interest may be frustrated by the general inaccessibility of the thesis (it is located in the library at Brigham Young University). It is to be hoped that after polishing his prose Goff will edit and submit for publication the content of his thesis and other projects to which he alludes.
Historical fiction, whether in print or on film, generally suffers from a common disorder. In a word, rheumatism. Stiffness. Creaky joints. And scripturally based stories are particularly susceptible to the malady. Historical and scriptural characters rarely come alive in print, burdened down as they are with all our knowledge of their ultimate destiny, with the heavy background theme song, “Little Do They Know That—,” and especially with our idealization of them.

All the more reason why Chris Heimerdinger’s *Tennis Shoes among the Nephites* comes as a happy surprise. This is not only historical and scripturally based fiction, it is—what else?—a time-travel narrative. Jim, Garth, and Jennifer are contemporary kids from Cody, Wyoming, who beam their flashlights down one dark cave too many, and wind up smack in the middle of the Book of Mormon era, during one of the Nephites’ bloodier stretches. The book unfolds their adventures among the strangers whose names and intrigues are so well known to them, or at least to Garth, who seems to have the Book of Mormon memorized. *Tennis Shoes*, designed for teen and young adult readers, may have its flaws, but its characters are definitely not stiff. The author seems to understand that people are people, whatever their era. Except in the case of a prophet or two, his characters speak believable dialogue and behave like members of the human race we all know and love.

The book is, as one would expect, action-centered. It barrels along like a tropical version of *Star Wars*. (If you read closely, you’ll even find the equivalent of a Jedi sword.) Adult readers may feel as though they had accompanied some young friends on an extended roller coaster ride; after a while, you’re reluctant to scream and throw your hands in the air, even to preserve the name of good sportsmanship. But for the right audience, the book’s rapid-fire pace is just the ticket.

Heimerdinger has done his homework, to the extent possible, and the setting is convincing, whatever technical flaws may be visible to a squinting eye. He handles detail and description well; in terms of the old creative writing maxim, he shows, rather than merely tells.
But the author’s greatest achievement is his commitment to the two central characters. From first to last, Heimerdinger stands by them, and to the extent possible in an adventure book of this sort, refuses to use them, to accord them less than the fullest humanity possible. Garth is a nerdish scripture-freak, and it would be easy to let him drift into caricature. But his personal passion for the world he has come to know through studying the Book of Mormon is never compromised; indeed, it deepens and rings truer as the novel progresses. Jim, the narrator, seems a mighty precocious thirteen-year-old, but he also is true to himself throughout—ironic, skeptical, teaching, and loyal—not at all a bad combination for a time-traveler, or anybody else.

This is a book written with imagination, care, a surprising amount of skill, and the right kind of conviction. Its shortcomings don’t really matter. I plan to give it to my favorite teenager as soon as he gets home from seeing *Back to the Future, Part III*.

Reviewed by Bruce W. Warren

In *Christianity in America before Columbus?* Donald Hemingway points out that Christianity originated in the Mediterranean world, but its message eventually spread to Europe, Africa, and Asia in the Old World. But was the message of Christianity taken to the New World before the voyages of Columbus? This question is the subject of the book under review.

An attractive gloss cover packages the book. The content of the book is presented in 256 pages of text, 10 pages of references, 8 color plates, and 13 black-and-white illustrations. The descriptive material comes mainly from Mesoamerica, 225 pages, but 27 pages of description come from Peru in South America and 4 pages from North America. All the illustrations are from Mesoamerica.

The author, Donald W. Hemingway, "is an attorney, teacher, musician and author. He has practiced law in Nevada and Utah and worked many years in the office of the Staff Judge Advocate in the United States Air Force... The collecting of original manuscripts dealing with the history and genealogies produced by ancient civilizations has been an avocation of his for many years."

Information used in the text comes from authors writing in the sixteenth through twentieth centuries. They are all non-Mormon authors. Even his material on the Book of Mormon, pages 240-45, comes from the non-Mormon historian Hubert Howe Bancroft’s five-volume series *The Native Races* published in 1883. Three Mormon writers are listed in the references. One is Charles E. Dibble (an expert on the writings and language of the Aztecs), whose lecture on "The Conquest through Aztec Eyes" is cited; and the other two (Warren and Ferguson) are the coauthors of *The Messiah in Ancient America*, whose book is used to date a couple of the illustrations from the Maya site of Palenque.

Hemingway has divided his book into four main sections: (1) Symbols of Christianity; (2) Practices of Christianity; (3) Beliefs and traditions; and (4) Where did these symbols, practices, and beliefs come from? There is a lot of fascinating discussion coming from many different authors covering a
period of nearly five hundred years. The reader will find this compilation of material useful and conveniently available in one volume.

What is lacking in the book is a critical evaluation of the writings consulted. A growing body of literature is available that deals with the efforts of the native Americans and the Spaniards in their attempts to understand and synthesize their respective belief systems. Contemporary historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and linguists have much to contribute to the proper interpretation of the various sources of information. For example, the final four illustrations from the Codex Borgia are interpreted by Lord Edward King Kingsborough in a very suspicious manner. Kingsborough uses the Old and New Testaments to explain the meaning of these paintings in the light of Christ’s death and resurrection. He did not use any of the native writings or ethnographic materials in his efforts. Most scholars are certain Kingsborough went too far in his interpretations. The reader may wish to look more closely at the illustrations and be his own judge. If that is not satisfactory then one should immerse himself in the appropriate literature.

I would think that students of ancient America and the Book of Mormon would want this volume on their bookshelves. It is a handy resource.
Robert L. Millet, By Grace Are We Saved. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989. viii + 128 pp., bibliography, subject and scripture indexes. $9.95.

Reviewed by John Gee

The publication of Robert Millet's book fills a long felt need for a work on grace for the Latter-day Saints which is balanced but not polemical. Millet has done us all a favor for which we should be grateful.

What qualifies Millet's work for review in this publication is not so much that it is a book about the Book of Mormon but that it draws heavily on the Book of Mormon. Millet uses the Book of Mormon as much as the New Testament, and in many cases his points are best made and his conclusions often clinched by quoting the Book of Mormon. He also uses the Joseph Smith Translation both extensively and well. His wide use of both of these sources, as well as of several quotes from Joseph Smith, is what gives this discussion of grace a distinctively Latter-day Saint hue. By Grace Are We Saved contains a discussion of grace which is thoroughly grounded in the scriptures. Millet's thought seems to be so permeated with the scriptures, in fact, and with statements of certain of the leaders of the Latter-day Saint Church that at times he seems to quote them unknowingly. Therefore, the following might be noted where he has omitted a reference or two:

On page 8, line 19, change "Nephi" to "Jacob" and add the references "(Isaiah 55:1; 2 Nephi 9:50-51)" at the end of the sentence, line 21.

On page 14, line 20, add "(Mosiah 16:4-7; 2 Nephi 9:7-9; Alma 11:40-41)" at the end of the sentence.

On page 15, line 1, add "(JST, Matthew 5:6; 3 Nephi 12:6)" at the end of the first partial sentence.

On page 34, line 10, add "(see Lectures on Faith, 3:3-5, in Lundwall, A Compilation Containing the Lectures on Faith . . . , p. 33)" before the dash.

On page 38, line 23, add "(JST, Matthew 5:6; 3 Nephi 12:6)" at the end of the paragraph.

On page 52, line 8, add "(Acts 4:12; Mosiah 3:17; Moses 6:52)" at the end of the sentence.

On the whole, Millet is to be commended for his fair and balanced approach to the subject of grace; he cites both General Authorities and non-Mormon writers with about equal
frequency. Most noteworthy is Millet’s care in avoiding two of the major pitfalls in discussions of grace: “(1) either they could come to believe in salvation by grace alone and hence in the irrelevance of one’s obedience and works, or (2) they could come to trust wholly in their own labors and genius, erroneously supposing that what they merit hereafter is a product solely of what they achieve or accomplish on their own here” (p. 4). Both grace and works are necessary but neither is individually sufficient (p. 70; Moroni 10:32 is cited appropriately here). Thus, Millet would have us avoid both the snare of Nehor, who “testified unto the people that . . . the Lord had created all men, and had also redeemed all men; and in the end, all men should have eternal life” (Alma 1:4), and the delusion of Korihor, who said that “there could be no atonement made for the sins of men, but every man fared in this life according to the management of the creature; therefore every man prospered according to his genius, and that every man conquered according to his strength” (Alma 30:17). Sometimes we are apt to fall into the Zoramite trap: “Holy God . . . we believe that thou hast elected us to be thy holy children” and therefore we need “no Christ” (Alma 31:16), all the while being “puffed up, even to greatness, with the vain things of the world: . . . costly apparel, . . . gold, and all . . . precious things” which we have obtained through hard work (Alma 31:27-28). Alma called such people “wicked and . . . perverse” (Alma 31:24), and Millet’s book serves as an antidote for such thinking.

There are a few matters which Millet has wisely left alone. For instance, he does not get entangled in a discussion of the meaning of the Greek word charis, which is traditionally translated “grace.” His one foray into a discussion of the meaning of Greek words, an etymology of metaphysics that occurs in the context of a discussion of metanoei as a term meaning ‘repentance,’ is only partially successful. Meta does mean “after,” but it does not mean “above’ or ‘beyond,’ as in the word metaphysics” (p. 37).1 The term “metaphysics” comes from a book by Aristotle entitled Metaphysics because, in the canonical order of his works, it came after (meta) the book called

---

more revelations, additional rites and ordinances, instructions, information, as well as speculation and interpretations, obviously followed the Book of Mormon. Many of these, even those coming directly through Joseph Smith, must be read as constituting a radical shift in perspective, and are inconsistent and discontinuous with his early theology—that is, with the doctrines taught in the Book of Mormon. After 1835 there was a shift away from an essentially orthodox theology, which was basically drawn from the Protestant sectarian world, to a new "progressive theology," with a "liberal" rather than pessimistic view of human nature, and a radically different conception of God. Instead of interpreting later revelations as clarifications, elaborations, and applications of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, as plainly and emphatically set forth in the Book of Mormon, a "development of Mormon theology" is postulated which does not rest on "an unwarranted impression of continuity and consistency."  

It seems to me that clarity on exactly what has been restored as the doctrine of Jesus Christ (or the fulness of the gospel) by divine revelation, rather than what some of the early Saints believed or attempted to work out as part of their efforts to fashion a creed or do theology, would assist in overcoming the notion that a reconstruction of the doctrine, as set forth in the Book of Mormon, was undertaken by Joseph Smith. I am not denying that additional instructions, information, rites, and even additional ancient texts expanding the memory of the Saints were provided by revelation. Nor am I rejecting the notion that the understanding of the Saints was gradually expanded and modified. But this fleshing out of the core structure was not done in such a way that what came in the later revelations was, as some now claim, discontinuous or inconsistent with the doctrine taught in the Book of Mormon understood as the gospel of Jesus Christ. By failing to clarify exactly what constitutes the doctrine of Jesus Christ, it has been possible for some to assume

10 According to Alexander, "This type of exegesis or interpretation," that he accuses Joseph F. McConkie of employing, "may produce systematic theology and while it may satisfy those trying to understand and internalize current doctrine, it is bad history since it leaves an unwarranted impression of continuity and consistency." See Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," 24, and also n. 1, where specific reference is made to the views of McConkie, who is cited as the example of an author who insists on reading earlier texts through the lens of later dogmas.
that a presumably sectarian Protestant "early theology," which they strive to find in the Book of Mormon, was later jettisoned by Joseph Smith after 1835, as he began to advance a different set of doctrines which constituted a liberal, progressive theology. "Mormon doctrine" (or theology) is understood in such discussions as whatever the Saints may or seem to have believed at any given point, rather than what the crucial texts mean.

Though Millet is clearly opposed to speculation about a radical "reconstruction of Mormon doctrine,"11 unfortunately both he and McConkie share basically the same understanding of "doctrine" as do the Revisionists, for they also think in terms of a complex network of dogmas answering a host of different questions. They are therefore prepared to say exactly what Mormon doctrine is on the nature of God and man, and numerous other theoretical questions. They differ from the Revisionists by holding that the vast array of statements and beliefs that Latter-day Saints have entertained on various questions must be winnowed, and the doctrines of what they call "true religion" (1:369; 2:102, 107, 115) or even "revealed religion" (1:369: 2:115) then ascertained, harmonized, and taught authoritatively. A commentary thus provides the occasion for setting forth an elaborate and detailed creed, at least partially explicated in terms of categories quite foreign to the scriptures, upon which assent is thought to be mandatory for salvation. Labels like "true religion" and "revealed religion," like "theology," are categories foreign to the scriptures, but common to our post-Enlightenment, secularized world. Such categories form the lens through which we tend to view the scriptures, when it is the categories of the scriptures that ought to form the lens through which we view the secular world.

A careful examination of the Book of Mormon, which seems to lack much that is familiar to Latter-day Saints, perhaps because of our neglect, points in a somewhat different direction, with its narrow conception of doctrine. The Book of Mormon, with its strict focus on Jesus Christ, rather than an expansive notion of doctrine composed of a complex assortment of details about the nature of divine and human things, turns our attention away from what are clearly theoretical questions that traditionally have constituted the substance of theology. In our urge for

11 See, for example, Robert L. Millet, "The Ministry of the Father and the Son," in The Keystone Scripture, 44-72, especially 45, n. 4.
theology we are sometimes disappointed to find how little is said in the Book of Mormon that helps us fashion a system of doctrines that deal with the nature of God, or the Godhead, the Holy Ghost, original sin, the nature of man, and so forth, about which it is sometimes thought that Mormons have or at least should have detailed doctrines.

The Book of Mormon focuses our attention, when read carefully, on essentially practical issues centered on the consequences of repentance and believing in Jesus Christ, of trusting God, keeping the commandments, building Zion, avoiding the works of darkness, and so forth, which relate us to eternal life in the presence of God as that is made possible by Jesus Christ as set forth in the doctrine of Christ. I am not persuaded that anything that came in the later revelations to Joseph Smith was anything more than an elaboration and clarification of the core message contained in the initial founding revelation. And I flatly reject the now popular notion that there is a discontinuity and inconsistency between the earlier and later revelations. Nor do I think that we do the Kingdom a service by attempting to harmonize or winnow the various attempts to fashion a Mormon theology with the contents of the Book of Mormon and later revelations. Those who postulate an inconsistency between the Book of Mormon and what was taught by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo begin with the assumption that they are dealing with theology—man’s words about God. But what we are dealing with is divine revelation—God’s words to man, and quite a different thing than theology. (Plato gave us the world theologia, from which we derive our “theology,” in the Republic [Bk II, 379a] to describe the tales appropriately told by poets in a well-ordered regime.) Whenever we attempt to do theology, or fashion a system of doctrines, we end up in contention and disputation, for the entire enterprise is an exercise in arrogance and pride, against which the Book of Mormon warns.

But even as an elementary and informal account of Mormon beliefs, Doctrinal Commentary is flawed, since it is brief, sketchy and necessarily a random rather than an orderly or even historical explication. The end result is, for the most part, a series of didactic discourses, little sermons, or homilies prompted by phrases in the Book of Mormon, which may have little or nothing to do with the meaning of the passage or even the phrase which functioned as the trigger. These homilies tend to opine about words or phrases, but they seldom probe for the
Charis also has a prepositional meaning: (35) on behalf of, because of (the equivalent of heneka),37 (36) paralleling,38 (37) by means of.39

Finally there are a few instances where charis is used as a proper name: (38) the Greek goddesses, the Graces: Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia;40 (39) a type of tree, either the myrtle41 or (40) the cypress;42 (41) the name of an Attic naval vessel;43 (42) the name of a Parthian city;44 and finally (43) the name of a river.45

If simply looking at a few dictionaries will produce such a wide variety of meanings, a detailed word study would likely only add to the confusion. Some of the particular meanings, such as "the Graces" and "atonement," could profitably use close attention by themselves. For example: The pagan Hesychius of Alexandria46 mentions the peculiar "thank" offering of three round bread loaves (popanōn)—some of which looked like plakountes (a type of flat bread)—which is very similar to the thank offering of the Law of Moses which consisted of "round unleavened [and therefore flat] bread loaves moistened with oil and thin unleavened cakes anointed with oil and mixed wheat groats, round loaves moistened with oil, and upon the round loaf, a loaf of leavened bread [which] he shall offer for his thank-offering upon the altar" (Leviticus 7:12-13), which the Israelites could only partake of in the sanctuary under the supervision of the priests.47 The Septuagint does not use the

37 Ibid., 9:1333-34; Liddell, Scott et al., Greek-English Lexicon, 1979.
38 Stephanus, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, 9:1334.
39 Ibid., 9:1335.
40 Ibid., 9:1332, 1341; Gaisford, Etymologicon Magnum, 2253; Slater, Lexicon to Pindar, 543; Liddell, Scott et al., Greek-English Lexicon, 1979.
41 Stephanus, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, 9:1340; Liddell, Scott et al., Greek-English Lexicon, 1979.
42 Stephanus, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, 9:1340; Liddell, Scott et al., Greek-English Lexicon, 1979.
43 Stephanus, Thesaurus Linguae Graecae, 9:1341.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
47 See David P. Wright, The Disposal of Impurity: Elimination Rites in the Bible and in Hittite and Mesopotamian Literature, vol. 101 of
word *charis* for this offering, but the two "thank" offerings are strikingly similar and remind one of the bread in the sacrament, which the Greek-speaking Christians call the *eucharistia*, another Greek word for "thanks" which comes from *charis*. Though such an analysis might not have been without interest to many Latter-day Saint readers, to go into such detail would have defeated Millet's purpose of providing for the general reader a "perspective on what the Lord has done and continues to do for us" (p. vii). A specialized study might profitably treat this material, but such esoterica would likely confuse the average reader.

Millet has rightly drawn our attention to what it means to sing the song of redeeming love, a subject that deserves attention. There is, however, nothing that prevents us from taking the song of redeeming love literally; something Millet does not do. When Millet claims that "To sing the song of redeeming love is to joy in the matchless majesty of God's goodness, to know the wonder of God's love. It is to sense and know, by the power of the Holy Ghost, that the Lord is intimately involved with his children and that he cares, really cares, about their well-being; it is to relish and cherish that fruit which is most joyous to the soul" (pp. 106-7), he is describing not the song of redeeming love, but what it is to "have felt to sing the song of redeeming love" (Alma 5:26). The song and what motivates us to sing it are two different things. Millet has given us an excellent description of the latter while leaving the former untouched. Much work still remains to be done on this long-neglected subject, but Millet, at least, has given us something.

For the most part, the preceding has been mere straining at gnats. All books have flaws, and any author should feel fortunate to write a book which has as few as Millet's. His book is one of the better Latter-day Saint discussions of grace available, and we do both the author and ourselves a great disfavor if we do not use what has been offered us.

---

Robert H. Moss, The Nephite Chronicles, including these novels:


“Polishing God’s Altars”: Fictionally Wrestling the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by Richard H. Cracroft

It was Richard Mather, the early American Puritan divine, who insisted in his Preface to *The Bay Psalm Book* that “Gods Altar needs not our polishings”*(sic)*; and it was Simon Peter himself who insisted that “no . . . scripture is of any private interpretation” (1 Peter 1:20). Nevertheless, well-intentioned men and women—Jews, Christians and Latter-day Saints alike—have often attempted, if not to polish God’s altar and privately interpret God’s word, at least to assist the Lord in awakening the responses of his less patient and studious children in their understanding of holy writ. Such scribes have reshaped, recast, rephrased, and restated the word of God by means of a seemingly infinite variety of scriptural commentaries, annotations, elucidations, interpretations, extrapolations, modern translations, poetic retellings, and dramatic and fictional renderings, in short stories and novels, the whole panorama of the holy scriptures. Proving Mather’s point, however, the various results of these renderings, always exegetic and didactic, seem seldom to ascend to literary or aesthetic excellence, and even less often to approach the literary and spiritual stature of the unvarnished Word of the Lord.
So it has been with the various literary recastings of the Book of Mormon. The impetus to retell the saga of the Nephites, Lamanites, and others is understandable, for the Book of Mormon remains as formidable to the young mind as the Old Testament and the letters of Paul. Still, the Book of Mormon lends itself to literary dramatization, packed as it is with stirring events and incidents which too often go unnoted, unappreciated, or even unreached by sluggish young (and old) readers, for whom the distance between 2 Nephi and 4 Nephi seems as long and Sysyphian (to evoke a pagan image) as the trek between Zarahemla and Shim.

To vivify and enliven the Book of Mormon, a variety of authors have literally re-created portions or all of the book (in such variety, I must hasten to note, that my survey must remain exhausting but far from exhaustive). Dramatists from Orestes U. Bean (in 1902; see below)\(^1\) to Ruth H. Hale, Clinton F. Larson (1961),\(^2\) Orson Scott Card, and a number of pageant, radio, theater, and ward and stake one-act playwrights have brought ancient American prophets to the stage and microphone. Poets have also rendered the book’s events with varying success, from Louisa Lula Green Richards’s *Branches That Run over the Wall* (1904),\(^3\) and Marion Sharp’s *I Cry, Mormon* (1939),\(^4\) to Orrin R. Wilcox’s *The Book of Mormon Abridged in Rhyme* (1972).\(^5\) Since the book is itself an epic, it lends itself naturally to epic and panoramic treatments, and there has been no dearth of Book of Mormon epics—again varyingly successful—from Orson F. Whitney, *Elias, A Epic of the Ages* (1904)\(^6\)—only part of which involves the Book of Mormon; and Charles W. Dunn, *The Master’s Other Sheep: An Epic of Ancient America* (1929);\(^7\) J. E. Vanderwood, *A Story of the

---

Ancestors of the American Indians: An Epic (1936);8 to Olive M. Wilkins, From Cumorah’s Lonely Hill (1950);9 and R. Paul Cracroft’s little-known but remarkable epic, A Certain Testimony (1979).10

Writers of short fiction, limited in publication possibilities by the long-standing and doubtless wise policy of the Church magazines not to publish literary renderings of scriptural accounts, have nevertheless published short fiction about Book of Mormon events which range in scope from literal recounts of the text to imaginative and free-wheeling adaptations. But the audience has generally been Primary-age children and thus artistically limiting. Mabel Jones Gabbott and Louise Clark Gregson have published such retellings for children,11 as have Clinton F. Larson, in his multi-volume and poetic Illustrated Stories from the Book of Mormon (1967-1972),12 and Deta Peterson Neeley, in her appealing, enduring, and highly readable four-volume series, A Child’s Story of the Book of Mormon (1949; 1973).13

More sophisticated fictional retellings of Book of Mormon stories for teenagers and young adults seem to have originated during the first years of the Home Literature movement, initiated by Elder Orson F. Whitney in his 1888 landmark address to the youth of the Church in which he called for a faith-promoting Mormon Home Literature of our own,” purposefully written by faithful Latter-day Saints for Mormon youth and young adults to offset worldly influences seeping into hitherto isolated Mormon settlements and adversely affecting a young generation of Saints who “knew not Joseph” or Brigham, and who had not been tested in the refiner’s fire of Missouri, Illinois, or crossing the

---

10 R. Paul Cracroft, A Certain Testimony (Salt Lake City: Epic West, 1979).
11 Mabel Jones Gabbott, Heroes of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), and Louise Clark Gregson, Gregson’s Stories of the Scriptures of Ancient America for Young and Old (Independence, MO: Gregson’s Storybooks, 1972).
12 Clinton F. Larson, Illustrated Stories from the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Promised Land, 1967-72).
plains—youth sensitive to eastern anti-Mormon, anti-polygamist attacks and vulnerable to accusations of Village Virus provincialism then circulating through the villages and towns of increasingly urban America.

Among the first to respond to the call to write “faith-promoting stories” was George Q. Cannon, a member of the First Presidency and one of the most outspoken foes of novel-reading. Sensing the need to fight fire with fire, Cannon published Book of Mormon Stories Adapted to the Capacity of Young Children (1892),14 which followed a short, 167-page, fictional retelling of The Life of Nephi.15 Elder B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy joined President Cannon with the publication of “A Story of Zarahemla,” a heavy-handed attempt to extrapolate a story from the Book of Mormon.16 This literary stumble, published in the Contributor, was nevertheless important because it led Roberts to a much more ambitious and successful attempt to render the Book of Mormon as fiction, in his novel, Corianton, which he published serially, also in the 1889 Contributor.17 The novel is based on two unrelated but parallel stories from the book of Alma—the stories of Korihor the Antichrist (Alma 30) and Corianton and the “harlot Isabel” (Alma 39). Orestes U. Bean redacted Corianton into a play (which he subtitled, “An Aztec Romance”) which played to large audiences in Salt Lake City (where the role of Alma was played by Brigham S. Young, son of Brigham Young), Ogden, Omaha, Chicago, and New York City, where the later famous Gladys George played the role of Zoan (changed by Bean to Joan).

While Nephi Anderson, the best of the Home Literature school, avoided writing fiction about the Book of Mormon (he came closest in Added Upon [1898]),18 now in its fiftieth

14 George Q. Cannon, Book of Mormon Stories Adapted to the Capacity of Young Children (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1892).
15 George Q. Cannon, The Life of Nephi (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1883).
18 Nephi Anderson, Added Upon (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1898).
printing), the prolific and influential daughter of Brigham Young, Susa Young Gates, editor of the *Young Women's Journal*, would publish more than forty-five short stories, a number of which were retellings of Book of Mormon and Bible stories. One of her three novels, *The Prince of Ur* (1915), was based in scripture. Elizabeth Rachel Cannon followed Gates's fictional lead by writing *The Cities of the Sun* (1911), "stories of ancient America founded on historical incidents."


All of this literary history makes the appearance, over the past four years, of Robert H. Moss's seven-novel *The Nephite Chronicles* something like an event in the history of fictional treatments of the Book of Mormon. Moss, an Ed.D. and (presently) self-employed educator with long experience in teaching and educational administration, published *The Covenant Coat—A Novel of Joseph of Egypt* (1985) in

---

25 Rolf Barlow Fox, *Behold, I Am Moroni* (Salt Lake City: Grante, 1976), and *The Sons of Helaman* (Bountiful: by author, 1980).
which he virtually takes Thomas Mann-like imaginative freedoms with the life of Joseph, adding a tender wife and children and details which sweep far beyond the scriptural account of Joseph to flesh out the outlines of his life. Pleased with the success and reception of this fictional format, Moss then turned to the Book of Mormon, in which he also soars imaginatively beyond the scriptural perimeters of the lives of Nephi, Alma, Alma the Younger, Helaman and Moroni, Mormon, and Moroni, son of Mormon.

The Nephite Chronicles, written to transform these Book of Mormon prophets into flesh-and-blood realities for contemporary young adult and adult readers (though the novels are doubtless enjoyable for teenagers), recounts the adventures of the American prophets in lively and often vivid narrative, and in detail which soars far beyond the scope of the Book of Mormon, while remaining anchored to the scriptural text, but seldom citing actual scriptures. For readers who know the Book of Mormon, however, the scriptural text becomes a resonating sounding board against which the fictional text reverberates, sometimes quietly, sometimes loudly, but always intriguing to the reader who knows the plot and its episodes and is curious to learn how Moss, who occasionally wanders far afield, will bring us home to the familiar scriptural base.

Moss is an imaginative plotter and innovator: Helaman, in The Title of Liberty, for example, recognizes with a knowing twentieth-century smile that his father wrote in "the ancient chiastic, mirrored poetry form of the Hebrews"—and illustrates it (p. 51). In The Abridger, Moss treats the reader to Mormon’s dramatic end in a sword-fight with an enemy patrol (p. 211). In Valiant Witness, Moss, freed from the Book of Mormon account, follows Moroni through thirty-six hitherto mysterious years, back and forth across North, Central and South America, during which journeys he preaches the gospel, establishes the tradition of the "Pale One" (Moroni, not Christ) among the Indians, is crucified but is spared to visit the sites of future temples and valleys where the Saints would gather. After depositing the plates, Moroni dies—whereupon Moss, in a segment which may not have been attempted since Nephi Anderson’s Added Upon, follows Moroni into Paradise, where he meets with the Savior and the ancient prophets, visits earth from time to time, and prepares for his role in the Restoration of the gospel to the Prophet Joseph Smith, Jr. Moss then recounts the Restoration, through Moroni’s eyes, detailing his increasing
personal relationship with the Prophet Joseph, who says to Moroni, on embracing him at their parting, "You have been more than a friend. I look forward to an eternal association with you" (p. 177).

Typical of Moss's novel fictional soarings are those found in his treatment of Alma the Elder, *The Waters of Mormon*, the third novel in the *Chronicles*. In the preface, Moss presents necessary "background" so he can plunge into Alma's story in medias res. Alma, he tells us, appreciably enriching our "knowledge," is the son of "Abimolam and Marji, King Zeniff's daughter," and is the nephew of King Noah, who removes the faithful Abimolam from the priesthood but appoints the sycophantic young Alma as one of his priests. Amidst the preaching of Abinadi and Alma's acceptance of the prophet's words as he is burned at the stake, Moss weaves the twentieth-century-like family life of Alma and Esther, his wife of one year, and their baby, Zoram (to be joined, later, by siblings Netta, Leesa, and Alma junior—*and* two dogs, Bones, then Noah). Alma, on the way to visit Rebecca, one of the most alluring of his several concubines, watches his fellow priests, Nakka and Tay, accost and beat Abinadi, whose preaching Alma himself has reported to Noah. Stunned and moved by Abinadi's call to repentance, Alma forgets his concubines and worldly ways, repents, and defends the prophet before the king, for which he must flee the city. Alma, assisted by his friend Helam (we're back to the text: Helam is Alma's first baptism), finds a cave where he lives alone, undergoing a cleansing conversion and hearing the voice of the Lord first forgive him and then call him "to preach to this people."

Re-entering the city, he visits his wife, Esther, who had already been converted on hearing Abinadi preach in the square. It is a fact of Moss's novels that each of the prophets in *The Nephite Chronicles* is blessed with a spiritual yet sensuous and affectionate woman who makes it difficult for her husband to leave her embraces and return to the battle for souls. Esther is such a passionate woman, wonderfully responsive to her husband's manly caresses and evoking some very unprophetlike reactions: "You make it very hard to leave," [Alma] said, holding her soft lithe body tightly against him. Another long kiss and he released her. She wrapped her fingers in the hair of his chest and laughed teasingly. He turned her towards the door, and with his open hand spatted her behind. She was still laughing quietly as she went inside. 'I love you' he whispered"
114 REVIEW OF BOOKS ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

(p. 39)—these are scriptural accounts such as we have not experienced since breaking out into cold sweat on first being surprised by “The Song of Solomon”!

Emboldened by the Lord, Alma establishes a congregation and leads them, assisted by miracles not chronicled in the book of Mosiah, first to the Waters of Mormon and then, fleeing before Noah’s army, down into the rain forest, complete with all the tropical birds, jaguars, lizards, mosquitoes, and chattering monkeys, and cedar, mahoganies, sapodillas and breadnut trees that we have longed for in the often laconic original, to the land of Helam. There, busy amidst the building of a civilization, Moss’s Alma is confronted by post-Freudian family problems: “A pent-up flood of words erupted from Esther’s lips. ‘Everyone else seems more important to you than the children and I. All day I never get to see you, and as soon as you get home all you want to do is eat and go to bed.’ She buried her face in Alma’s chest.” Responds the Prophet: “I have neglected the most important part of my life. That will change.” Esther snuggled close to him, drawing comfort from his large, strong body” (p. 63), and they take a restorative family home day outing up the slopes of Tanza, “the volcano that smokes but does not erupt.” These idyllic years in Helam are abruptly concluded with the invasion of Amulon and his Lamanite troops, and the young Ruth (who will become Alma the Younger’s wife) is abducted with other young Nephite virgins to serve in the heathen temples. Alma’s passive response to the invaders and Ruth’s abduction angers the young Alma and triggers his nascent rebellion against his father and the Church, which was reorganized after the fleeing captives survive the trek through leopards, crocodiles, and a jaguar attack on Alma the Younger. Ultimately, he is welcomed at Zarahemla. Working with King Mosiah, Alma becomes high priest of the land and all is well—save for Esther’s terminal illness and son Alma’s rebellion. The story from there is generally familiar: Alma prays constantly for a miracle to bring young Alma to repentance, for his son’s false teachings have spread throughout the land and threaten the Church. But in this account the Lord speaks to Alma the Elder and urges him to be of good cheer, for Alma the Younger “will serve me as you have served me.” Esther, who wisely identifies her son Alma’s problem as a lack of self-worth and a sense of inferiority, soon dies, and Alma mourns, especially when his errant son attends the funeral but will not speak to his father. Not long after, while working in
his office in the temple at Zarahemla, Alma is called out onto the steps of the temple, where the sons of Mosiah have carried his unconscious son from the jungle. They describe how an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and Alma gives thanks that his prayers have been answered. Alma the Younger, responding to two days of fasting and prayer, awakens and proclaims his vision and his conversion to Christ. Soon thereafter, Ruth is freed from captivity and marries Alma the Younger, now a successful missionary, and Alma and Mosiah wrap up their ministry and reign by translating the twenty-four plates of King Limhi’s people and establishing the government of judges in the land. On his last mortal day, the aging Alma attends a final Church service, and then enjoys a family home evening: “Zoram, Micael and their sons, Lehi and Aha, were there. Netta ... was there with her four children. Leesa, Abelon and their three girls had come all the way from Melek to be part of the family gathering. Alma [the Younger] was there with Ruth and Helaman.” As he held the baby Helaman, Alma senses, “This is he through whom the priesthood lineage will be carried” (p. 73), and, content, Alma returns to his home and to his death, at which Esther comes for him, and they stride off, hand in hand, into Eternity.

Still, regardless of such imaginative plot devices, lively dialogue, neatly contrived flashbacks, and interesting though fabricated details about wives and family and genealogy, and notwithstanding a plethora of fictitious detail about American geography and geology and Nephite sociology and anthropology, the characters in The Nephite Chronicles remain less than complex, less than psychologically realistic, less than spiritually compelling, less than authentic. At last, the reader comes away entertained—but not moved to a deeper understanding of the prophets of God in ancient America nor of the doctrines on which they staked their lives.

The problems may be less a fault of Moss’s art, whose narrative moves well (and reminds one of Nephi Anderson’s middle and later novels), than of Moss’s purpose, which is inherently at odds with his selected genre of the novel. Via fiction, Moss attempts to transform spiritual giants into flesh and blood human beings with whom modern readers can identify. But he desires to effect this transformation without diminishing their spiritual greatness and charisma. It is a futile and perhaps thankless effort, for his subjects are men-of-God—spiritual and political and (often) military giants; they are the stuff of legends;
they are heroes more than protagonists, and must remain so to the reader of their lives centuries later, if they are to have an impact on the reader and remain true to the intent of the book’s compilers and translators.

In a review of Norman Mailer’s *The Executioner’s Song* in *New York Magazine*, the novelist Tim O’Brien writes that, “The heart of nonfiction . . . is to dispel mystery. But the heart and art of fiction is both to generate and to celebrate human mystery, to allow ambiguities and contradictions to resonate, to explain little of a character’s inner drives operating in a dramatic context.”

In an age of literary realism which deconstructs heroes and prefers the existential victim, one pits the mystical, fictional, humanized, heterodoxical rendering of Jesus in Nikos Kazantzakis’s novel, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1960), against Franco Zefferelli’s nonfictional, almost ethereally remote but heroic Jesus of Nazareth. Both renderings are remarkable, but Zefferelli’s Jesus, firmly rooted in the Evangelists’ accounts of Christ’s life, strikes the viewer as authentic—and does not expect the viewer to “identify” with Christ, with God Incarnate, but to stand all amazed. Nonfiction is the right genre for the life of Jesus. In his novel, conversely, Kazantzakis tears the mantle of divinity from Christ and, persuading the reader to accept that donnée, enables us to approach Jesus on our human terms, as an extraordinary but possibly deluded man—one of us. It is a fascinating thesis, an interesting exercise, but one not harmonious with the life and mission of the historical Jesus.

Perhaps Lew Wallace, in *Ben Hur* (1880), and Lloyd Douglas, in *The Robe* (1942) and *The Big Fisherman* (1948) showed us the better uses of fiction by dealing fictionally with characters and matters tangential to the life of Christ, a ploy of indirection which enables the authors to avoid standing directly on “holy ground” while celebrating, in smaller-than-giant protagonists, the “human mystery” and the resonating “ambiguities and contradictions” of men and women caught at once in the gospel net and the talons of the world.

Perhaps *Ben Hur*-like stories about the Book of Mormon will give future writers the access to the book which Robert H. Moss attempts by his too-direct and too-human portrayal of the prophet-giants of ancient America. Meanwhile, we still await a fictional treatment of the Book of Mormon which can

---

accomplish for this unique volume that which John Milton accomplished poetically for the Holy Bible in *Paradise Lost*—
polishing God's altar to a sheen that reflects not only the joy of man, but, almost certainly, the smile of God—to the blessing of both.

Reviewed by Daniel W. Graham

Designed as a study guide, this book offers several questions for each chapter of the Book of Mormon. The author provides a blank at the beginning of the question to write the verse number or numbers in which the answer is found, and he leaves space for writing the answer beneath the question. The number of questions per chapter varies from two to fifteen. At the back of the book a key gives the verses that answer the respective questions.

Concise and clear, the questions will help the student learn the details of the Book of Mormon. But they will not necessarily focus attention on some aspects of the text rather than others, for they treat all details as equal. I would like to see some discussion questions included, which, by calling for interpretation and evaluation, might lead the student to synthesize the details and to ponder the significance of the text as a whole. For, important as they are, the details of the scriptures are not their message.

**Time Vindicates Hugh Nibley**

Reviewed by William J. Hamblin

Hugh Nibley's *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* was originally published in 1957 as a Melchizedek Priesthood lesson manual. In the nearly quarter of a century since it was written, a great deal of new scholarship has appeared treating many of the topics which Nibley briefly investigated in this work. Nibley himself has been active in continually reexamining many of the ideas he first presented in *An Approach*, as can be seen especially in his 1967 work, *Since Cumorah*.1 Furthermore, Nibley's intellectual heritage has been taken up by many other scholars and by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, as manifested by the publication of numerous studies which examine in greater detail many ideas which Nibley first presented in embryo. An avid Nibleyophile reading *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* is therefore presented with a case of *déjà vu*.

All the footnotes in this third edition have been checked and made easier to use. Also, the lesson format and questions of the 1957 edition, which were dropped in the 1964 edition, have been restored. This edition also has subject and scripture indexes, which were not found in the first two editions.

Continuing the methodology he utilized in *Lehi in the Desert*,2 Nibley focuses on examining the Book of Mormon as an ancient Near Eastern document to see if it fits into the cultural milieu of the pre-Hellenistic ancient Near East from which Lehi and his descendants were said to have migrated.3 Contrary to

---

3 Nibley's methodological assumptions are briefly explained on pages 3-14.
some modernist critics of Nibley’s works (who frequently claim Nibley is methodologically incompetent at best), he applies fairly traditional historical methodology of internal criticism of forgeries to the Book of Mormon, i.e., comparing a possibly forged document with its purported origins to determine whether the text fits its supposed cultural and historical setting. Nibley shows a methodological sophistication by clearly stating his subjective bias in favor of the Book of Mormon (p. 14) rather than attempting to feign some sort of impossible historical objectivity. Indeed, Nibley’s general attitude towards the nature of scholarship and academic “proof” is very much in line with modern studies of historiography and the sociology of knowledge.

Nibley’s chapters cover an amazingly broad range of times, places, cultures, and topics, through which he invariably manages to deepen our understanding of the Book of Mormon. I will present here just a few examples.

In Nibley’s view the ancient Near East at the time of Lehi was a cosmopolitan world of numerous interacting cultural zones, but with a fundamental cultural unity. Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Anatolian, Greek, and Israelite civilizations were all, in a sense, variations on a basic cultural theme (pp. 33-37). Although this idea was not broadly accepted in the 1950s, and still has major critics today, the evidence for such a view of antiquity is expanding rapidly, forcing us to rewrite much of ancient history. The revisionist view of ancient Near Eastern

4 I use the term “modernist” to refer to those who see the Book of Mormon as ahistorical and therefore deriving solely from the nineteenth century.
6 For an attack against the coherence of traditional assumptions on historical objectivity see Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). This is a topic of such intense debate in Mormon historical circles that Peter Novick was invited to the 1989 Sunstone Theological Symposium to discuss how his interpretations of historical objectivity relate to Mormon historical scholarship. For an excellent study of the “sociology of knowledge” in the history of Classical studies, see Martin Bernal, Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization, vol. 1: The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785-1985 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).
history that is emerging among many scholars today is very similar to that espoused by Nibley a quarter of a century ago in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*.

Nibley describes Lehi as a man of the "Axial Age," a term which he does not use in his first edition, but which he mentions in the preface to his second edition. The "Axial Age" is thought to have been a period extending roughly from the seventh through the fourth centuries B.C., in which a series of prophets and sages, including Zoroaster, Confucius, Buddha, the authors of the Upanishads, the Greek philosophers, and the great Israelite prophets, established fundamentally new paradigms of social and religious thought which formed the ideological basis for nearly all of the subsequent major civilizations of the world. The way in which Lehi perfectly fits the time, place, and model of an "Axial Sage" is little short of remarkable. Karl Jaspers, in *The Origin and Goal of History*, first coined the phrase "Axial Period." That work was published in 1953, shortly before the publication of *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*. Various versions of this idea have gained such widespread acceptance that it is now beginning to appear in standard world history textbooks.

Nibley also explores the relationship of the Jews of the seventh and sixth centuries B.C. with the surrounding cultures. Nibley sees Lehi as a merchant engaged in caravan trade (pp. 59-70), with trading contacts in Arabia and Egypt. Nibley thereby maintains that the Arabs of the seventh century were far

---

7 Bernal, in *Black Athena*, discusses in detail the reasons why the models of ancient history of the past century are fundamentally flawed, and explores new models which are very reminiscent of Nibley. For another revisionist view of ancient Near Eastern history from a political and military perspective that also calls for a synthesis of all ancient cultures, see Robert Drews, *The Coming of the Greeks: Indo-European Conquests in the Aegean and the Near East* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

8 For the basic description of Lehi as an "Axial Sage" see pp. 36-55. Nibley explicitly links his analysis of Lehi with Karl Jaspers's discussion of "Axial Period" on p. vii (2d ed.) and p. xi (3d ed.).


more important in the Near East than is often thought, and that Jews had extensive contacts with Arabia and Egypt in the sixth and seventh centuries B.C. (pp. 71-92, 225-52). Studies of Arabia during the first millennium B.C. have flourished in the past two decades, essentially confirming Nibley’s position.  

Nibley’s view of ancient civilization as fundamentally hierocentric (centered on sacred ideologies, rituals, and ceremonial centers) (pp. 157-67) has become fundamental to an entire school of thought on the ideologies of ancient civilizations through studies of such giants as Eliade.13 In a specific Book of Mormon context, his insight of seeing King Benjamin’s speech in a ritual setting (pp. 295-310) has been supported by extensive research by other Latter-day Saint scholars.14 Likewise, his analysis of the importance of military history in the Book of Mormon (pp. 209-21, 378-99)15 laid the foundation for a recent symposium and the publication of a book on the topic, which has confirmed and expanded upon many of his insights.16

Thus, An Approach is filled with numerous imaginative and provocative insights on the Book of Mormon which have laid the foundation for an entire school of Book of Mormon


13 The hierocentric nature of Pre-Modern human civilization is a theme that runs through nearly all of Eliade’s works. A good summary is contained in Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1959).


15 Nibley, Since Cumorah, 291-333.

scholarship and interpretation. On the other hand, there are several problems in the book which need to be examined.

The first is methodological. Here Nibley is not really in error, but rather his presentation contains some methodological weaknesses which, if corrected, would have greatly strengthened his case. Before discussing these problems it is important to emphasize that Nibley is not trying to "prove" the Book of Mormon is true. "Our purpose is to illustrate, explain, suggest, and investigate. We are going to consider the Book of Mormon as a possible product . . . of the Ancient East. . . . Proving the Book of Mormon is another matter" (pp. 3-4). Thus when critics occasionally accuse Nibley of trying or failing to prove the Book of Mormon historical, it is the critics who have failed to understand what Nibley is trying to do.

Nonetheless, Nibley's method does contain some weaknesses. The first, and perhaps most important, is Nibley's view that the "East" is somehow unchanging (p. 123). In reality the Near East has witnessed some of the most tremendous periods of social, economic, technological, political, and cultural transformations in world history. An example of Nibley's unfortunate concept of the "unchanging East" is the chapter on Laban (pp. 120-31), in which he utilizes Egyptian sources of the fourteenth century B.C. (p. 121), the eleventh century B.C. (p. 125), Jewish documents from the sixth century B.C. (p. 127), medieval Arabic sources from the fifteenth century A.D. (p. 122), and European accounts of Arabian bedouin practices of the nineteenth century A.D. (p. 129), all to illustrate the role and position of Laban in sixth century B.C. Jerusalem. Although such virtuosity is impressive, it also obscures the fundamental context of the Laban story. Clearly the most significant evidence Nibley references is in the Lachish letters, which he quotes extensively. Indeed, that evidence, and other evidence which could be derived from Israelite culture of the same period, is

17 It is important to emphasize here that this problem is based on the methodological assumptions of several generations of "orientalists." For a general discussion of historiographical problems of nineteenth and early twentieth-century approaches to Near Eastern history and cultures, see Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978). In this case Nibley is thus simply following the assumptions of his day, for which he really cannot be blamed any more than we should be blamed for being creatures of our own modern age by our descendants. Nonetheless, these "orientalist" assumptions cause methodological problems.
strong enough to make his point. To me his case is weakened by including these other marginal parallels.  

A second methodological problem is that in attempting to draw parallels between ancient Near Eastern cultures and the Book of Mormon, Nibley often ignores equally significant differences. What is important here is not that the differences between the Book of Mormon and ancient Near Eastern cultures somehow threaten to undermine the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but rather that the differences are often just as important evidence as parallels in obtaining a more complete understanding of the ancient historical setting. For example, Nibley tends to see the Jaredites as typical Central Asian nomads transported to the Great Plains of America (pp. 329-36).  

Now, while it is true that many elements of Jaredite culture parallel ancient patterns of Central Asian kingship and society, there are also equally significant differences. Thus the rise of Central Asians to global military and social signiﬁcance did not really begin until the development of the war-chariot and mounted archery. The war-chariot, which gave the Indo-Europeans a signiﬁcant military advantage over sedentarists, did not become signiﬁcant until the seventeenth century B.C. in the Caucasus, reaching China only by the thirteenth century B.C.  

Central Asian horse nomadism of the Turko-Mongolian style also did not begin until the second millennium B.C. and had spread through Central Asia only by the end of that same century. By most chronological interpretations of the

18 Another example of the problem of the “unchanging East” is Nibley’s attempt to utilize medieval Islamic poetry and customs as evidence for conditions in Arabia in the sixth century B.C. (pp. 225-52). Nonetheless, many of Nibley’s points are well taken since bedouin society was more static than many other Near Eastern cultures. Furthermore, owing to the limited nature of pre-Islamic Arabian sources, Islamic records must serve as a major source for pre-Islamic times.  

19 This topic is much more fully developed in Nibley’s The World of the Jaredites, pp. 153-282 in Lehi in the Desert.  


Jaredites, which place their departure from Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C., both of these developments were too late to have been a part of Jaredite cultural characteristics transported to the Americas. While these facts in no way undermine many of the authentic ancient elements Nibley has found in the Jaredite records, they do undermine Nibley’s general description of the Jaredites, especially when we remember that neither the chariot nor the horse are mentioned as being fundamental to Jaredite societies or warfare in the Book of Mormon.22 Thus, although Nibley has been able to establish parallels in literature, ritual, and kingship between the Jaredites and the ancient Near East, he is in error when he then seems to assume that there were extensive socioeconomic parallels (e.g., horse and sheep nomadism) as well.

Thus Nibley’s methodology consists more of comparative literature than history. Of course the two methodologies overlap in many ways. However, in the textual and literary analysis of ancient documents, it is generally thought sufficient to establish that textual, linguistic, or literary parallels exist to establish that two cultural traditions were in some sort of contact, even though it may be impossible to establish the exact historical nature of such contacts. I feel that Nibley’s case would be strengthened if he had paid more careful attention to the historical characteristics of his evidence such as the chronological, geographical, and cultural details of the parallels he analyzes.

Another problem appearing throughout Nibley’s work of the fifties and sixties is the seemingly fundamental assumption that the Book of Mormon describes continent-wide events (pp.


22 Horses are mentioned only once in the Jaredite record, in Ether 9:19: “And they (the Jaredites) also had horses, and asses, and there were elephants and cureloms and cumoms; all of which were useful unto man, and more especially the elephants and cureloms and cumoms.” It is clear from this reference that, completely unlike all post-chariot Central Asian nomadic societies, the horse was not considered a significant animal among the Jaredites, being less useful to the Jaredites than “the elephants and cureloms and cumoms.”
Those following the Sorenson school of limited geography have now demonstrated that the text itself describes events occurring within ranges of well under 1000 miles, centering almost certainly in Mesoamerica. As Nibley himself admits, he is not well read in pre-Columbian American history and archaeology (pp. 3-4, 442). He is thus at his weakest when he turns from drawing upon ancient Near Eastern sources to illuminate the text of the Book of Mormon to speculating about the relationship of the text to the geography, history, and archaeology of pre-Columbian America. Here one is much better off turning to Sorenson and Clark.

Finally, there are occasional factual errors in the text. One of the most obvious is Nibley’s statement that Humbaba was Gilgamesh’s boon companion, whose death sends Gilgamesh on his quest for the plant of immortality (pp. 355-56). In fact, Enkidu was Gilgamesh’s companion, and Humbaba was a demonic monster which Gilgamesh and Enkidu killed. Such errors are perhaps forgivable, however, in a book utilizing sources covering all of ancient and medieval history and most of the major cultures of the world.

In conclusion, despite these problems, Nibley’s ideas have been extensively supported by later researchers both in general concepts and in many specific details. In a field as controversial and rapidly changing as ancient Near Eastern studies (which is stable and placid compared to Book of Mormon studies), one would certainly expect to find numerous topics on which Nibley was in error after a quarter of a century. The fact that many of the insights which he discusses in only a few pages have yielded research which has developed into entire books is vindication enough for Nibley’s genius. The fact that he has unintentionally and almost single-handedly spawned an entire intellectual “cottage industry” in the form of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies is remarkable.

My overall reaction to An Approach to the Book of Mormon can best be stated as follows: When in this age of correlation and manuals written by committees will we see another Melchizedek Priesthood lesson manual as exciting and insightful as this one?
Nearly every reader has either written down or, more frequently, keeps in his mind, a list of those books which have had the most influence on him. In my own list of such books are two by Hugh Nibley—The World and the Prophets and Lehi in the Desert. The World and the Prophets helped me to understand the course of early Christian history—the period of the apostasy—as the victory of the sophic tradition over the prophetic. Lehi in the Desert not only informed me about the first chapters of the Book of Mormon, but also introduced me in a significant way to Arabia in the pre-Islamic era, sparking an interest in this region and period that remains with me. But this book also contains some sage observations about method—even though Nibley sometimes disclaims an interest in it—as well as historical assumptions in the study of the Book of Mormon that retain their timeliness and deserve further examination. In this review, I deal only with Lehi in the Desert, which comprises the first third of this volume. Of the numerous topics that are treated in Lehi in the Desert, I wish to focus in this review essay on Nibley’s strategies and method in Book of Mormon studies, as reflected in Lehi in the Desert and elsewhere in his writings.

The chapters comprising Lehi in the Desert originally appeared in the Improvement Era in 1950, and were published in a single volume in 1952 along with The World of the Jaredites. With his typical wit, erudition, and graceful writing style, Nibley reflects, in Lehi in the Desert, on various aspects of the first eighteen chapters of 1 Nephi: the troubled political

---


conditions that prevailed in the ancient Near East at the beginning of Book of Mormon history, which ultimately brought all of the major powers in that area into conflict; some of the "strange names" in the Book of Mormon, which are explained in the light of cognate Egyptian names; a comparison of various elements found in the desert chapters of 1 Nephi with early Arab materials—life in a tent, the order of march, and day-to-day life in the wilderness, with its constant search for sufficient food, water, and shelter from the elements; a penetrating analysis of Lehi's dream of the tree of life and a comparison with similar motifs in pre-Islamic and early Islamic literature; the affairs of the family of Lehi and Ishmael at home in Jerusalem and in the desert; and a review of the events and circumstances surrounding the end of the desert wanderings in the land Bountiful.

In *Lehi in the Desert* as well as in other works of his considerable corpus of writings on the Book of Mormon—which now include four volumes of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*—composed over a period of some forty years, Nibley's approach has reflected his own desideratum that one "give the Book of Mormon the benefit of the doubt," granting that it is what it claims to be—an historically authentic ancient document of a people who originated in ancient Israel. Thereafter he tests those claims from the internal evidence of the book itself—names, historical details, and cultural concepts—against what can be known about the ancient Near East (or ancient America). When this is done, a picture emerges in the Book of Mormon that is strikingly consistent with what can be determined about the ancient Near East (and Mesoamerica). Most of his examples in *Lehi in the Desert* come from Arabia and ancient Egypt, as well as ancient Israel.

To show that the Book of Mormon is not inconsistent with what it claims to be, Nibley accepts—for purposes of argument—the criteria set forth by other scholars dealing with other ancient documents, and then applies those same criteria in considering the Book of Mormon. Thus, for example, at the outset of *Lehi in the Desert*, Nibley reviews the great American archaeologist William F. Albright's criteria for determining the historical plausibility of the Middle Egyptian tale of Sinuhe,

---

which Albright considers to be "a substantially true account of life in its milieu" on the grounds (1) that its 'local color [is] extremely plausible,' (2) it describes a 'state of social organization' which 'agrees exactly with our present archaeological and documentary evidence . . . ', (3) 'The Amorite personal names contained in the story are satisfactory for that period and region,' and (4) 'Finally, there is nothing unreasonable in the story itself' "(p. 3). Nibley then asks about the story of Lehi: "Does it correctly reflect 'the cultural horizon and religious and social ideas and practices of the time'? Does it have authentic historical and geographical background? Is the mise-en-scène mythical, highly imaginative, or extravagantly improbable? Is its local color correct, and are its proper names convincing?" (p. 4).

In anticipation of the criticism that his approach to the material constitutes a sort of special pleading and lacks "objectivity" (still the elusive—and unreachable—will-o'-the-wisp of many in the historical profession), Nibley responds directly, then, with a parable:

But haven't we been decidedly partial in dealing with Lehi? Of course we have. We are the counsel for the defense. Our witnesses have all been of our own choosing, but no one can deny that they are competent and unprejudiced. We invited the prosecution to examine them. To date they have not done so, but instead have brought their own witnesses into court, up-to-date intellectuals who can tell us just exactly what the accused was thinking when he wrote the Book of Mormon. Such evidence

---

4 The question of objectivity among American historians is dealt with in detail by Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). David Hackett Fischer, in *Historians' Fallacies* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 4, cites the "Baconian fallacy," which Fischer describes as "the idea that a historian can operate without the aid of preconceived questions, hypotheses, ideas, assumptions, theories, paradigms, postulates, prejudices, presumptions, or general presuppositions of any kind. He is supposed to go a-wandering in the dark forest of the past, gathering facts like nuts and berries, until he has enough to make a general truth. Then he is to store up his general truths until he has the whole truth. This idea is doubly deficient, for it commits a historian to the pursuit of an impossible object by an impracticable method."
is not evidence at all—it is bad science, bad history, and even bad newspaper reporting and would be rejected by any court in the land. But it might impress the half-educated jury, and that is its purpose. We can best explain the new trend in Book of Mormon criticism by a little parable.

A young man once long ago claimed he had found a large diamond in his field as he was ploughing. He put the stone on display to the public free of charge, and everyone took sides. A psychologist showed, by citing some famous case studies, that the young man was suffering from a well-known form of delusion. An historian showed that other men have also claimed to have found diamonds in fields and been deceived. A geologist proved that there were no diamonds in the area but only quartz: the young man had been fooled by a quartz. When asked to inspect the stone itself, the geologist declined with a weary, tolerant smile and a kindly shake of the head. An English professor showed that the young man in describing his stone used the very same language that others had used in describing uncut diamonds: he was, therefore, simply speaking the common language of his time. A sociologist showed that only three out of 177 florists' assistants in four major cities believed the stone was genuine. A clergyman wrote a book to show that it was not the young man but someone else who had found the stone.

Finally an indigent jeweler named Snite pointed out that since the stone was still available for examination the answer to the question of whether it was a diamond or not had absolutely nothing to do with who found it, or whether the finder was honest or sane, or who believed him, or whether he would know a diamond from a brick, or whether diamonds had ever been found in fields, or whether people had even been fooled by quartz or glass, but was to be answered simply and solely by putting the stone to certain well-known tests for diamonds. Experts on diamonds were called in. Some of them declared it genuine. The others made nervous jokes about it and declared that they could not very well jeopardize their
dignity and reputations by appearing to take the thing too seriously. To hide the bad impression thus made, someone came out with the theory that the stone was really a synthetic diamond, very skilfully made, but a fake just the same. The objection to this is that the production of a good synthetic diamond 120 years ago would have been an even more remarkable feat than the finding of a real one.\(^5\)

Lest we fail to see "the moral of the story," Nibley makes it perfectly clear: "the testimony brought out by the prosecution, however learned, has been to date entirely irrelevant and immaterial."\(^6\) Unhappily, things are scarcely better today, and the approach of the Book of Mormon’s critics is hardly more sound—or more relevant—now than when Nibley first wrote these words in 1950. While today some critics may actually look at the text of the Book of Mormon, their analyses are generally restricted to showing how it reflects elements from Joseph Smith’s own environment,\(^7\) an issue that Nibley takes on squarely elsewhere in his writings on the Book of Mormon.\(^8\)

---


\(^7\) Environmentalist explanations are, of course, nothing new in Book of Mormon studies. Alexander Campbell (1788-1866), the founder of the Disciples of Christ, composed a response to the Book of Mormon that was published on February 7, 1831, in his paper, the *Millennial Harbinger*, and was reprinted as a pamphlet in Boston in 1832 (with "Prefactory [sic] Notes" by Joshua V. Himes) under the title *Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon; with an Examination of Its Internal and External Evidences, and a Refutation of Its Pretences to Divine Authority*. The book, according to Campbell, is solely the product of the mind of Joseph: "There never was a book more evidently written by one set of fingers, nor more certainly conceived in one cranium since the first book appeared in human language, than this same book." Further, Campbell claims that the Book of Mormon represents the reflections of Joseph (whom Campbell, in *Delusions* [Boston: Greene, 1832], 11, characterizes as a "knave" who is "ignorant" and "impudent") on the social, political, and religious controversies of the day: "infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of freemasonry,
In order to provide an alternative explanation of the Book of Mormon as the product of the nineteenth century on sound historical grounds, it is necessary to demonstrate that the various elements of the book that have ancient analogues could have

republican government, and the rights of man,” ibid., 13. Further, Campbell asserts that the Book of Mormon not only demonstrates a fundamental misunderstanding of Israelite and Jewish history (the Book of Mormon portrays some of the Nephites as Christians hundreds of years before the birth of Christ) but an abysmal grasp of English grammar as well. Delusions is significant among studies of the Book of Mormon since it is not only one of the earliest extensive attacks on the book but in many ways it sets the agenda for future environmentalist critiques of the Book of Mormon (i.e., a position that sees the Book of Mormon deriving from, or responding to, various trends in early nineteenth-century upstate New York). Subsequently, however, according to Richard Bushman, in Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1984), 231 n. 37, Campbell, writing in the Millennial Harbinger, reversed his position entirely, adopting the Spalding-Rigdon theory, according to which Sidney Rigdon purloined a copy of a manuscript by Solomon Spalding, developed from it what became the Book of Mormon, which he passed on to Joseph Smith, in the late 1820s, while later pretending to have met Joseph for the first time in 1830.

8 Thus, in discussing Thomas O’Dea’s environmentalist explanation in “What Frontier, What Camp Meeting?” in The Prophetic Book of Mormon, vol. 8 in The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 185-86, where O’Dea claims that “The book is obviously an American work,” Nibley asks, how obviously? Well, “American sentiments permeate the work.” For example? ‘Taxation is oppressive, and lawyers are not to be trusted.’ In what nation is that not true? Has Dr. O’Dea never heard of Molière or Aristophanes or Rabelais? Again the obligation of the clergy to work in Alma’s church is right out of New England: But why not right out of Cluny, or the Qumran Community, or the Didache? Alma’s going ‘from one body to another, preaching unto the people repentance and faith on the Lord’ (Mosiah 25:15) is for O’Dea ‘a scene strongly reminiscent of the camp meeting,’ though he admits elsewhere that camp meetings belong to the post Book of Mormon period. But Dr. O’Dea’s job as a critic is not simply to report what Book of Mormon scenes and incidents suggest to his mind, but to prove, when he suggests a source, that the matter concerned could not possibly have come from any other source. After all, the man who by some mysterious process can borrow the ideas of thirteenth-century monks, Brahmin sages, French satirists, and Washingtonian reformers may at any given moment be stealing from any conceivable source, so that no critic can ever be sure of his ground.”
been known to Joseph Smith. To do this, Nibley asserts, it would be necessary to explain, point by point, how Joseph could have obtained his information so as to provide an accurate and convincing ancient setting for the Book of Mormon. At the end of *Lehi in the Desert*, Nibley makes this point: “Another thing, the prosecution must prove their case to the hilt: it is not enough to show, even if they could, that there are mistakes in the Book of Mormon, for all humans make mistakes; what they must explain is how the ‘author’ of the book happened to get so many things right.”9 Nibley’s point is well taken. Simply adducing parallels between the Book of Mormon and life in nineteenth-century upstate New York, or any other era or place besides the one from which the book claims to derive, is methodologically problematical, unless it can be shown at the same time that these various features of the book could not possibly have been known in the the ancient Near East and in Mesoamerica—a formidable task, indeed, given the relative paucity of our evidence from these areas (about which more below). To my knowledge, though, no one who has challenged the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon as an ancient document has looked in a serious and systematic way at the ancient evidence adduced by Nibley (and now many others), or attempted to deal with—and disprove—that evidence point by point. One solemn opponent of the Book of Mormon grants that Nibley has adduced a fair bit of ancient evidence for the Book of Mormon, but then dismisses hundreds of pages of this evidence with the mere flick of a wrist by saying that Nibley has failed to take into consideration the nineteenth-century material. Thereafter, this author devotes many pages to nineteenth-century parallels to the Book of Mormon, without ever seriously examining—and refuting—the ancient analogues. Such a critique is simply insufficient and is methodologically wanting as well: as long as no discussion is provided for the ancient evidence relating to the Book of Mormon, the critique remains incomplete.

It might be possible, I suppose, for someone to write a book dealing solely with nineteenth-century parallels to the Book of Mormon, but if no conclusions are drawn, then it becomes an exercise in methodological frivolity, on a par with taking the phone book, cutting it up, and putting it back together in a higgledy-piggledy fashion. A volume of nineteenth-century

---

parallels to the Book of Mormon that provides no conclusion can, at the very least, be charged with methodological sloppiness, if not also some slight disingenuousness.

The historian who does accept the internal claims of the Book of Mormon and who wishes to deal with the book as an historical document has two possible avenues of approach: (1) to show that the suspicion or accusation of forgery is ungrounded; or (2) simply to "contextualize" the book, attempting to understand its content better by understanding better the ancient Near East and ancient America, the areas and periods from which it claims to derive. One who takes the former approach must show both that the Book of Mormon reflects, in its general outline and in its details, the ancient world from which it claims to derive and that these details (or at least some of them) were not available to Joseph Smith at the time of the translation. This approach to the Book of Mormon is, in general, the one taken by Nibley in *Lehi in the Desert* (where he describes himself as "the counsel for the defense").

Nibley will frequently clinch a point with such statements as (in this case, with reference to the taking of oaths): "In such a situation there was only one thing Nephi would possibly have done, both to spare Zoram and to avoid giving alarm—and no westerner could have guessed what it was," or "virtually all that is known of the world in which Lehi is purported to have lived has been discovered within the last hundred years—mostly within the last thirty."

Should the historian wish to dispute the charge of forgery against a document, he would be expected to show that features of the work in question accurately reflect the world from which it claims to derive in ways that could not have been known to the purported forger. It is not, of course, necessary to show that every element in the document is unique to the period of time from which it claims to derive, nor is it necessary to explain how there might be parallels between features of the document and other periods of time. Indeed, given the nature of human

---

10 It is, of course, possible—and perfectly legitimate—to deal with the doctrine and teachings of the Book of Mormon without particular regard to its historical setting.
11 Ibid., 120. In *An Approach to the Book of Mormon and Since Cumorah*, on the other hand, Nibley generally takes the second, "contextualizing" approach.
12 Ibid., 102.
13 Ibid., 4.
experience, it would be surprising if there was nothing similar to what is known from other times and places. To take a parallel, hypothetical example from the classical world: a manuscript that deals with the end of the Republic and rise of the Empire is discovered in a monastery in Venice that dates, ostensibly, from the twelfth century, and appears to be a history written in the first century A.D. by an otherwise unknown Roman historian. It contains some information that is already known, and some that is new. It is known only in this manuscript (this fact should surprise no one, since many of the works of classical authors are extant in only one late manuscript). Some doubt the genuineness of the manuscript, believing that it was actually produced in Venice. Those supporting the authenticity of the document would be expected to show that it reflected, in its broad outline as well as in its details, the period from which it claimed to derive, and that it contained material that could not have been known in medieval Venice. It would be no more necessary to explain why there are similarities to late medieval Venice than to explain why it shows similarities to ancient Myra or early medieval Bari or downtown Manhattan of the twentieth century—that is not a part of his task in refuting the charge of forgery.

In comparison with what is known of nineteenth-century America, the documentary remains from the ancient world are meager. In dealing with the presence of Greek words in the book of Daniel, a biblical scholar has noted:

Only a fraction of the possible [classical and ancient Near Eastern] sites have been surveyed, and only a fraction of the surveyed sites have been excavated. In Greece over 300 Mycenaean sites are known. But this number could be readily multiplied by more intensive and more extensive surveys. In 1944 the Palestine Gazette listed a total of about 3,000 sites in Cis-Jordan and several hundred in Trans-Jordan. In 1963 the total of known sites increased to about 5,000. Paul Lapp estimated that of this total there had been scientific excavations at about 150 sites, including 26 major excavations. "To be sure, many of the sites on record would not merit extensive excavation, but if only one in four were promising, major excavations have till now been carried out at only two per cent of the potential sites." Seton Lloyd notes that by 1949 more than 5,000 mounds had been
located in Iraq. As of 1962 Beek’s atlas records twenty-eight major excavations in Iraq.14

By this estimate, only a tiny fraction of what could be known archaeologically from ancient Israel or the classical world has been uncovered (and surely we know more about the ancient Mediterranean world than we do about Mesoamerica). Documentary finds have hardly fared better.

Speaking of Greek literature, Baldry notes: “Of scores of epic poems, we have a mere half dozen; of thousands of plays, forty-five; of countless speeches, enough to fill a few volumes.” This is true of even the works of the three greatest Greek dramatists—Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles. Only about ten percent of their works have been transmitted to us. Of all the Greek lyric poets who wrote in the seventh and sixth centuries we have manuscripts only for Theognis and Pindar. Even for Pindar all but the victory odes are fragmentary. From Sappho, apart from fragments, we have only one complete poem.

If so little of highly prized literature survived, it is no surprise that even a smaller portion of mundane writing survived. To take an extreme example from the Roman world:

In the first three hundred years of the empire there were never less than twenty-five Roman legions, and each legion had five thousand men. The legions were paid three times a year, so that there were 375,000 pay vouchers a year. Multiply that by three hundred, and the result is 112.5 million.

Of this grand total of pay vouchers we have recovered only six and a fragment of a seventh.15

Has the documentary evidence that would illuminate the ancient setting of the Book of Mormon fared much better? I doubt it. Further, given the vast amount of material, relatively

15 Ibid., 171.
speaking, available from the nineteenth century and the repetition of certain themes throughout history, it is not surprising that parallels—some of which are linguistic, as well as conceptual—can be drawn between the Book of Mormon and that period of time.

Another approach to the Book of Mormon may be "contextualization": understanding the text better through understanding better the milieu from which it came. Such an approach may not be intended as, and should not necessarily be construed as, an apologia for the internal claims of the Book of Mormon. Just as comparisons with the ancient world are made in biblical studies primarily to elucidate the text of the Bible, with no apologetic agenda intended, so the same may be done in the case of the Book of Mormon. The forthcoming volume on warfare in the Book of Mormon takes this approach. In general, the essays in this volume treat the ancient origins of the Book of Mormon as a given, without any apologetic intent, and attempt to understand the Book of Mormon better in the light of these other materials.

Subsequent studies of 1 Nephi 1-18 by the Astons, Brown, England, the Hiltons, and Tvedtines have all tended to validate the evidence that Nibley presents in Lehi in the Desert. Indeed, this whole section squares well with what is known of the life and geography of the Arabian Peninsula, much of which was scarcely known to the West until the twentieth century. There were few vade mecums in the early nineteenth century that could have provided Joseph Smith a thorough and accurate picture of the Arabian Peninsula. The outstanding geographic studies by Adolf Sprenger and Forster in the 1840s were among the first to describe the Arabian Peninsula in any detail, but even these would have provided no help for the place name Nahom.

now in the Arab Republic of Yemen, recently visited by Warren
Aston, which is in a location that plausibly corresponds to what
is known about the site in the Book of Mormon.

In recent months, I have heard several methodological
objections raised to looking at—or taking seriously—evidence
for the Book of Mormon as an ancient document. Most of these
objections are not new, but are simply variants on issues dealt
with by Nibley at one point or another in his writings. Thus, for
instance, evidence for an ancient setting for the Book of
Mormon has been dismissed by some because the authors were
not specifically trained in the field of Book of Mormon studies.
But the logical correlative to ignoring evidence in a discussion
about the Book of Mormon on the basis of the author’s
purported training in that field would, for example, be that there
can be no legitimate Ugaritic studies because nobody knew
anything about Ugarit until 1929, no legitimate study of
Assyriology since no one knew a thing about the subject a
couple of generations ago, no legitimate Egyptology for the
same reason, and so forth. But any field that impinges on the
topics that are discussed in the Book of Mormon—and there are
a whole host of them—has already provided training in the skills
and techniques that will facilitate study of the Book of
Mormon—unless Book of Mormon studies are absolutely
different from other academic endeavors. Objecting to (or
refusing to take seriously) evidence because of the training and
background of the one presenting the evidence constitutes a kind
of credential checking—something that Nibley has frequently
deplored—which is more concerned with looking at degrees
than seriously dealing with issues raised in support of the
antiquity of the Book of Mormon by that evidence.

Another objection to the Book of Mormon as an
historically authentic ancient document centers on its supposedly
anachronistic Christian elements. This is a form of the
environmental argument and rests on a kind of question
begging, assuming (here, that the Christian elements are
anachronistic, and the book is thus not genuine) what one sets
out to prove (that it is not genuine because of such Christian
elements), a point that is particularly problematical since the
Book of Mormon claims for itself a Christian component. To
accept only those elements of the Book of Mormon—or any
other document, for that matter—that accord with what is
already known is to refuse it any primary evidentiary value and
to render the Book of Mormon—or any other document—
superfluous. Yet each new document of religious content has changed our perception of the ancient religious world, often radically: the Ugaritic tablets have given us our first detailed glimpse into the Canaanite pantheon by “true believers,” the Dead Sea Scrolls are the first documents written by actual Essenes, the Nag Hammadi codices provide insights into, among other matters, Gnosticism so called, by adherents rather than opponents. Is it so unreasonable to envision a “Church of Anticipation” of a Messiah in the pre-Christian era? Or are we to expect no further documents that would necessitate paradigm shifts? To single out the Book of Mormon, among documents that purport to deal with the ancient world, is, again, almost certainly the result of a kind of question-begging. If the Book of Mormon has been slower in being accepted than these other documents, it is probably because of its origin and the means and mode of its translation.

An even more extreme methodological objection to taking seriously an ancient setting for the Book of Mormon comes from a rather prolific writer on the Book of Mormon from an environmentalist perspective who recently claimed, in my hearing, that translations only inform the reader about the period of time in which the translations were made. The implications of such a deconstructionist position are simply astonishing: where we had imagined that in reading the Bible in the King James Version, Revised Standard Version, New International Version, or the Jewish Publication Society Translation we would learn something about ancient Israel or the life of Jesus and the early Church, we were actually learning about the England of James I or of Victoria, or America of the twentieth century. Indeed, in this view all translations, whether they be of ancient literature or not, may appropriately be tossed out. While such a position may—justifiably—strain our credulity, this claim is useful in justifying ignoring evidence for the Book of Mormon as an ancient document.

Assertions of “objectivity” and accusations of partisanship have sometimes been brought to bear in discussions of the Book of Mormon. Some of the misunderstandings on the matter of “objectivity” have resulted from conflicting definitions, other misperceptions from an uncareful use of words. The issue of objectivity, as it occurs in discussions concerning the writing of history, does not revolve around whether events actually occurred at a given time and under given circumstances. No one on either side of the discussion concerning the historicity of the
Book of Mormon disagrees that events did occur—that *something* happened—in 600 B.C. or A.D. 1829. Rather, what is at stake in discussions of "objectivity" centers on recognizing that everyone approaches events with presuppositions, assumptions, and preunderstandings that aid him in selecting and categorizing those events in a coherent fashion. "The question," according to Arthur H. King and C. Terry Warner, "is not whether the historian, like other craftsmen, colors what he makes with his own personality, for inevitably he does. Rather, the question is what sort of colors he gives it."18 The quest for assumptions and preunderstandings—one's own or those of others—remains perennially relevant. King and Warner further warn that history written with the pretense of "objectivity" becomes merely an "affectation, a style deliberately adopted with an eye for professional legitimacy and success."19 It is, then, hardly correct to state that those who claim that the Book of Mormon is ancient are not being "objective" while those who deny such claims are. The very fact that many of those who make the latter assertion have not even looked at the ancient evidence in any sort of systematic fashion is itself an indication that there has been a hardy lack of objectivity on their part. Nor is the enterprise of writing history involved in "proving" or "disproving" but in sustaining, enhancing, or questioning plausibility. Here, again, those who would question or impugn the historicity of the Book of Mormon do not hold the higher ground—the realm of "proof"—while those who support its historical authenticity labor in the realm of mere plausibility, although this has been suggested.20 While the Book of Mormon can be studied without any particular regard to its truth claims, the window is fairly narrow: such a study would have to deal with the way in which the work has been used in the community of believers and outside of it, and what influence it may have had.

19 Ibid., 486.
In *Lehi in the Desert*, as elsewhere in his writings, Nibley has shown us that a knowledge of the original sources—in the original languages, where possible—is desirable, if not indispensable, since it is in the original sources that we gain the clearest and most direct picture of the world from which the Book of Mormon claims to derive. An unabashed partisan himself, Nibley has shown that partisanship, explicit or implicit, admitted or denied, is in the nature of the historiographical enterprise. He has shown that academic writing need not be dull but can be witty, graceful, and interesting (in contrast to many academics, who write with the grace of an elephant). One senses here, as everywhere, Nibley’s excitement for learning and his enthusiasm for putting knowledge at the service of illuminating faith.

In most discussions of the historicity of the Book of Mormon heretofore, the interlocutors have tended to talk past each other. They may still do so, but they should at least address the issues. Nibley’s *Lehi in the Desert* lays out what some of those issues are.

Ecological Nomadism versus Epic Heroism in Ether: Nibley’s Works on the Jaredites

Reviewed by David B. Honey

Among the works of Dr. Hugh Nibley recently republished by F.A.R.M.S. in its series *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* are two contributions on the Jaredites. *The World of the Jaredites*, initially published in 1952 by Bookcraft (together with *Lehi in the Desert*) and *There Were Jaredites*, originally issued as separate articles in the *Improvement Era* from 1956 to 1957, have been printed as *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites*. Each work reviewed here takes one cultural pattern as its basic consideration. *The World of the Jaredites* places the Jaredites in the ancient and exotic setting of Central Asia as the traditional patterns of nomadic life are surveyed. The pattern of epic adventures essayed by our heroes after they settled and prospered in ancient America is the subject of *There Were Jaredites*.

*The World of the Jaredites* was a natural companion to *Lehi in the Desert* chiefly because both works deal with the culture of Book of Mormon peoples as they journeyed in traditional Old World settings towards the promised land. These works are therefore happily paired in this reprinting. On the other hand, *There Were Jaredites* deals with a different setting and theme, Jaredite life as a settled populace in the New World. Consequently, there is some dissonance between the themes of nomadism and epic (but still sedentary) heroism even though

---

1 Other works by Hugh Nibley that concern nomadism have been reviewed in brief by David B. Honey, “Heroic Legitimation in Traditional Nomadic Societies,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990), 1:562-83.

2 The new edition of *Lehi in the Desert* published in vol. 5 of the *CWHN* is reviewed by Stephen Ricks in this issue of *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*. 
they both deal with Jaredite history, albeit at different times. This difference is a result of both themes representing mutually exclusive lifestyles. This review will attempt to mediate between the competing modes of existence and address a few side issues.

But first, a note of explanation. One hesitates to storm the heights of Nibley’s erudition armed only with meager intellectual armament; fortunately, another strategy is called for because, due to the impressive quality and main lines of argumentation of these works, I find myself allied with him. This review will rather reconnoiter Nibley’s thematic battlements and at the same time attempt to shore up minor deficiencies in his conceptual defenses and repair minor gaps in his bibliographical bulwarks, natural and expected weak points given the passage of over thirty-five years.

Ecological Nomadism in Jared

The World of the Jaredites has been republished with minimal adjustments to the original text. The only discernable differences are in the endnotes (which appeared as footnotes in the 1952 edition), where an occasional updating has been effected, by no means exhaustive, and some references have been simplified. Such standard Latin phrases as passim and op. cit. have been purged, as have such formulaic abbreviations as “ff.” after a page reference. Also, some notes referring to classical authors have been fortified by citations to specific editions and the inclusion of English translations of appropriate quotes. But there has been no full-scale effort to revise or expand the original text to take advantage of the scholarship of the last thirty-five years.3 The 1952 edition was published

---

3 Nibley consulted an impressively wide range of sources on the nomads. Even so, with the progress of scholarship, it is impossible even to hint at the breadth of studies available today. However, some indispensable reference works that have appeared since Nibley’s work, excluding the critically important Chinese, Japanese, and Russian bibliographies, include the following: Denis Sinor, Introduction a l’étude de l’Eurasie Centrale (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963); Gyula Moravcsik, Bizantinoturcica, 2 vols. (Berlin: Akademie, 1958); J. Harmatta, ed., Prolegomena to the Sources on the History of Pre-Islamic Central Asia (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1979); and Henry Schwarz, Bibliotheca Mongolica, Part I: Works in English, French, and German (Bellingham: Western Washington University, 1978); Don Lee, An Annotated Bibliography on Inner Asia (Bloomington: Eastern Press, 1983); and Don Lee, An Annotated Archaeological
without illustrations; in this reprinting two maps have been added to chapter three, and one illustration of the throne of Darius to chapter four, all taken from the 1951-52 Improvement Era articles which formed the basis for the 1952 book. Furthermore, some subsection titles have been eliminated with no other alteration of the text.

Six chapters comprise this work. "A Twilight World" introduces the problem and sources. Nibley employs an epistolary style in addressing a hypothetical "Professor F," a style maintained throughout both The World of the Jaredites and There Were Jaredites (where it is modified into a "conversational" style). The problem to be addressed in this work is the fifth cultural form encountered in the Book of Mormon, the "twilight world of proto-history" of Central Asia. A major theme of the book is introduced early, that the Jaredites had been driven reluctantly from their homes, an important point to which we will return. The episodes of "The Tower" and "The Stolen Garment" form subsections of this chapter.

Chapter two, "Departure," commences with the confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel and the consequent scattering of peoples, including the Jaredites. The section "A Note on the Weather" links up the terrible sand storms of Central Asia as reported by ancient and modern travelers with the violent winds that dispersed the peoples at the Tower and drove the Jaredites across the sea. "The Way Out," a discussion of the route across the steppes taken by the Jaredites, concludes this chapter. It stresses the common culture that existed in the belt of territory that stretched virtually from what today is Hungary to Korea, and is a good prelude to the next chapter in this work.

Chapter three, "Jared on the Steppes," treats nomadic culture in detail and will be the focus of our attention presently. Chapter four, "Jaredite Culture: Splendor and Shame," discusses the episodes from Jaredite history of the institution of lifelong imprisonment and the dancing damsel as part of a coup and sets them in widespread Old World contexts; also treated in such a context are the elements of steel, glass, silk, hunting, animals, and animal preserves. Chapter six, entitled "They Take Up the Sword," details the unfortunate pattern of the extinction of civilizations as illustrated with the Jaredites. The speed and

Bibliography of Selected Works on Northern and Central Asia (Bloomington: Eastern, 1983).
great distances over which these wars of extermination were concluded is stressed. Once again Jaredite practices are compared with typical nomadic ones. The concluding chapter is "A Permanent Heritage," in which Nibley surveys the survival of Jaredite customs and even stragglers among the Nephites.

Chapter three, "Jared on the Steppes," contains the most material on the ecology of the Jaredites, and it is here that we find the lifestyle of the Old World Jaredites portrayed in sufficient detail for comparison with the later New World lifestyle described in *There Were Jaredites*. Nowhere does Dr. Nibley use the term "ecological" to describe nomadism in the record of Jared. Yet it is implied by the attempt in this chapter to place the Jaredites in the typical camp of Central Asian nomads who are ecological nomads. "Ecological" nomadism is the type that is practiced habitually as a recurring pattern of existence— not a mere expediency to insure survival in times of turmoil or flight—and that utilizes different pastures at different seasons. The pattern of existence with which he compares the Jaredite model is derived from nomadic life as viewed by such widely separated observers in time as "modern travelers in Central Asia," "the spies and ambassadors of the Byzantine court," "classical historians from Cassiodorus to Herodotus," and "Russian archaeologists" (pp. 157-58). He writes, as a methodological maxim, that "we are limiting our curiosity to the sort of thing that happened. The exact time and place of any specific event are no concern of ours... We specialize in patterns" (p. 158).

In the first section of this chapter, "The Moving Host," Nibley contrasts the migratory mode of Lehi's band with that of the Jaredites. The migration of the latter is characterized by the terror of the weather, by the make-up of the group—a tribal conglomeration of friends and supporters rather than of family members, and, most importantly, by the abundance of flocks of

---

4 The terror of the weather was one of the most prominent elements associated with Central Asia by the sedentary inhabitants surrounding its periphery. For this and similar elements, see Ruth Meserve, "The In hospitable Land of the Barbarian," *Journal of Asian History* 16 (1982): 51-89.

5 Actually, the basic nomadic social unit is the "tent," i.e., one family. But Nibley is right, as commonly two to five "tents" form "herding "units" based on mutual friendship and trust. On this practice in a modern nomadic tribe, the Basseri, see Fredrik Barth, *Nomads of South Persia* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1961), 11-12; for a medieval Mongolian
animals of all kinds as the wandering tribes seek a promised land that they might settle. Nomads like the Jaredites are on the move, says Nibley, because they are in reality refugees, pushed from their home farms and pastures by other tribes who had been themselves displaced by weather-induced ruin to their own homelands. Nomadic wanderers are described as concurrent hunters, herdsmen, and farmers, who from time to time take to their great wagons for their epic emigrations. The next section, "Concerning Deseret," is related to the theme of nomadic migration because, according to Nibley's authority Eduard Meyer, all of the major migrations out of Central Asia were conducted under the sacred rubric of the bee or "Deseret."  

The last section, "Early Asiatic and Jaredite Civilizations: A General View," attempts to delineate the process of state formation in the vast spaces of the steppes and to place the Jaredite civilization comfortably in this process. Nibley rightly focuses on individual great men and the steps followed in their rise; his account of recruiting a host and forming confederacies is remarkably complete and parallels the same process discernable in Chinese accounts of the nomads. The only major objection from recent scholarship would be the need for sedentary states to provide the raw materials of nomadic statehood, whereas in Nibley's view the nomadic state produces them.


6 The name and concept of Deseret were later developed by Nibley in Abraham in Egypt (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), chap. 8, "The Deseret Connection." See esp. pp. 238-45 for the connection between Deseret and migrations.

7 Honey, "Heroic Legitimation in Traditional Nomadic Sources," isolates the following elements as crucial: personal prowess, aristocratic heritage and legitimate lineage, the sanction of heaven and the legitimation of religion, and the use of gifts and oaths in gathering and maintaining a following over vast distances. Nibley treats all of these elements.

8 Because ecologically there is no need for any political organization beyond the tribe, great men who attempt to form supratribal confederacies, states, or empires find it impossible unless outside sources are used. These sources are luxury goods provided by sedentary civilization to be used as gifts to bind the newly created aristocracy and bureaucracy in allegiance. On this view of nomadic state formation, see Thomas Barfield, "The Hsiung-nu Imperial Confederacy: Organization and Foreign Policy,"
Despite the intriguing parallels discovered between Central Asiatic nomads and the Jaredites, however, the comparison is not very useful in trying to determine the ecology of the Jaredites. This is because specifics can be as important as patterns in historical comparisons. The pattern of life that does emerge from Nibley’s many authorities is not clearly ecological nomadism because he focuses on those elements of steppe life that parallel Jaredite practices in the Old World; but since the specific nomadic peoples he cites were ecological nomads, we must look closer into this pattern of life. Nibley describes the Jaredites as “reluctant to leave their homes, and when they were finally ‘driven out of the land,’ they took flocks, herds, and seeds of every kind, together with the knowledge and skills (they even took books with them) necessary to establish a great civilization—all these being the necessary products of a long-established and widespread economy” (p. 160). Repeatedly he emphasizes their reluctance to leave and the fact that they were impelled to do so by the weather. This Jaredite pattern is incompatible with the pattern of ecological nomadism as developed by recent scholarship for a number of reasons. The first one is a question of what nomads do on the daily round; the second has to do with what causes nomadizing. The third is a problem of chronology.

Ecological nomads are not predominantly cattle herders, at least not those in Central Asia—they herd chiefly sheep and horses; cattle come in a distant third ahead of camels and goats. David Morgan, in discussing the ecology of steppe nomads in general, characterizes the herds and their usage as follows:

The nomads relied above all on sheep and horses. Sheep provided skins for clothing, wool for the manufacture of the characteristic felt tents (gers, often called yurts in the West) that were the nomads’ homes, mutton, milk and cheese for food, and dung for fuel. Horses were the principal means of transport, both of men and goods, and were essential for

---


9 We must stress that since Nibley compared the Jaredites to Central Asian nomads, we shall also focus on this type of nomadism. Hence, other types, ecological or otherwise, which may feature different
hunting, which was a major source of food and incidentally a method of military training...and they were needed for warfare. Their milk, when fermented, provided the staple alcoholic drink, *qumis.*...Less important, but still an integral part of the stepped economy, were camels, and oxen, which were used to pull carts.10

Therefore, although cattle are present, they are never so predominant as they appear in Nibley, nor as central to the nomadic ethos as compared to the role of beef in the "heroic age" described by Nibley in *There Were Jaredites.* For instance, the typical ratio of sheep to cows among the Mongols of the decade of the 1950s was 91 sheep to 17 cows per family, or 16 sheep to 3 cows per individual.11 The most valuable herd animal is clearly the sheep, although the most prized and the greatest source of wealth is the horse.12

Furthermore, a distinction must be made between the nomadic pastoralists and nonnomadic pastoralists who practice transhumance, such as the Manchu-Šolons. Transhumance, according to Krader, is "where farming and herding jointly comprise the subsistence base of a community."13 "Under transhumance," continues Krader, "the livestock not being used for food or work are driven out to the pastures seasonally by village herdsmen while the core of the village remains at home and tills the soil.... Nomadic pastoralism, in contrast to mixed elements than those of the Central Asiatic mode, will only rarely be considered in this review.


12 On this point see Denis Sinor, "Horse and Pasture in Inner Asian History," *Oriens Extremus* 19 (December 1972): 171-83.

pastoralism and farming, established itself later.\textsuperscript{14} Nibley cites the Manchu-Solons as a typical example of hunters, cattlemen, or cultivators, each guise being adopted “as conditions require or permit” (p. 187); but they were not nomads.

When the nomad wandered, he was not migrating or emigrating but nomadizing. This means that he followed his flocks of sheep and herds of horses from one pasture to another,\textsuperscript{15} usually over a set route that took him through territory over which he claimed some sort of temporary ownership. Marco Polo described the ecological nomadism of the Mongols in these words:

The Tartars (his name for the Mongols) commonly feed many flocks of cows, mares and sheep, for which reason they never stay in one place, but retire to live in the winter in plains and in hot places where they have grass in plenty and good pastures for their beasts; and in the summer they move themselves over to live in cold places in mountains and in valleys where they find water and woods and good pasture for keeping their beasts.\textsuperscript{16}

The nomads were motivated by the exigencies of their economy. In contrast to this, the Jaredites were seeking a promised land (Ether 1:41-42); they were emigrants, not nomads. Furthermore, people fleeing from natural disaster or foreign depredation are refugees, again not nomads. Even if nomadic means are

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Imanishi Kinji posits that nomadism originated from herders following the natural inclinations of their flocks to migrate; he draws this from his observations that flocks in Mongolia often will leave one pasture even though it is still fit for grazing, and move onto another pasture even though it had been abandoned by a previous Mongol herder as supposedly deteriorated. See his “Nomadism: An Ecological Interpretation” in Silver Jubilee Volume of the Zinbun-Kagaku-Kenkyusyo, Kyoto University (Kyoto: Nissha, 1954), 466-79.

adopted as a mode of travel, such people do not become nomads.

The origins of nomadism are somewhat different than described by Nibley. Although in line with the scholarly thinking of his day, his theories of the influence of weather on nomadism are no longer held. Neither gradual desiccation nor droughts, as variously suggested by Toynbee or Huntington, can account for either the origins of nomadism or the setting in motion of nomadic peoples. Indeed, even the displacement of one people, including a nomadic one, by another conquering people is now viewed by some as no more than a literary topos.

Chronologically, nomadism did not develop until the ninth and eighth centuries B.C. All authorities on nomadism are in agreement on this point. Also, in Nibley's discussion of the origin of riding it is grossly anachronistic to refer to the Mongols as having lived during the sixth century B.C. (p. 189), for the name Mongol dates no earlier than the T'ang period (A.D. 618-907)—and even this is questionable—and the Mongols as a

---


18 On this see Detlev Fehling, Herodotus and His “Sources,” Citation, Invention and Narrative Art, tr. J. G. Howie (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1989), 46-48.

19 See n. 17 above.

20 For various theories on the dating and meaning of the ethnic name Mongol, see Sechin Jagchid and Paul Hyer, Mongolia’s Culture and Society (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), 6. For references to the scholarly debate concerning the earliest appearance of the name in Chinese historical
people did not emerge as a distinct polity until the tenth century, under the name of Tatar (Marco Polo's "Tartars"). It is true however, as Nibley asserts, that driving did precede riding: the mounted nomad was not portrayed in art until the ninth century B.C., signaling that he was already in full form by this time. Based on a closer look at certain specifics of nomadism, we must conclude that the overall pattern of Jaredite life in their Old World trek towards the promised land does not match that of ecological nomadism. This interpretive framework was most likely unintentional, caused by having overlooked the differences between ecological nomadism and other forms of pastoralism. Since the scientific study of nomadism had barely begun in the 1950s, it is no disparagement of Nibley to point out sources, consult Louis Ligeti, "Le Tabghatch, un dialecte de la language sien-pi," in Louis Ligeti, ed., Mongolian Studies, Bibliotheca Orientalis Hungarica XIV (Amsterdam: Grünner, 1970), 269, n. 9.

21 For the rise of the Mongols, see René Grousset, The Empire of the Steppes: A History of Central Asia, tr. Naomi Walford (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1970), 189-97; Paul Pelliot, "Researches sur les Mongols au temps des Leao et des Kin," Toung Pao 26 (1928-29): 126-28; and Paul Ratchnevsky, Činggis-Khan: Sein Leben und Wirken (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1983), 1-18. The most important medieval Chinese sources on the origins and rise of the Mongols, the Meng-Ta pei-lu or Record for Providing against the Mongol-Tatars by Chao Hung (1195-1246) and the Hei-Ta shih-lüeh or Epitome of the Affairs of the Black Tatars by P'eng Ta-ya (fl. 1214) and Hsü T'ing (fl. 1235), have been recently translated by Peter Olbricht and Elisabeth Pinks, Meng-Ta pei-lu und Hei-Ta shih-lüeh. Chinesische Gesandtenberichte über die frühen Mongolen 1221 und 1237, Asiatische Forschungen, Bd. 56 (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1980). Because of the complicated and composite nature of both the medieval works and the modern translation, it is safest to consult first Igor De Rachewiltz, "On a Recent Translation of the Meng-Ta Pei-lu and Hei-Ta Shih-Lüeh: A Review Article," Monumenta Serica 35 (1981-83): 571-82.

approaches, let alone specific studies, which were not yet devised at the time he wrote his work. Yet despite this early date, Nibley, by dint of his energy and erudition, has mined the sources for nomadism to yield interesting illustrations and valuable insights into many activities of the Jaredites. That his interpretive framework needs modification in no wise undermines the veracity of Ether’s account, nor lessens our debt to Nibley for illuminating many of the historical specifics in Ether. And even if some of these specifics do not permit us to classify the Jaredites as nomads, the fact that many of the details treated in the World of the Jaredites still retain their value today entirely justifies the reprinting of this work and its wide dissemination among current students of the Book of Mormon.

Epic Heroism in Jared

Nibley presents a different interpretive framework for the history of the Jaredites in the New World, that of “epic heroism.” Contained in the last section of volume 5 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, There Were Jaredites consists of five chapters, each of which delineates the “heroic milieu” of various eras and regions of the ancient world, and again employs the “epistolary form,” modified into a dialogue between “Professor F” and a newcomer, “Mr. Blank.”

Chapter one, “The Heroic Age,” sets the stage for discussion by defining an heroic or epic milieu to be the cultural equivalent of the Homeric world as described in the Iliad and Odyssey. Since similar themes and events are found in the epic poetry of other cultures, Nibley concludes that every ancient society went through an “heroic age” that is reflected in its native epic poetry, and that “epic poetry in general is not the product of a national spirit or a poet’s fancy but before everything else of the Völkerwanderungszeit—the time of the Great Migrations” (p. 289). This chapter, after elaborating on the meaning of the formidable German tag, is largely concerned with isolating the epic elements as discerned in world literature by H. Munro Chadwick.23 These elements in the main include the following: a concentration on individuals, usually an aristocratic hero with superhuman but not supernatural powers; a forced relocation or migration in a time of social collapse or world calamity; a military hierarchy and pervasive interest in warfare, often to the

extinction of entire peoples with only the king remaining alive; feasting and drinking in great castles, usually on beef, bread, and beer; and blood oaths and terrible revenge.24

The remaining chapters examine the “heroic ages” of various civilizations. Chapter two, “Egypt Revisited,” introduces the theme of nomads versus farmers and discusses the founding of Egypt by the first Pharaoh as a process of invasion and investment. It links up many Egyptian institutions with the heroic elements discussed in chapter one. Chapter three, “The Babylonian Background,” continues the process of linking up yet another culture with the heroic elements identified by Chadwick. We again see cattle-raiding invaders becoming conquerors and founding kings. In chapter four, “Epic Milieu in the Old Testament,” Abraham is held up as the representative figure from the Old Testament who typifies both wandering nomad and sedentary citizen, a marriage of lifestyles typical of the heroic age. However, this chapter soon leaves its stated theme and ranges widely over “the epic worlds of Ugarit and the Hurrians, the Hittites, the Phoenicians, the Greeks, the Persians, the Romans, the Celts, the Germans and Scandinavians, the Slavs, and the heroic cultures of the late Middle Ages, which take their cue from the Arabs and Persians,” as Nibley courteously warns the reader up front (p. 380). The Celts are actually not treated until the final chapter, “Our Own People,” where the heroic ages of the Celtic, Frankish, Gothic, Germanic, and Scandinavian traditions are surveyed. Nibley drops the epistolary style for most of this chapter in his need to cover much ground in little space; he resumes it to end the work. A subsection of this chapter treats “The Book of Ether as an Epic” and will receive most of our attention presently.

Also included are two appendices. “East Coast or West Coast” discusses a particular Native American legend on the founders of the Chichimeca peoples, who seem to have followed an itinerary similar to the Jaredites. Second, “How Far to Cumorah?” cites the Benjamin Cluff expedition of 1900 to South America as an example of how easily Nephite or Lamanite

24 Arnold Toynbee, A Study of History, 12 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1934-61), vol. 8, part 3, “Heroic Ages,” includes most of these same characteristics in his own conception of the heroic age which he posits was formed by the decay of civilizations into barbarous groups whose loyalty is turned from the state towards individual great men.
armies could have conducted continent-wide campaigns. They have been slightly edited from their original appearances in the 1952 edition of Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites.

As with the former work, Nibley again specializes in patterns, not specifics, especially those patterns found in the epic poems of the past. As a statement of methodology the following is typical:

As a historical source for "particular incidents and events" these old poems may not be worth a bean, but the sort of thing they describe, the things that happen recurrently, familiar scenes, and accepted patterns of behavior may be reliably reported and carefully confirmed in their verses. In other words, it is possible to detect in the early English ballads just such a genuine cultural milieu as one discovers in Homer. (p. 289)

The congruence between heroic ages widely separated in time and space is convincingly portrayed, and the pattern of Jaredite life is tailored neatly into this epic context. I see no reason, methodological or factual, to challenge the depiction of Jaredite civilization as "heroic" in both its larger concerns and daily details of existence. The interpretive framework hence fits the Jaredites and serves to bring them to life from historical contexts that are familiar to us. It is on an important side issue not affecting the framework that I must concentrate.

Early on Nibley hints that, because epic writing can take may forms but always deals with the same themes, the book of Ether was itself an epic (p. 292). The penultimate section of the fifth chapter, "The Book of Ether as an Epic," suggests that it has been divested of its epic form by the editing of Moroni but that originally Ether was a true epic. The proof, according to Nibley's persona Mr. Blank, is in the power of the work:

The most remarkable thing about a true epic is the way in which it surpasses all other literature in power and directness, a peculiar force and impact that renders a real epic impossible to imitate or translate. Only a real epic milieu can produce it. . . . Moroni in editing Ether is keenly aware of his inability to do justice to the writing before him. It just can't be done, he says, and he is right. He plainly tells us that the original Ether is a type of composition unfamiliar
to the Nephites, "who like ourselves obviously had no true epic literature." (p. 406)

Even if one is willing to concede that the powerful effect of part of the Book of Mormon derives from its genre instead of its message, there are major problems with considering the book of Ether as an edited epic.

The first problem is the nature of epics. Nibley states that "real epics tell the truth. . . . A real epic describes a real world" (p. 407). But the ancient Greeks, namely Plato and Aristotle, reserved the genre of tragedy for "imitating life." The epic was more concerned with larger-than-life portrayals of heroic struggles which may or may not have contained authentic details of everyday life. It seems certain that most of the details in Homer are authentic only for his own times, not for an earlier heroic age. And Toynbee has convincingly shown how little epic literature has to do with preserving historical facts.

Another problem is the basic function of epic literature in religious settings. Again, Plato criticized the genre of epic as

---


26 Plato, Republic II, 378, complains that the epic "tales of Homer and Hesiod" are erroneous representations of the nature of both gods and heroes—"as when a painter paints a portrait not having the shadow of likeness to the original." (On epic in Hesiod see n. 36 below). K. W. Gransden, "Homer and the Epic," in The Legacy of Greece (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 73, sums up the scholarly consensus on the historical authenticity of Homeric details as follows:

Homer's picture of the heroic age is primarily a poet's imaginative reconstruction of the past, in which are preserved many details of the world he knew. In that world there may have survived, if only in the confused form of legend and folk memory, elements from the Mycenaean Age itself. . . . It seems unlikely that for four centuries generations of oral bards could have maintained an accurate and uncontaminated record of the Mycenaean Age.

being insulting to the gods. Nibley’s single authority for an epic element underlying some biblical narrative, Cyrus Gordon, cites Exodus 15 as containing epic elements, being ultimately based on an epic source. But the genre of epic, according to Robert Alter, is entirely unsuitable for the religious world of the Bible. He comments that in the Bible

There could be no proper epic poetry, with its larger-than-life human figures and its deities conceived in essentially human terms, but there could be narrative verse on a smaller scale celebrating God’s power in the affairs of man, as in David’s victory hymn, or preeminently, in the triumphal Song of the Sea.

Not only is the spirit and function of epic foreign to the Bible, but this particular passage, the “Song of the Sea,” Exodus 15:1-19, has been interpreted by various scholars in other than epic terms. Umberto Cassuto calls it a psalm, specifically an “Ode of Triumph.” Frank Michaeli also defines it as a psalm and concludes that it was a “liturgical conclusion” to the narrative of Exodus 1-15, a “hymn of victory and deliverance.” Theodore Gaster terms it a “chante-fable.”

Robert Alter stresses its place

---

28 Plato, Republic II, 379.
29 Gordon states, as quoted by Nibley: “The Exodus is the epic of the Birth of a Nation, even though most of the text is now in prose form. Fortunately, chapter 15 of Exodus preserves a sizable poetic fragment. . . . The narrative content includes epic episodes” (443 n. 102).
32 Frank Michaeli, Le Livre de l’Exode. Commentaire de l’Ancien Testament, II (Neuchatel, Switzerland: Delachaux & Niestle, 1974), 128, 130. Michaeli’s theory of the provenance of this song is as follows: its oldest layer was probably a popular chant which originated close to the time of the events celebrated, passed on orally until developed liturgically around the time of either the conquest of Canaan or the kingdom of David (ibid., 133).
33 A “chante-fable,” the insertion of song into prose narrative, was used to involve the audience, to relieve tedium, and to prevent strain to the voice of the reciter of the narrative. See Theodor H. Gaster, Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 240-41.
as an integral part of the narrative, not, we may add, as an archaic element from an early epic incorporated into the narrative.\(^{34}\) Apart from this specific passage, considerable doubt has been thrown on the whole concept of epic elements underlying parts of Bible, something that has been taken for granted but never convincingly proven.\(^{35}\) After all, such sacred songs as those found in D&C 84:99-102 are evidence that songs and other oral genres need not be taken for residual epic verses that were later incorporated into historical narratives. We must take care to avoid imitating Macaulay, who after searching in vain for ancient Roman lays, ended up inventing his own!

Another problem is the individualist theme of epics. The focus tends to stay on one protagonist or hero, not a whole succession of individuals as in Ether’s treatment of various kings in succession.\(^{36}\) And the major clusters of epic motifs re-


\(^{36}\) My colleague Daniel Peterson points out that the Persian epic *Shah Nameh* is, in fact, an epic portrayal of successive kings. Of course, one may argue over the strict definition of epic and just which texts to compare with Ether. For instance, the ancient Greeks defined epic in terms of meter; hence anything, including Hesiod, was an epic if it was composed in dactylic hexameters. We should go too far afield, however, if we consulted the *Theogony*, let alone the *Works and Days*, in our examination of Ether. I have solved the difficulty inherent in definition by opting to confine my comparison to nomadic epics, in particular those of the early Turks and the Mongols (see text at on. 36-37). But a prominent feature of general epic literature does seem to be its concentration on one heroic individual; and even if several “masterful individuals” share the action, one “individual-in-chief,” according to John Clark, remains the center of the story; see John Clark, *A History of Epic Poetry* (New York: Haskell House,
semblé nothing in Ether. Since Nibley has focused on nomadic parallels of the Jaredites, let us cite as an example the typical nomadic motifs for Mongolian heroic epics:

1. Period
2. Origin of the Hero
3. Homeland of the Hero
4. Appearance, Character, and Possessions of the Hero
5. His Horse as Friend and Helper
6. Departure and Emigration
7. Friends and Helpers
8. Danger
9. Enemies
10. Encounters with Enemies and Battle
11. Catalogue of Magical Powers of the Hero
12. Courtship
13. Marriage
14. Return

None of these motifs are particularly relevant to the Jaredite heroes with the exceptions of motifs eight through ten, all having to do with battle and its attendant dangers and foes. The pattern of the Mongolian heroic epic, at least, is absent in Jared.

The Turkish epics come somewhat closer. The following elements typify them: aristocratic heroes, heroic women, a setting around tents and tent life, feasting, boasting of courage and strength, attention to details of etiquette and procedure, horses, and minute description of apparel and weapons. Even though many of these characteristics find parallels among the Jaredites, the fact that Turkish epics are wholly individualist in their focus tends to disqualify them for comparison with a hypothetical Etherian epic. For Jaredite narrative, far from focusing on individual exploits, reads much more like a

1964), 47-49; cf. further Bowra, Heroic Poetry, chap. 3; and W. T. H. Jackson, The Hero and the King: An Epic Theme (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).


chronological “king list” than an edited account based on an original individualist epic or epics. Nibley had earlier hinted towards such a provenance for the book of Ether on p. 197 of the World of the Jaredites, stating that “the book of Ether is a typical ancient chronicle, a military and political history relieved by casual references to the wealth and splendor of kings.” Recently John Welch has suggested that an actual “king list” was the probable provenance after studying possible sources for the record of Jared. 

But notwithstanding the above arguments based on the common characteristics of the epic, if Nibley is right that the general pattern of the epic is present in Ether even if specific elements have been edited out by Moroni, an examination of the text might betray some residual epic features. For this examination it is first necessary to characterize briefly Nephite historiography in general, against which the pattern of narrative in Ether may be compared.

Some recent studies on the Bible have stressed the close relationship between Hebrew historiography and contemporary Greek practice. Since early Nephite historiography was based on biblical models brought over from Jerusalem, one profitable approach to the Book of Mormon is to compare its historiography to both Hebrew and Greek historical works. Although this is not the place to survey Nephite historiography, one can state that in general one major structural element is the common tendency found in Herodotus of a narrative consisting of separate logoi connected by framing statements. For instance,


41 As used by Herodotus, logoi (singular logos) meant “stories” or “arguments” (Henry R. Immerwahr, Form and Thought in Herodotus. American Philological Association, Monograph 23 [Cleveland: Western
the first *logos* in 1 Nephi after the introductory first chapter, although a minor one, is Nephi's seeking and finding the knowledge which had earlier been revealed to his father (1 Nephi 2:16-23). This *logos* is framed by statements that allude to the tent of his father (1 Nephi 2:15; 3:1). The following outline reveals the structural pattern found in the first fourteen chapters of 1 Nephi as divided into individual *logoi*, each framed by introductory and concluding statements couched either in identical or similar terms, printed here in bold letters:

1 Nephi  2:15  tent
        16-23  Nephi's desire to know things Lehi saw; obtains this knowledge
        3:1  tent

3:9  journey, tent
4:10-37  brass plates obtained
4:38  journey, tent

5:7  tent
5:8-7:21  three digressions
7:21  tent

7:22/8:2  tent, tarry in wilderness
8:2-38  dream of tree of life

Reserve University, 1966), 14). Seth Bernardette defines *logos* as a "teaching," which he contrasts with an "inquiry" (*historie*); see his *Herodotean Inquiries* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 5. But modern students, beginning with Max Pohlenz, have applied the term *logoi* to thematically related units or episodes. For detailed treatment consult Max Pohlenz, *Herodot der erste Geschichtsschreiber des Abendlandes* (1937; repr. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1961), 43-58. Immerwahr's *Form and Thought in Herodotus* is probably the best-known representative of the approach of isolating individual *logoi* and examining their interrelationships. He defines a *logos* as "basically a series of items, which are themselves smaller *logoi*, held together by certain formal elements signifying in turn a selection (but never the totality) of unifying themes" (ibid., 15). As examples he identifies the *logoi* of Croesus, the campaign of Cambyses against the Ethiopians, Skythian ethnography, and the like (see ibid., 329-62, for a comprehensive index of *logoi* in Herodotus; p. 329 gives references to the exhaustive [and slightly differently defined] catalogues of *logoi* of Felix Jacoby and John Myres).
The same pattern of “framing sentence—logos—framing sentence” holds for the rest of 1 Nephi, and indeed continues throughout the Book of Mormon in varying degrees of consistency. In contrast to this, the structure of Jared is strikingly different. Although the early parts of Ether follow the same pattern, albeit less densely, once the narrative turns from the brother of Jared to the kings of the New World Jaredites, the structuring principle is a formulaic statement of kingly succession, such as “And he reigned in his stead” or “he began to reign in the stead of his father” (see Ether 7:3, 10; 8:1; 9:6, 14-15, 21-22, 25, 27; 10:4, 13, 16-18, 30; 11:4, 14). Thereafter the narrative treats Ether’s mission and account of the fall of Jaredite civilization. At no stage are there enough logoi on individual kings to justify positing an original epic source except for the narratives of the brother of Jared and Ether; but at these two points there is no clustering of epic elements that include the full range of motifs found in the typical epic. Therefore, Nibley
is certainly correct in contrasting Nephite with Jaredite historiography, but the latter was not based on the epic pattern.

**Conclusion**

*The World of the Jaredites* and *There Were Jaredites* share a unity of style in that the same skillful blend of humor, ironic insight, and witty conversational format (epistolary in the former, dialogue in the latter) are employed, which allows us to listen to a rapid-fire exchange that covers many different themes and numerous details without getting bogged down at any point. I found Nibley’s light-handed tone delightful, and amusing phrases were well-placed to enliven the text (for example, the phrase “lisp the chaste Mongolian”).

Since we have discovered that the Jaredites did not suddenly switch from nomadism to a sedentary lifestyle upon arrival in the New World, but rather resumed an interrupted ecology, both works now mesh well as they trace the evolution of Jaredite society from refugee migration to sedentary heroism. They share a unity of approach, treating both Jaredite ecology and historiography—which are vastly different from Nephite models.

Both works creatively illuminate many historical facts in Ether. In the first work we found that the specifics of ecological nomadism disqualified it from serving as an interpretive framework for early Jaredite history. But although we have revised and updated Nibley’s campaign strategy, the military might he has marshaled—the raw data of history—remain powerfully operative. In the second work we found that the specifics of the heroic age made a fitting framework for later Jaredite history. Speculations about an epic source for Ether were found groundless, but this fact in no way vitiates the validity of the rubric “epic heroism.” His battlements hence have survived with only a minimal adjustment of the logistical support system. All in all, Nibley’s defenses remain up in both works. For allied students of the Book of Mormon, they form formidable rallying points for the cause; for the neutral or enemy student, they remain forbidding outposts against either complacent neglect or outright assault. Quite a feat, General Nibley.

Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

Many of the contributors to the recently published *Festschrift* honoring Hugh Nibley took the opportunity of paying explicit tribute to him at the commencement of their articles.¹ For no better reason than sheer inattentiveness, I did not, and I would like to remedy that defect, at least partially, here. I am only one of a number of scholars and amateurs in the Church who owe their interest in antiquity and comparative religions, and much of their approach to these vast subjects, to the example set by Hugh Nibley. He has always been an inspiration, even if his brilliance has not infrequently also been an intimidation. And although few of us still suspect that he has transcended human limitations, most of us—myself emphatically included—have found in the course of our own researches that his general orientation and indeed many of his particular insights have continued to hold up remarkably well.

The lengthy collection of Nibley’s essays published as *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* gathers together in one convenient place pieces which had previously either been scattered in a multitude of different publications of varying accessibility or (in the cases of “Freemen and King-Men in the Book of Mormon,” “The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After,” and the title essay) not published at all. The essay called “The Book of Mormon: True or False?” features an important new addendum, based on remarks delivered in Portland, Oregon. These are interesting pieces, and the volume might perhaps serve as a good introduction to his thought on the Book of Mormon, since it spans virtually his entire publishing career—the first article appeared originally in 1953—and furnishes bite-sized samples of almost the whole range of his thought on the subject. “New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study” (pp. 54-126) is

probably the best statement of Nibley's methodology available in print.

Naturally, there is some repetition among the essays. But there is also impressive variety. In "The Boy Nephi in Jerusalem" (pp. 207-11), for example, we see Nibley as a writer for children—a role seldom associated with him, but highly indicative, I think, of his nonpublic character. "The Mormon View of the Book of Mormon" (pp. 259-64) includes a marvelously concise statement on the subject written originally for the multilingual Catholic journal Concilium. (I first ran across it as a missionary, in an elegant German translation, and actually used it with some of my more intellectually inclined investigators.) "Howlers in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 243-58) briefly discusses some of the apparently ridiculous elements in the book which are, in fact, "the best index to its authenticity" and which clearly demonstrate that "the book was definitely not a typical product" of the nineteenth century. On pp. 221-22, we find Nibley's challenge to his religion students to write their own Book of Mormon during the semester. The fact that nobody has yet accepted his challenge should give pause to those who glibly dismiss the Book of Mormon as—what else could it possibly be?—merely the work of a frontier yokel with "a measure of learning and a fecund imagination."2 ("Mrs. Brodie," Nibley remarks on pp. 301-2, "saw in the Book of Mormon only the product of a completely untrained, unbridled, undisciplined imagination that ran over like a spring freshet.")

In essays such as "Just Another Book" (pp. 148-69), "The Grab Bag" (pp. 170-81), "What Frontier, What Camp Meeting?" (pp. 182-92), and "The Comparative Method" (pp. 193-206; cf. 230, 300), Nibley argues powerfully (if somewhat ahead of his time) against the currently blooming environmentalist explanation of the Book of Mormon, in which the entire Restoration is seen as the by-product of Joseph Smith's undisciplined imagination mixed either with (a) folk "magic," (b) scraps of rural Protestantism, (c) republican ideology, (d) socioeconomic insecurities, or (e) anything else you care to name.3 "The Book of Mormon critics have made an

---

2 The phrase is from Fawn M. Brodie, No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, 2d ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1975), 69, but the sentiment can be found in the writings of many others of similar inclination.

3 Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 128: "In recent
art of explaining a very big whole by a very small part,” Nibley points out.

The game is to look for some mysterious person or document from which Joseph Smith might have got the few simple and obvious ideas and then cry triumphantly, “At last we have it! Now we know where the Book of Mormon came from!”

“If only someone will show me how to draw a circle,” cries the youthful Joseph Smith, “I will make you a fine Swiss watch!” So Joachim or Anselm\(^4\) or Ethan Smith or Rabelais or somebody takes a stick and draws a circle in the sand, and forthwith the adroit and wily Joseph turns out a beautifully running mechanism that tells perfect time!

This is not an exaggeration. The Book of Mormon in structure and design is every bit as complicated, involved, and ingenious as the works of a Swiss watch, and withal just as smoothly running. With no model to follow and no instruction of any kind (Where was the model? Who could instruct?), the writer of that book brought together thousands of ideas and events and knit them together in a most marvelous unity. Yet the critics like to think they have explained the Book of Mormon completely if they can just discover where Joseph Smith might have got one of his ideas or expressions! (p. 175)\(^5\)

---

\(^4\) I have corrected, here, an obvious typographical error (“Anslem,” for “Anselm”). There are a few too many of these, but they can be corrected in a future printing.

\(^5\) From another perspective, the words of a distinguished American historian who happens to be a Latter-day Saint, Professor Richard L. Bushman of Columbia University, are relevant here: “It is important to recognize that the Book of Mormon was more than a patchwork collection of theological assertions, or a miscellany of statements about the Indians. . . . We may miss the point if we treat the Book of Mormon as if it were that kind of hodgepodge. Sometimes we employ a proof text method in our analyses, taking passages out of context to prove a point. We seek to associate a few words or an episode with Smith or his time, the Masons
Taking aim at one of the favorite weapons in the environmentalist arsenal, Nibley rejects close parallel passages as proof of fraud (p. 88). Yet he does not repudiate the search for parallels altogether. (How could he, since it is his own approach?) “The comparative method as such is neither good nor bad. It can be abused (what tool cannot?), and to condemn it outright because of its imperfections would put an end to all scholarship” (p. 193). (Oddly, in my experience it has always been those hostile to Nibley’s enterprise who have summarily dismissed what they like to term “parallelomania.” Then they often turn right around and point out purportedly damning parallels to Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century environment without the slightest apparent sense of incongruity.) But there are other, more fundamental flaws in the environmentalist project. Among these is the fact that Joseph Smith and Mormonism, which we are now supposed to regard as quintessentially American, were regarded by their contemporaries as anything but that. “We know exactly,” Nibley observes (p. 407; cf. 152), “how his neighbors reacted to the claims of Joseph Smith, and it was not (as it has become customary to insist) with the complacent or sympathetic tolerance of backwoods ‘Yorkers,’ to whom such things were supposedly everyday experience: nothing could equal the indignation and rage excited among them by the name and message of Joseph Smith.”

Still, even this does not exhaust the fundamental weaknesses of the environmentalist position. “For many years,” Nibley says (p. 537), “critics of the Book of Mormon fondly believed that if they could find some striking parallel in the Bible or in U.S. history to a situation in the Book of Mormon, they had proven that Joseph Smith had plagiarized the whole thing. But when equally striking parallels are found to things of which the ancient Book of Mormon writers, had they existed, would

---

here, republican ideology there, then a touch of Arminianism or of evangelical conversion preaching. While that kind of analysis may have its uses, it has had disappointing results, and the danger is that we will lose sight of the larger world which the book evokes.” Richard L. Bushman, “The Book of Mormon in Early Mormon History,” in Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, eds., New Views of Mormon History: Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 5.
surely have been aware, but of which no one in Joseph Smith’s day could have had an inkling, they were ignored.”

Nibley’s use of the past tense notwithstanding, such refusal to consider ancient evidence continues to the present. Indeed, I would contend that it is actually growing in strength in certain circles, where it is considered a token of methodological sophistication. But Nibley will have none of this. He calls upon “the well-established rules of textual criticism” (p. 54) to argue that serious study of the Book of Mormon requires “examination of its claims as if they were valid” (p. 127, emphasis in the original; cf. 499). “To begin with, says Blass, ‘We have the document, and the name of its author; we must begin our examination by assuming that the author indicated really wrote it.’ You always begin by assuming that a text is genuine. What critic of the Book of Mormon has ever done that? One can hear the screams of protest: ‘How unscientific! How naive! How hopelessly biased!’ . . . Why not assume that it is false, as its critics regularly do? Because, says Friedrich Blass, once you assume that a document is a fake, no arguments and no evidence to the end of time can ever vindicate it, even if it is absolutely genuine” (pp. 55-56). Once Othello had begun to listen to Iago’s insinuations, virtually no evidence could have proven Desdemona’s innocence. All pointed to her guilt. Yet Desdemona was innocent, and Othello was tragically, fatally wrong.

This is a point with which environmentalist critics of the Book of Mormon simply must come to terms. Yet I see no sign of their doing so. Instead, my own experience validates precisely what Nibley says. I have been told countless times that my position, which assumes the Book of Mormon to be what it claims to be, is hopelessly irrational and unscholarly. At the same time, I have been informed repeatedly that the other position, which assumes the Book of Mormon to be at best a pious fraud, is the ultimate in scientific objectivity (whatever that

6 Compare the refusal of most Mesoamericanists to consider the possibility of any ancient contact between the Old and New Worlds, mentioned by Nibley on p. 267. The idea that scholarship, as actually practiced, is objective and value-neutral has long since perished among most of those who monitor what goes on in practical reality. See William Barrett, The Illusion of Technique (Garden City: Anchor Doubleday, 1978), 3-117, for evidence that even mathematics and symbolic logic—surely the purest of purely theoretical disciplines!—are not exempt from this judgment.
may be). Nibley did not overstate the situation when he said that anyone who undertakes to examine Mormonism's claims from a faithful perspective is "automatically branded as prejudiced merely by taking the job" (p. 127). Indeed, one of his very vocal critics even went so far on one occasion as to link friends of mine with the forces of irrationalism—among whom he specifically listed the Ayatollah Khomeini and Plato (!)—merely because they argued (plausibly, in my opinion) that elements of Freemasonry have ancient parallels. No attempt was made to refute their logic; indeed, scarcely any reference was made to their arguments. It was a *tour de force* of historical and philosophical misinformation, not to say of *ad hominem* illogic, but it did make one point clear beyond cavil: To be on the Wrong Side is to ally oneself with darkness and superstition, and, one almost feels, to risk the attention of the environmentalist Thought Police. Yet it seems obvious to me that the two assumptions, for and against the Book of Mormon, are at worst equally unobjective, and that the negative assumption cannot by any reasonable standard be regarded as somehow privileged. Indeed, Nibley makes a most intriguing case that the positive assumption is actually the more methodologically sound.

The lengthy book review entitled "Bar-Kochba and Book of Mormon Backgrounds" (pp. 274-88) is well worth reading for its depiction of believable Near Eastern elements in the Nephite record. Among other things, it shows that the masculine personal name "Alma," still the object of much ignorant snickering among anti-Mormons, fits perfectly into an ancient Near Eastern setting (p. 282; cf. 310). The discussion of "The Lachish Letters," found at pp. 380-406, illustrates how well the first chapters of the Book of Mormon match what we are only now coming to know from other sources about the Jerusalem of Lehi's day. Referring to those letters and the Book of Mormon, Nibley notes that "both records paint pictures which are far removed from those supplied in any other known sources, and yet the two pictures are as alike as postcards of the Eiffel Tower" (p. 383). "Joseph Smith was either extravagantly lucky in the opening episodes of his Book of Mormon," Nibley concludes, "or else he had help from someone who knew a great deal" (pp. 401-2).

Some essays represent Nibley in his role as the loyal critic of modern Mormondom. Usually, in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, while he criticizes clearly he does so by indirection:
"We must not forget those Book of Mormon super-good guys, the Zoramites—hard working, independent, fiercely patriotic, brave, smart, prosperous Zoramites—strictly attending their meetings and observing proper dress standards. What a perfectly wonderful self-image!" (p. 488; cf. 521). In this respect, his is one of the most challenging of contemporary Latter-day Saint voices, and many have come to see his social and ethical writings as among his most important. Some of those, in fact, who reject his theological and historical beliefs, but who nonetheless seem possessed of a residual admiration for him, profess to see in his "progressive" politics the one feature of his thought that is destined to last. Indeed, for a few who repudiate every other aspect of Mormon belief it has seemed a godsend to find Nibley apparently on their side in criticizing institutional and social Mormonism. But Nibley is not on their side, and he gives cold comfort to those who denigrate the leaders of the Church. Instead, he offers "the Book of Mormon admonition to be more patient with the imperfections of the church and less patient with our own. The church is a training school in which everyone is there for the training. So don't waste time criticizing the authorities" (p. 564). He insists throughout his voluminous writings that it is we, with our ideologies and habits, who will be judged according to the revelations of God. The Church and the scriptures are not to be judged according to human ideologies, with beliefs picked and chosen according to how they suit our own inclinations. Our first loyalty is to God and his kingdom, and not to any corporation or sociopolitical movement or scheme of material enrichment.

Nibley will have no part of any view of the gospel that does not acknowledge its absolute claims upon us. Nor is he willing to accept halfway views of the Book of Mormon as, say, inspired fiction or a nineteenth-century pseudepigraph. "Joseph Smith was either telling the truth or he was a criminal—not just a fool—and no sentimental compromises will settle anything" (p.

8 It is as a social critic—as "the Mormon essayist Hugh Nibley"—that he was quoted recently in a piece by the noted non-Mormon writer Wendell Berry. See Berry's What Are People For? (San Francisco: North Point, 1990), 99.
65). And Nibley leaves no doubt as to where he stands on the matter:

The only alternative to Joseph Smith’s explanation is to assume . . . the existence of a forger who at one moment is so clever and adroit as to imitate the archaic poetry of the desert to perfection and supply us with genuine Egyptian names, and yet so incredibly stupid as to think that the best way to fool people and get money out of them is to write an exceedingly difficult historical epic of six hundred pages. Endowed with the brains, perseverance, and superhuman cunning necessary to produce this monumental forgery, the incredibly sly genius did not have the wit to know, after years of experience in the arts of deception, that there are ten thousand safer and easier ways of fooling people than by undertaking a work of infinite toil and danger which, as he could see from the first, only made him immensely unpopular. This is the forger who never existed. (p. 59)

Nibley is not infallible. Surprisingly enough, given his legendary command of the Book of Mormon, he occasionally even makes mistakes in reporting what it distinctly says. (This should serve as a cautionary example to those critics of the Book of Mormon who have nowhere near Nibley’s control of the text, and who often leap to utterly unfounded judgments. The book is dauntingly rich and frightfully complex.) For example, contrary to the assertions on pp. 466-67 and 547, Alma the Younger did not give up the leadership of the church to serve as “a simple missionary.” He relinquished his political offices, “but he retained the office of high priest unto himself” (Alma 4:18; cf. 8:11, 23; 16:5). (And how, by the way, can Nibley be certain that Samuel the Lamanite held no ecclesiastical or other office? See p. 547. We know next to nothing about Samuel, or any other Lamanite.) Furthermore, Zeniff’s return to the land of Nephi did not occur during the days of Mosiah the Second, son of Benjamin, but, contrary to Nibley’s aside on p. 486, during the days of Mosiah the First, who was the father of Benjamin. (Or, perhaps, at the very latest, during the early reign of Benjamin himself. See Omni 1:23-30.) Finally, on pp. 359 and 552, Nibley mistakenly reverses the positions of Gadianton and Kishkumen. It is the latter who is the “professional hit man” (see Helaman 1:9-12; 2:3-9).
But Hugh Nibley is far more often right than wrong. (Perhaps it is significant that all of the three errors I have just identified come when he is engaged not in purely historical exegesis, but in social polemic.) Indeed, the experience of climbing laboriously to a new vista, only to find that Nibley has already been there—or, less metaphorically, of tracking down a new and exciting article only to realize, from Nibley’s characteristic marginal notations, that he has already read it—has become depressingly familiar. The retrospective essay on “The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After,” for instance, sheds fascinating light on the harlot “Isabel,” alluded to in Alma 39:3. Surely I must have read the essay before, but I ran across it again only after submitting the final copy of my own labored discussion of the subject to the publisher.9 On an earlier occasion, while still in graduate school, I decided for a term paper to review and extend the Arabic research Nibley had done in his 1964 article, “Qumran and ‘The Companions of the Cave.’”10 Arabic, I reasoned, was my specialty, not his, and so it would be comparatively easy and perhaps even useful to build on the foundation he had laid down. I soon found, however, that it would be the undertaking of more than a mere academic quarter even to read and assimilate the Arabic sources Nibley had already used, to say nothing of finding further ones. References abounded in his article not only to his favorite Arabic writer, al-Tha‘labi of Nishāpūr, but also to al-Ṭabarī, Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurtubi, al-Damiri, al-Bayḍawī, al-Nasafi, al-Hijāzī, al-Zamakhshari, al-Shirbīnî, and others. I was deeply impressed, and my high estimate of his work grew all the more as I saw how accurately he had interpreted his sources. Once again, he had beaten me to the prize. But I was not alone. As my research progressed, I noticed that Nibley had also scooped Marc Philonenko, a prominent European scholar of Near Eastern studies. An undeveloped throwaway line in a footnote, in which


Nibley suggests a parallel between the Qur’an and a passage in the Dead Sea Scrolls, had preceded by three years an article on the subject by an internationally famed scholar who had evidently not done his homework well enough to know that his own discovery was not original.11 This was comforting, somehow.

The Book of Mormon’s links to antiquity are astonishing, as Nibley has demonstrated at impressive length. “But if such a performance was beyond the capacity of anyone living in the 1820s, what is even more fantastic is the picture painted by the Book of Mormon of another world entirely, even more removed from the imagination of anyone living in 1830, namely our own world of the 1980s. And this is the world with which the Book of Mormon is primarily concerned” (p. 500; cf. 262). Nibley concludes the essay which gives this volume its title with the statement that, “only a few years ago,” what he has just said “would have sounded like the most extravagant science-fiction or futuristic horror-fantasy; it would have been quite unthinkable. In my youth I thought the Book of Mormon was much too preoccupied with extreme situations, situations that had little bearing on the real world of everyday life and ordinary human affairs. What on earth could the total extermination of nations have to do with life in the enlightened modern world? Today no comment on that is necessary” (p. 468; cf. 496, 526).

“Suddenly, we find ourselves there,” he says at the conclusion of “Last Call: An Apocalyptic Warning from the Book of Mormon.” “Scenes and circumstances that not long ago seemed as distant as Nineveh and Tyre suddenly come to life about us. Could Joseph Smith have made all this up?” (p. 531).

It is a very good question. One thing is clear: Hugh Nibley’s urgent advocacy of the contemporary relevance of the Book of Mormon, shared most notably with President Ezra Taft Benson, has revealed the fatuousness of efforts made by certain environmentalist critics of the book to limit its relevance and scope to the immediate period of its coming forth.12 Their


12 Dan Vogel is a prominent instance of this. For an example of these efforts, see his Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 5, and his “Mormonism’s ‘Anti-Masonick Bible’,” John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 9 (1989): 17-30.
motivation for doing so is manifest. Whole areas of discussion and entire categories of evidence would thereby be ruled inadmissible, and the battle would be fought on grounds entirely of their choosing. In fact, the battle would be over. But the powerful message of the Book of Mormon—increasingly relevant to our times—cannot be contained in so small a bottle.

Publication of Hugh Nibley’s *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* will, I hope, extend the scholarship and insights and moral passion of one of the book’s greatest students to yet wider audiences. It is to be enthusiastically welcomed.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

During the past half of a century, Hugh Nibley has become the apologist laureate of the Book of Mormon. One of his primary goals has been to show that criticism of the Book of Mormon has been premature and superficial. The loudest critics are typically those who have spent the least time examining the contents of the book. In their haste to condemn, they have not only failed to see what the book really says, but they have also failed to perceive that the Book of Mormon truly conforms to the milieu from which it claims to derive. Their lack of study of the book has led to an oversimplification of its complex history and culture.

*Since Cumorah* is one of Nibley’s finest attempts to elucidate the ancient Near Eastern background of the Book of Mormon. First printed in 1967, it was released in a new edition in 1988 as volume 7 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* being jointly published by Deseret Book and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.).

Nibley’s principal message is that the *Sitz im Leben* of the Book of Mormon is authentic. He points to the volcanic nature of the destructions which took place at the crucifixion of Christ, the precise detail of the olive culture discussed in Jacob 5, and ancient Near Eastern precedents for such customs as temple building, the order of battle, treading on garments as a sign of covenant, the use of the Rameumptom, methods of execution, the concealment of treasures and books, dancing maidens, the Liahona, and royal coronation rites. Over the years, other Latter-day Saint scholars have built on these ideas first discussed by Nibley.

Nibley also notes the many parallels between the Book of Mormon people and the Dead Sea Covenantors of Qumran, the Mandaeans, and the proto-Christian “Gnostics.” From ancient documents, he elicits evidence to support the Book of Mormon view that a knowledge of Christ and of the principles of the gospel was had prior to the coming of the babe of Bethlehem.

For a more complete view of Nibley’s researches on the historico-cultural background of the Book of Mormon, one must
also consult some of his other books, of which the following are especially important: *An Approach to the Book of Mormon; Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites; The Prophetic Book of Mormon; Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless; and Old Testament and Related Studies.*

Readers of the 1967 edition of *Since Cumorah* will find few major changes in the body of the text in the 1988 printing. What, then, justifies calling it a "second edition"? The answer lies in the history behind the book. Most of *Since Cumorah* originally appeared in articles written for the *Improvement Era* during the years 1961 and 1964-66. An appendix on pp. 409-14 makes a comparison of the location of all the materials in the magazine version, the 1967 book edition, and the present edition. When the material was gathered for the book, some was omitted. The 1988 edition restores the major deletions in the footnotes, and it is an invaluable tool to those who seek an in-depth view of Book of Mormon scholarship. There have been minor changes in the illustrations used, and a scripture index has been added.

Although Nibley was involved in the preparation of the second edition of *Since Cumorah*, he chose not to incorporate new findings in this work. However, had he done so, he would undoubtedly have added much new material now available. A good deal of additional information appears in some of his other works, all of which are scheduled for publication in the new F.A.R.M.S. series.

Unfortunately, as in nearly all works of scholarship or all research, there are certain small errors in the book. Here are some examples:

- Nibley states that Helaman and his 2,000 stripling warriors fought on the "eastern front" (p. 318); the Book of Mormon makes it clear that Helaman's campaign was by the western seashore (Alma 53:22).

- Though Nibley gives passing credit to Mormon for the abridgment of the story of the Nephite war in the days of the first Moroni (p. 293; cf. p. 291), he nevertheless generally errs in crediting the "younger Moroni" with this work (pages 298, 302-3, 306, 311). It was, in fact, Mormon who made the abridgement down to Mormon 7:10, where he bids his future readers farewell.

- Nibley suggests a comparison between the Zenos of the Book of Mormon and the biblical Kenaz, known as Zenez in a pseudepigraphical text (pp. 286-90). Kenaz, the brother of
Caleb and father of Othniel, was of the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:13-17). Zenos, on the other hand, appears to have been an ancestor of Lehi (3 Nephi 10:16), who was of the tribe of Manasseh (Alma 10:3).

Revision of the text could also have updated all statements like “more than a decade ago” (p. 54) to “a quarter of a century ago,” and the like.

Nibley’s off-hand remark about Ammon’s “karate” swordplay (p. 183) may not be as far-fetched as it seems. In 1969, a Latter-day Saint karate expert, Maurice W. Connell, wrote an article on “Karate in Ancient Egypt,” in which he listed evidences of karate techniques used by the sons of Jacob in the book of Jasher. Connell cited Nibley on another matter, but did not mention the story of Ammon or the Book of Mormon. Others have noted that some of the ritual stances depicted in Egyptian documents and in tomb and wall reliefs are similar or identical to karate stances.

Nibley devotes at least ten pages to discussions of the accounts of Lehi’s dream of the tree of life (1 Nephi 8, 11, 15) and Zenos’s parable of the olive tree (Jacob 5). In a very real sense, the tree is the same in both stories. Joseph Smith identified the tree of life with the olive tree, when he designated D&C 88 (see preface) as an “olive leaf . . . plucked from the Tree of Paradise, the Lord’s message of peace to us.” In Jewish lore, the tree of life is sometimes considered to be an olive tree, around which is entwined the vine, often believed to be the tree of knowledge. In the Dura-Europos synagogue, as Nibley points out (pp. 189-91), the tree of life is both a tree and a vine. So the olive tree is not out-of-place in the vineyard.

In the Book of Mormon, the tree represents not only the love of God, which was manifest in the giving of his Only Begotten Son (1 Nephi 11:25), but also the people of Israel, who are God’s means of blessing the whole earth.2 Lehi,

---

1 Maurice W. Connell, “Karate in Ancient Egypt,” Action Karate 2 (1969): 20-23. The same issue carried an article by another Latter-day Saint, Di Mau, “Did the Maoris Know Karate?” The author notes that there is evidence that the Maoris are Israelites.

2 Likening people and nations to trees, branches, and vines is not new. We find such allegories throughout the Bible, e.g., Psalm 1:3-5; 52:8; 128:3; Jeremiah 11:19; 17:6, 8; Isaiah 24:13; Ezekiel 31; Zechariah 4; Revelation 11:3-4. Typically, the righteous are likened to trees planted beside water, while the wicked are unfruitful trees cut down and burned.
evidently following Zenos's lead, compared Israel with an olive tree, whose branches would be scattered on the face of the earth, stating that "after the house of Israel should be scattered they should be gathered together again; or, in fine, after the Gentiles had received the fulness of the Gospel, the natural branches of the olive-tree, or the remnants of the house of Israel, should be grafted in, or come to the knowledge of the true Messiah, their Lord and their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 10:12-14).

When Laman and Lemuel complained to Nephi that they could not understand Lehi's words "concerning the natural branches of the olive-tree, and also concerning the Gentiles" (1 Nephi 15:7), he explained "that the house of Israel was compared unto an olive-tree . . . and behold are we not broken off from the house of Israel, and are we not a branch of the house of Israel?" (1 Nephi 15:12). He further explained that "the grafting in of the natural branches" referred to the people's acceptance "of the gospel of the Messiah" in the last days (1 Nephi 15:13), knowing "that they are of the house of Israel," and knowing "the gospel of their Redeemer" (1 Nephi 15:14). Then they will "receive the strength and nourishment from the true vine (1 Nephi 15:15) and, having been "remembered again among the house of Israel, they shall be grafted in, being a natural branch of the olive-tree, into the true olive-tree" (1 Nephi 15:16).

While Nephi spoke of his people being grafted into "the true olive tree," Alma compared the believing Nephites to "a branch . . . grafted into the true vine" (Alma 16:17), which is

Similar ideas are expressed in pseudepigraphical works. Here are some examples:


The Lord's paradise, the trees of life, are his devout ones. Their planting is firmly rooted forever; they shall not be uprooted as long as the heavens shall last, for Israel is the portion and inheritance of God. (Psalms of Solomon 14:2-5, in Charlesworth, The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha, 2:663)
Jesus Christ. Other allusions to the scattered branch are found in 1 Nephi 19:24; 2 Nephi 3:5; 9:53; 10:1; and Jacob 2:25. Ammon, speaking of the Lamanites, said, "God...has been mindful of this people, who are a branch of the tree of Israel, and has been lost from its body in a strange land" (Alma 26:36).

Critics of the Book of Mormon typically trace the olive tree parable in Jacob 5 to Romans 11:16-25 and accuse Joseph Smith of plagiarism. That the two passages are related cannot be doubted. But is Romans 11 the source of Jacob 5, or did Jacob and Paul draw upon an earlier, common source?

A partial answer to this question lies in the fact that even in the Bible Paul’s grafted branches have their precedents. Jesus, for example, likened himself to “the true vine” of which God is “the husbandman” and of which those obedient to Christ are “the branches,” bringing forth “much fruit,” while the disobedient are withered branches which are burned in the fire (John 15:1-6).

The Psalmist spoke of Israel as a vine taken out of Egypt and planted in its own land which, because of disobedience, was cut and burned (Psalm 80:8-16). Similarly, prophets such as Balaam (Numbers 24:6), Isaiah (Isaiah 60:21), and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11:16-17) compared Israel with trees or branches planted by the Lord. Similar ideas were expressed by the prophet Hosea (Hosea 9:10; 14:5-8).

In Revelation 22:2, the tree of life is said to have twelve branches with “twelve manner of fruits,” evidently representing the twelve tribes of Israel. Its leaves are “for the healing of the nations,” reminding us of God’s promise that the nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham’s seed (Genesis 12:3; 22:18).

Nibley likens Zenos’s olive tree allegory to the Thanksgiving Hymns from Qumran (pp. 283-85), wherein well-watered trees in the desert are the righteous in the world, while the wicked are cut down and burned. He further notes that in the Zenez/Kenaz story in Pseudo-Philo, the vineyard (symbolizing people) had corrupted the fruit, just as in Jacob 5 (p. 289).

Nibley notes that the language in the Zenez story is close to 4 Esdras and closer to Ezekiel (p. 287). Significantly, Ezekiel,

---

3 Cf. the parable of the twelve olive trees in D&C 101:44-45.
4 At the end of his explanation of Lehi’s comments regarding the grafted branches, referred to above, Nephi told his brothers that the parable referred to the scattering of Israel and the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that all kindreds would be blessed through his seed (1 Nephi 15:17-18).
speaking of the exile of the Jews, compared Jerusalem to a useless vine which would be burned (Ezekiel 15:1-6). He further compared Israel to a vine planted by the water, with fruitful branches, which is plucked up and the rods (rulers) burned, after which the tree is planted “in a dry and thirsty ground” (Ezekiel 19:10-14).

Even more important is the fact that Ezekiel 17 is, along with Romans 11, the closest biblical parallel to the Zenos parable in Jacob 5. Ezekiel compared the house of Israel to a tree from which an eagle “took the highest branch of the cedar: He cropped off the top of his young twigs, and carried it. . . . He took also of the seed of the land, and planted it in a fruitful field; he placed it by great waters, and set it as a willow tree. And it grew, and became a spreading vine” (Ezekiel 17:3-6). Another eagle took the vine and “it was planted in a good soil by great waters, that it might bring forth branches, and that it might bear fruit, that it might be a goodly vine” (Ezekiel 17:8). But the vine withered in the wind (Ezekiel 17:9-10). Ezekiel explained that the parable referred to the scattering of Judah (Ezekiel 17:11-21).

The simplest explanation for this recurrent scriptural theme is that prophets such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Paul drew upon the parable of Zenos in the same way Jacob did. The Zenos story also seems to have influenced at least one pseudepigraphical work, the eleventh chapter of the Odes of Solomon.5 In this passage, the king reputedly says, “My heart was proved and its flower appeared, then grace sprang upon it, and it produced fruits for the Lord.” Planted on the rock of truth, he drinks living waters (Odes of Solomon 11:5-8); and becomes “like the land which blossoms and rejoices in its fruits” (Odes of Solomon 11:12). He is taken to paradise, where “I contemplated blooming and fruit-bearing trees. . . . Their branches were flourishing and their fruits were shining; their roots [were] from an immortal land” (Odes of Solomon 11:16). “And I said, blessed, O Lord, are they who are planted in your land, and who have a place in your paradise” (Odes of Solomon 11:8). “Behold, all your laborers are fair, they who work good works. . . . For they turned away from themselves the bitterness of the trees, when they were planted in your own land” (Odes of Solomon 11:20-21).

Thoughts such as those I have expressed here are but an extension of ideas originally conceived by Hugh Nibley. A generation of scholars has grown up on his works and, as Nibley himself hoped, has begun building a superstructure of additional knowledge atop the foundation he laid. With the republication of Since Cumorah, a third generation will climb even higher.

But scholars are not the only ones who can profit from a study of Nibley's writings. In Since Cumorah, Dr. Nibley has left us an important spiritual message as well. Noting that it was written for our day, delivered by an angel of God, and translated with divine assistance, he concludes that the ultimate test of the Book of Mormon is whether it has any meaning for us. With this in mind, he concludes his work by listing the major messages of the Book of Mormon:

- Righteousness brings peace.
- Wealth is a fringe benefit, not a goal; it becomes evil when inequality results, bringing pride to the rich and misery to the poor.
- Ambitious people are a serious social problem; they bring about inequality because they seek wealth.
- Secret combinations are another serious problem; they bring about inequality because they seek gain and believe that the end justifies the means.
- The false philosophies encountered in the Book of Mormon are still with us today, challenging divine truths.
- One of the most oft-quoted statements in the Book of Mormon is the Lord's admonition to Lehi that the people will prosper if they keep the commandments, but will suffer if they commit sin.

These principles are not only important for us in today's complex and troublesome world; they are the very basis of the gospel, which teaches us to serve one another and to obey God. Along with faith in the atonement of Christ, they are the Lord's blueprint for temporal and spiritual salvation.

Reviewed by Noel B. Reynolds

This volume continues a now familiar format with its twenty-two papers from the Third Annual Book of Mormon Symposium sponsored by the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University. Several valuable contributions and the usual high production quality easily justify the modest purchase price.

The volume commences with another of Elder Dallin H. Oaks’s thoughtful and systematic treatments of a scriptural concept as he addresses the important distinctions between free agency and freedom, and the ways these can be preserved against Satan’s efforts to enslave. The preponderance of the other contributors are full-time teachers of religion at Brigham Young University, though some are Institute teachers, and two are from other Brigham Young University departments. The approaches reflected in the papers are appropriately varied and will therefore offer something of value to a wide range of readers. The layman who has heard anything about Blake Ostler’s theory of the Book of Mormon as a modern expansion of an ancient text will find in Stephen E. Robinson’s paper a clear and thorough explanation of the fatal confusions in all such naturalistic theories of sacred texts. This solid piece, which for many readers may prove the most useful paper, has little particular relevance to 2 Nephi, but the editors are to be commended for making it available with this collection.

While many of the articles aim at clarifying and endorsing one particular teaching or section of the text, a few attempt a comprehensive and systematic treatment of a scriptural theme. Of the latter group, Rodney Turner’s treatment of “the Lamanite mark” may come closest to being definitive, at least with respect to the internal Book of Mormon material. Turner’s essay is balanced and thorough and emphasizes the essential and often missed distinction between the curse by which the Lamanites were “cut off from the presence of the Lord,” and the dark skin which was given to distinguish them from the Nephites.

Several of the papers emphasize “the law of witnesses,” which they find taught and exemplified in Nephi’s writing. Of
these, Bruce Van Orden's article is most comprehensive and will become the starting point for future investigations of this topic. Edward J. Brandt's brief article brings together and analyzes the various evidences for the name "Jesus Christ" having been revealed to the Nephites. Gerald N. Lund attempts an interpretation of the fall of Adam, which, though it has many excellent points, is not likely to prove definitive, because of the complexity of the subject and its rich connections to other points of doctrine. A. D. Sorensen provides a careful and appropriately philosophical analysis of Lehi's teaching of "an opposition in all things." Sorensen's contribution derives from his ongoing work on the scriptural concepts of life and death, and lifts much of the discussion of Lehi to a new level, which will be important for subsequent efforts to interpret this important passage.

Some papers pick up on the themes of a promised land and future restoration. Alan K. Parrish examines the Lehi covenant from a modern perspective. Leland Gentry and S. Brent Farley emphasize the Isaiah passages and their significance and provide welcome aid to Book of Mormon readers who struggle with the Isaiah chapters.

John W. Welch and Robert L. Millet each take a broader look at the text and show us important new implications of its content and background. Millet traces significant evidences of the brass plates (as distinctive from the Old Testament) as an influence on Nephi. He also explores the possible relationship of the Joseph Smith Translation to the brass plates that is suggested in these same passages. In the most original paper in the volume, Jack Welch draws on his extensive knowledge of ancient law to help us understand the fuller implications of Lehi's last will and testament, showing most significantly how this episode constituted the tribes which defined the history of his descendants for a thousand years. Welch's analysis is brimming with valuable insights, but I personally missed some remarkable and intriguing observations advanced orally at the symposium but not included in the printed version.

Among the most interesting papers for me are those which attempt a detailed interpretation of a specific text. Larry E. Dahl provides a useful interpretation of "the doctrine of Christ" in 2 Nephi 31:32. This essay comes closer than any other to justifying the reference in the subtitle of the volume to doctrinal foundations. One can only guess why Dahl does not mention the equivalence between "the gospel of Christ" and "the doctrine
of Christ” suggested in 2 Nephi 30, Jacob 7, and 3 Nephi 11 and 27, which feature the same content and presentation as 2 Nephi 31. One also wonders why he does not make a stronger connection between his own previous work on faith, hope, and charity and the 2 Nephi 31 formula of “steadfastness in Christ,” “perfect brightness of hope,” and “a love of God and all men.” Dahl’s excursus on the baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost may seem out of proportion in his paper, but is an excellent contribution, and constitutes one of the best general explanations one could find on this important topic.

In a similar vein, Robert J. Matthews’s treatment of Jacob’s discourse on the atonement in chapter nine is a solid doctrinal contribution, though it does not attempt comprehensiveness. Rather, he chooses to deal with certain persistent misunderstandings about the atonement and the means by which people can gain a knowledge of its truth. Dennis L. Largey does an excellent job of presenting the anti-doctrines described by Nephi in chapter 28, showing their important relationships to scriptural teachings and to apostate beliefs current in the Christian world. In his analysis of messages to the Jews from the Book of Mormon, and especially 2 Nephi 25, Daniel H. Ludlow includes a fascinating comparison between the four writers most responsible for the Book of Mormon text (Nephi, Jacob, Mormon, and Moroni), in which he stresses the kinds of remarkable spiritual experiences they had in common. I was puzzled, however, by his insistence that Nephi and Jacob wrote specifically to us and not to their contemporaries in light of 2 Nephi 25:23 and other passages developed by Rex C. Reeve, Jr., in his discussion of the Book of Mormon as having been written for Lehi’s descendants. In a companion article, S. Michael Wilcox presents an excellent analysis of “Nephi’s Message to the ‘Gentiles’.” H. Dean Garrett’s treatment of Nephi’s farewell deals with many of the same themes.

Two other essays focus more on contemporary issues. Alvin K. Benson writes about the problem of science and religion, and Grant Underwood looks at Latter-day Saint interpretations of 2 Nephi 28-30 from the founding generation of the Restoration.

The introductory chapter, written by coeditor Monte S. Nyman, is not really intended as a paper, but rather distills for each chapter of 2 Nephi a list of “doctrines” that are articulated or assumed in the text, with a sentence or two of comment on those that are not developed elsewhere in the volume. The
editorial intent is doubtless to provide the reader with a reference list of the doctrines that occur in this important book of scripture, but unfortunately the unindexed format will not likely prove user friendly.

Even more puzzling is the extremely broad concept of doctrine that guides Nyman in his selections. Unlike any of the other authors, Nyman includes as doctrines any statements (or in some cases assumptions) for which 2 Nephi might be used as a proof text. Readers might be surprised to find included not only fundamental teachings of the gospel and the plan of salvation, but also a large list of historical facts or possibilities. In this view, it is a “doctrine” (1) that Satan’s objective is to dethrone God and (2) that the Church was organized in Old Testament times. Many of the “doctrines” listed are aspects of prophecies of future times. A review of this potpourri suggests that Nyman used the term to refer to any statement that can be supported by scripture or a logical inference from scripture, without any reference to its essential connection to the gospel of Jesus Christ. This unusually liberal concept of doctrine has two unfortunate effects. It obliterates an important distinction between the essential truths of salvation or the first principles and ordinances of the gospel—the “doctrine of Christ” as spelled out in 2 Nephi 31, and all other truths, whether trivial or important. It also tends to have the effect of cutting off discussion of matters that are not fully developed or clear in the scriptures and about which further inquiry might be productive. To use passing references in the Book of Mormon to settle the question of whether the Church was organized in Old Testament times avoids some of the most interesting questions. What church was it? The same as restored to Joseph Smith? Was Laban a ruler in the true church or in an apostate remnant? Zoram’s question can hardly answer this. How was it organized? Did it have twelve apostles? These are questions for scriptural and historical exegesis, and it does not help anything to call them “doctrinal.”

As editors, Monte Nyman and Charles Tate have done some things well, but have neglected other matters that do detract from the overall value of the volume and even the series. The Religious Studies Center, by virtue of its prestige and financial base, has the potential to provide the larger Latter-day Saint community with the highest quality of research and scholarship on our sacred texts. The production quality of the volume and the content of many articles meet that high
expectation. But only half the papers convince the reader that the authors have mastered the relevant literature on their various topics. One gets the impression that the editors and some of the authors do not place much value on the growing scholarly literature on these scriptural texts. Rather, one frequently notes terminology and assumptions that are unexplained and that seem to depend on an unarticulated oral tradition for both sense and import. Further, one might also wish that the editors would vigorously recruit in wider circles, soliciting the best papers possible on each topic, and truly fulfill the mission of a Brigham Young University Religious Studies Center.

The remaining mystery is the title of the book. I personally cannot understand how believing Latter-day Saints feel free to give their own books the exact titles of books of sacred scripture, distinguishing them only with different subtitles. The editors have chosen to do this for their entire Book of Mormon series, and it is an increasingly common pattern. In this particular case, the subtitle is not without its own mystery. One might expect that it derives from the doctrinal structure reported in 2 Nephi 31, as ably described in Dahl’s paper. But in his own treatment of this chapter, Nyman conflates this doctrine of Christ with the more comprehensive plan of salvation and then treats it as only one of many doctrines recorded in this rich source. He then surprises the reader further by explaining that this volume is labeled the “doctrinal structure” because it is built on the foundation of the preceding symposium.

The editing is of generally high quality. Word processors are wonderful aids to editors, but they also have dangers. The advantages are evident in the clean, readable text of well-edited articles from such a large group of authors. The exception is again chapter 2, for the editors have cheated themselves by allowing what appears to be an unedited version of Nyman’s manuscript to slip into the final volume with typical word processor errors uncorrected.

Reviewed by L. Ara Norwood

This is an anti-Mormon book. However, it is not "just another" anti-Mormon book. David Persuitte’s debut work is a thorough attempt to discredit Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling and to present the most complete case to date for the “View of the Hebrews” theory of the Book of Mormon.

It is not “just another” anti-Mormon book for the simple reason that, unlike his anti-Mormon colleagues, Persuitte is very open and candid as to his motives. He doesn’t put on any facades about how he loves the Mormon people and is only doing what is best for them. He doesn’t make exuberant claims of being interested in uncovering the “truth and only the truth.” And, most importantly, he never claims to be “objective” or to be “without bias” (something most anti-Mormons claim, either explicitly or implicitly). In all of these ways and more, he separates himself from his anti-Mormon predecessors.

Before launching into the heart of this review, it may be proper to present in capsule form a summary of the origins and history of the “View of the Hebrews” theory for the Book of Mormon.

I

In 1823, a man by the name of Ethan Smith (no relation to Joseph Smith) published the first edition of a book he called *View of the Hebrews*. A second edition was released in 1825. Ethan Smith was a pastor of a Congregational church in Poultney, Vermont. His book was a presentation of a theory he had concerning the origin of the American Indians. Pastor Smith believed the American Indians were descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel, and as such, needed to be restored to Christianity by the Protestants of the day. But how did this book ever get tied to the Book of Mormon?

In developing a body of parallels, Persuitte notes Ethan Smith’s use of a peculiar Isaianic locution and states, “I must admit I had hoped to find that expression in The Book of Mormon” (p. 112). He is to be credited for his candor.
In 1922, a man by the name of Couch wrote a letter to a Latter-day Saint friend asking five pointed questions concerning the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Couch, a non-Mormon from Washington, D.C., had read the Book of Mormon and concluded that it contained various anachronisms, so he wrote his letter asking, in essence, “How can the Book of Mormon be true if . . . .” The friend to whom he wrote was not equipped to respond to the questions, so he forwarded the letter to Elder James E. Talmage of the Quorum of the Twelve, who in turn delegated the task of answering the letter to Elder B. H. Roberts of the First Council of the Seventy.

Although the questions Couch posed failed to include any mention of View of the Hebrews, Roberts, with a gusto for controversy, debate, and thoroughness plunged head on into the task of trying to find answers to these five (and other) questions. He produced several studies on the subject, and one of these studies included a comparison of the Book of Mormon with the little-known work by Ethan Smith. Roberts was able to put together, in parallel form, eighteen similarities between View of the Hebrews and the Book of Mormon.

It is unclear what motivated Roberts to do the comparison, or where he first learned of View of the Hebrews, but he never intended his study to be published. It was published, however, first in 1956 when Mervin Hogan had a small portion of it printed in the Rocky Mountain Mason, then in 1980 when anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner printed the complete but unedited manuscripts, and again in 1985 when the University of Illinois Press released a poorly edited text.

From the time of Roberts in the 1920s until the University of Illinois Press published their volume in 1985, the View of the Hebrews theory received only limited attention. Other than Fawn Brodie discussing it in her 1946 book, No Man Knows My History, and Hugh Nibley analyzing Roberts’s parallels in his 1959 article in The Improvement Era, the only others to refer to the theory were anti-Mormons who are relatively

---

2 An early publication (perhaps the earliest) suggesting the Book of Mormon contained parallel material with View of the Hebrews is I. Woodbridge Riley’s The Founder of Mormonism (New York: Dodd, 1903), 124-30. This may be where Roberts first learned of the theory.

unknown to the Mormon population at large. To my knowledge it is not until Persuitte that we get a more thorough treatment of the subject.

II

Persuitte’s book consists of four major sections containing twenty chapters and an epilogue. This is followed by appendices consisting of four parts. The opening section of eight chapters focuses on Joseph Smith’s early life, his first vision, the 1826 trial, the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, and other like episodes of early Mormon history. All of these chapters are written to paint the particular portrait of Joseph Smith as conceived by Persuitte—that of a deceiver. Consequently, he borrows heavily from anti-Mormon sources for his information.

The second section contains two chapters which give some valuable background information concerning the View of the Hebrews theory. While spending a considerable amount of time in responding to previous apologetic statements by both Latter-day Saint and RLDS scholars concerning the View of the Hebrews theory for the Book of Mormon, it is in this section that the methodology used by Persuitte in his analysis of the two works in question first presents itself.

First, he tells us up front that the Book of Mormon does not (and would not) sound like View of the Hebrews because Joseph, being a deceiver, would not want to appear obvious in his deception. “Because of this, one must often look beyond the actual wording in the comparisons and analyze the underlying ideas and meanings in order to see the relationship between the two books” (p. 126). Second, Persuitte cautions us not to be surprised if the two works read differently because the viewpoints and the writing style of both works are different. “Again, because of this, one must look at the ideas each book presents rather than at the exact language and style” (p. 126). Third, he makes the comment that both books are dependent on the Bible and that this shows that Joseph was dependent not on one or the other, but on both View of the Hebrews and the Bible.

4 In addition to relying on the writings of Fawn Brodie, Wesley P. Walters, and others of the same ilk, he references E. D. Howe’s Mormonism Unvailed at least eighteen times in five of the first eight chapters.
Part Three contains the heart of the book. Here we have eight chapters loaded with comparisons between View of the Hebrews and the Book of Mormon. Much of this work seems to be original with Persuitte and thus seems to be his main contribution. The comparisons, mostly parallels, deal with the common topics of the voyage to the land of promise, things of a prophetic nature, the division into two camps of people, wars, the cycles between righteousness and wickedness, the visitation of Christ, and the final battles. The final chapter in this section presents an interesting theory of how the book of Ether functions in relation to the rest of the Book of Mormon.

It is not my desire to present an exhaustive analysis of Persuitte’s work. To do so would run several hundred pages and would not fit in this collection of book reviews. I will, however, present a few of my findings on his comparison of View of the Hebrews and the Book of Mormon.5

A careful examination of the passages in the Book of Mormon treated by Persuitte reveals that most of them deal with one or two broad themes: the land of promise (i.e., America) or the gathering of Israel. This is interesting because much of the Book of Mormon deals with additional Christian doctrine, yet few of these doctrinal passages were accused of being the result of pilfering from View of the Hebrews. The few times doctrinal passages are so accused, they are often found to have their alleged source not in View of the Hebrews but in some other nineteenth-century work such as Alexander Campbell’s Christian Baptist (see p. 122).

One of the more important parallels in his book is the one concerning the Title Page of the Book of Mormon (see pp. 109-11). Persuitte finds a corresponding theme in View of the Hebrews on pages 247 and 249. After reading the entire passage in View of the Hebrews, I would summarize its purpose as follows: If it can be demonstrated that the American Indians are actually members of the house of Israel, then those of us who are Christians should assist in bringing about their

5 Previous reviewers have approached this book in other ways. For instance, Kenneth Godfrey demonstrates Persuitte’s one-sided and limited use of the sources available, resulting in a book which raises questions that have already been answered in Mormon sources (see “Not Enough Trouble,” Dialogue 20 [Fall 1986]: 139-44), while John W. Welch takes Persuitte to task for faulty logic on a number of issues (see Pacific Historical Review [August 1986]: 619-23.)
conversion to Christianity, partly by teaching them of a heritage they have long forgotten.

I would summarize the gist of the message of the Title Page of the Book of Mormon in this manner: This sacred book of revelation you now hold in your hands was written for the benefit of all people (Lamanite, Jew, and Gentile); the purpose of this book of revelation is to affirm the primacy of the house of Israel, and to convince the world that Jesus is the Christ, the God over all.

The Book of Mormon purpose is much more concrete and far-reaching than the View of the Hebrews purpose. Note the tentative clause in View of the Hebrews, "Should we find ample conviction...". Notice the View of the Hebrews passage deals with one relatively small group of people (i.e., the Indians), whereas the Book of Mormon addresses the whole world population. Granted there are parallels here, but some of them are highly strained. Both do mention the word "remnant," both indicate that the people being referenced will not be cast off indefinitely, both mention the notion of "spirit of prophecy" or "prophetic spirit," both mention the name "Christ," and both contain the notion that God works in behalf of their respective nations. Yet even with these bits of surface resemblance, the View of the Hebrews passage, although referring to Christ as "the true star from Jacob, the Shiloh," does not seem to place as much emphasis on the divinity of Christ as does the most quoted portion of the Title Page, whose purpose is "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God." The word "convincing" is what makes the Title Page passage so climactic and central.

Now and then we find that a parallel does exist between the two works, but it involves something so common to human experience that citing such as an example of plagiarism is rather catachrestic. This occurs with Persuitte's analysis of Jacob 3:7 and View of the Hebrews, p. 175. Both mention the idea of Lamanites/Indians being kind and loving to their wives and children. None can dispute that a parallel does exist. But what of it? Is anything so unusual about that? Would Joseph Smith need to rely on Ethan Smith to dream up such a concept? And besides, the passage in Jacob is used in connection with condemning the Nephites for not being true to their marriage

---

6 Smith, View of the Hebrews, 247.
7 Ibid., 249.
vows; nothing of a similar nature is found in the corresponding passage in *View of the Hebrews*. Suffice it to say that this particular parallel (and several others like it) is rather trivial.

Occasionally Persuitte will cite a parallel between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon which probably should not have been cited even though a parallel did, in fact, exist. This is because on occasion, the passage from *View of the Hebrews* is not Ethan Smith’s work but actually a passage from the Bible. When this is the case, is it fair to say Joseph is borrowing from Ethan? Or is the Latter-day Saint position at least possible, that Nephite peoples were quoting from the brass plates or some other source common to both their prophets and those living in Palestine?

In contrast to the above, Persuitte provides some compelling examples of parallels, the interpretation of which needs further analysis before concrete conclusions can be attained. For instance, his analysis of Mosiah 8 is fairly persuasive (see p. 160). There are a number of common motifs found therein, including the finding of a large number of human bones, a land with adjoining waters, the presence of various types of buildings, a vast population, copper breast-plates, and swords with blades which suffer from rust. I credit him for finding that many resemblances, even though he had to rely on widely scattered passages from *View of the Hebrews* and in one instance he even relied on a source outside of *View of the Hebrews*.  

---

8 For examples, see ibid., 18, 19, 21, 22, 147, 153.
9 At first I thought I had discovered another error by Persuitte when I found that the 1981 edition of the Book of Mormon did not contain a hyphen between the words “breast” and “plates.” Since *View of the Hebrews* and Persuitte’s rendering of Mosiah 8:8 do contain the hyphen, this would be a fairly serious flaw on his part. But then I remembered that he is using the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon in his analysis and that that edition does contain the hyphen. However, the Printer’s Manuscript does not contain the hyphen but renders them as two separate words, “breast plates.” It is likely that the hyphen in the 1830 edition was actually the work of John H. Gilbert who was responsible for the punctuation of the Book of Mormon. (See George A. Horton, Jr., “Book of Mormon: Transmission from Translator to Printed Text,” in Paul R. Cheesman, ed., *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture* [Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988], 238-39.) This fact would soften the parallel somewhat.
On a few occasions, Persuitte seems to stack the deck a bit. An example of this is his treatment of 1 Nephi 19:13-14; 1 Nephi 22:5; and 2 Nephi 25:15, all of which he assumes come from the same brief passage in View of the Hebrews (see pp. 141, 144, 149-50). This tendency occurs several times, including an analysis of View of the Hebrews, p. 71, which Persuitte feels is the source for brief passages in 1 Nephi 22; 2 Nephi 1; 3 Nephi 15; and Mormon 8. A few of the more extreme examples of this include his analysis of View of the Hebrews, p. 249, which he feels is responsible for seven different Book of Mormon passages. He outdoes himself only in his analysis of View of the Hebrews, p. 172, which he feels is responsible for ten Book of Mormon passages, including 2 Nephi 5:1, 5; 2 Nephi 5:21-23; 2 Nephi 5:24; Enos 1:20; Alma 2:35-38; Alma 28:2; Alma 48:22; 3 Nephi 7:2-3; Mormon 6:4-10; and Mormon 8:2-7.

The questions we must ask ourselves here include: Is it likely that Joseph Smith read page 172 of View of the Hebrews and then used material from it in widely scattered passages as those cited above? Would 3 Nephi 7 seem more at home if verses 2 and 3 were absent? Or do those verses seem to fit naturally right in with the overall theme of the chapter? And just how similar are the various passages between the two books? Do they both contain identical words that are unusual, or do they merely mention similar themes?

A retrograde of the above occurs on pages 149-50. Here we find Joseph Smith accused of pilfering twelve different pages scattered throughout View of the Hebrews (comprising 13 different passages) to compose fragments of 2 Nephi 25:10-18. The odds against this happening the way Persuitte presents it are formidable at best.

Finally, it is important to examine the implications of Persuitte's parallels. He has done an enormous amount of work finding them, and it behooves us to ask ourselves just how much of View of the Hebrews he feels influenced Joseph Smith and just how much of the Book of Mormon he feels is influenced.

My analysis of Persuitte's parallels reveals that, with one exception, no single book in the Book of Mormon received more than 8.09% influence from View of the Hebrews (see chart 1). According to Persuitte, two of the fifteen books in the Book of

---

10 Smith, View of the Hebrews, 67-78.
Mormon received no influence whatsoever from View of the Hebrews, and in one book (Moroni), only one out of 163 verses had some influence. After doing a chapter-by-chapter analysis of the Book of Mormon, I found that, according to Persuitte, less than 4.5% of the Book of Mormon was influenced by View of the Hebrews. I also discovered by doing a page-by-page analysis of View of the Hebrews that, again according to Persuitte, 111 out of 284 pages (39%) of View of the Hebrews had some influence on that 4.5% of the Book of Mormon.

Chart 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Number of Verses with Parallels</th>
<th>Number of Verses in Book</th>
<th>Percentage of Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Nephi</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>618</td>
<td>8.09%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Nephi</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>779</td>
<td>6.67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacob</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>2.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enos</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jarom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omni</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words of Mormon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosiah</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>785</td>
<td>3.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>1975</td>
<td>1.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helaman</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>5.43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Nephi</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>759</td>
<td>6.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Nephi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>2.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mormon</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>15.41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11 In evaluating Persuitte’s material, I have elected to focus on individual verses from the Book of Mormon as my denominator. However, to be fair, it is important to note that other factors could be used in place of individual Book of Mormon verses and render varying results (some less damaging to Persuitte’s analysis, and others more so.) If the use of individual verses from the Book of Mormon is deemed a fair measuring rod in evaluating Persuitte’s analysis, the implications are striking; Persuitte claims View of the Hebrews is “the primary source of material for the Book of Mormon” (p. 3), yet his best efforts cannot account for 95% of the Nephite record.

12 It should be pointed out that in most cases, Persuitte indicated only a fraction of a given page of View of the Hebrews had some influence on a given passage in the Book of Mormon. Never does Persuitte claim a full page of View of the Hebrews contributed to the Book of Mormon.
In order to understand how David Persuitte (or any other author) arrived at his conclusions, it is imperative to understand something about the nature of bias and how certain premises, when adopted, unavoidably lead to certain conclusions. It is also important that we understand the differences between "evidence" and "proof."

To begin with, Persuitte assumes right from the start that the Book of Mormon is a product of the nineteenth century:

There is evidence to show that The Book of Mormon had its origin in Joseph Smith's time instead of in ancient America as the founder of Mormonism claimed. (p. 11).

Several questions present themselves right away. Does Persuitte mean that the evidence he presents not only indicates a nineteenth-century origin for the Book of Mormon, but also nullifies any evidence of an ancient source for the Book of Mormon? If so, it is curious that he never presents any findings that abrogate the evidence we presently have in support of an ancient origin for the Book of Mormon. It might have been more accurate to say that "there is evidence to show that the Book of Mormon had its origins in Joseph Smith's time" and then to leave it at that, for that seems to be the essence of Persuitte's premise.

When you adopt this premise, when you look through this particular lens, you not only limit your vision to a certain shade but you also risk a great deal. On the one hand, if you are correct in your assumptions you will bring into focus those items that provide the building blocks (i.e., evidence) that may ultimately result in the established structure (i.e., proof). On the other hand, even if you are incorrect in your presupposition, this will not deter you from producing evidence in support of your

false premise, yet it will cripple your ability to deal adequately with any evidence which nullifies your conclusions or thwarts your direction.

So what is Persuitte’s premise? He formulates it in expressing a flawed question: “Who authored the Book of Mormon? Was it Joseph Smith? or was it one of his contemporaries?” (p. 11). And there we have it. Rather than embracing a balanced premise by asking “who authored the Book of Mormon?” Persuitte refuses to even consider the notion that the source of the Book of Mormon might lie in the ancient arena, or that the process of translation into a modern language can result in a document which bears the superficial appearance of an entirely modern origin. For Persuitte, the Book of Mormon was obviously either Joseph Smith’s brain child or else that of one of his contemporaries. Although he never firmly decides which, this rules out the possibility of ever arriving at a conclusion that may support the Latter-day Saint (or the book’s own) claim for its origins—in spite of the fact that evidence for its ancient origin is frequently adduced.14

Another manifestation of his narrow presumption is found in his introduction. In disclosing his thesis, he states, “It is one thing to say, for example, that View of the Hebrews was the primary source of material for The Book of Mormon; it is quite another thing to prove it. By providing an extensive comparative analysis of the two books, I feel that I have proved it quite conclusively” (p. 3).

This is the typical anti-Mormon knee-jerk response to parallels. The critics’ assumption all too often is that if there are parallels between the Book of Mormon and any other pre-1830 work available in Joseph Smith’s world, then obviously plagiarism has taken place. Yet it is the erudite scholar who is not so fast in making such assumptions. Concerning the treatment of parallels, a very able scholar has written:

Surface resemblance may conceal profound difference. It requires competence, much goodwill and bold caution properly to distinguish what is remotely parallel, what is like, what is very like, and

14 Many of the publications put out by F.A.R.M.S. bear this out. See, for example, John W. Welch’s paper, “The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon,” and Stephen Ricks’ paper, “The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin’s Address.” Also, the F.A.R.M.S. Update series
what is identical. It is harder still to trace these threads to original influences and beginnings.\textsuperscript{15}

We know Persuitte isn’t wholly foreign to this concept either when he makes parenthetical statements like, “An opposition of ideas, as well as a concurrence, can indicate influence” (pp. 119, 109). And there you have it. Joseph Smith has been declared guilty regardless of the data. If there are parallels, then of course the only conclusion is certain plagiarism. And if there are “unparallels,”\textsuperscript{16} then again, the only conclusion is plagiarism. These are the only conclusions one can reasonably arrive at when one adopts Persuitte’s unreasonable governing premise.

It should be pointed out that in his effort to prove his thesis, Persuitte uses much language that is not supportive of his objective to “prove” anything.\textsuperscript{17} Some examples follow:

There is no absolute proof that Oliver Cowdery played a part in authoring ... The Book of Mormon. (p. 7)

Despite the hints suggesting that there was a collaboration [between Joseph and a colleague], it cannot be proven that such a collaboration existed. (p. 19, see also p. 114)

In the final analysis, it is the evidence... that is important. The evidence is valid regardless of whether Joseph Smith had any collaborators. (p. 20)

treats a whole range of such ancient characteristics of the Book of Mormon very succinctly.


\textsuperscript{16} This idea of “unparallels” was first developed in detail by John W. Welch in “Finding Answers to B. H. Roberts’ Questions, and ‘An Unparallel’,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1985.

\textsuperscript{17} In almost every page of his book, Persuitte employs language that is highly tentative and speculative. In fact, the book is loaded with conjecture, with phrases such as, “He [Joseph Smith] might even have...”, “If this were the case...”, “Joseph apparently felt...”, “This perhaps indicates...”, “Joseph could have found...,” much of which carries on the risky tradition of psychohistory that the late Fawn Brodie reveled in.
After engaging in some speculation about Joseph Smith’s abilities to produce the Book of Mormon, Pursuite summarizes with this statement: “None of this is proof that Joseph was the author of The Book of Mormon” (p. 18).

So Pursuite openly admits that he has no proof that either Joseph Smith or a particular nineteenth-century person was responsible for the Book of Mormon. What he does instead is try to link the Book of Mormon with View of the Hebrews, assuming that if he can find enough parallels, then he will have established his proof by circumstantial evidence. Thus, he writes, “Saying that, and proving it, are two different things. To prove it, one needs to show that there is a substantial connection between the Book of Mormon and View of the Hebrews” (p. 104). Here he leaves out a very important component. He must also somehow account for the equally substantial (or more substantial) connections between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world. But this he does not do, for he “knows” that there is no connection between the Book of Mormon and the ancient world (having decided that up front), in spite of mountains of evidence to the contrary.18

On one occasion, Pursuite speculates how Joseph Smith ever conceived the idea of the Book of Mormon after reading View of the Hebrews. “How, then, did Joseph Smith get such an idea? We can only guess” (p. 116). On another occasion, in wondering why the colossal difference exists in the two books’ notions of who the ancestors of the Indians were, Pursuite states, “Of course, we can only speculate about what that reason might have been but, by putting ourselves in [Joseph’s] place, we can perhaps perceive why he might have wanted to make the change” (p. 128). We must ask ourselves, in what ways does this “guesswork” aid him in “proving” his theory about the source for the Book of Mormon?

So the question naturally arises, does Pursuite succeed in “proving” anything? He does; he proves that it is very difficult to “prove” anything at all; he proves that there is a world of difference between “proof” and “evidence.”19 He proves

18 For a quick overview of the evidence gathered thus far, scan any current F.A.R.M.S. catalog.
19 Evidence is not proof; it merely helps lead to proof. Evidence suggests; proof establishes as fact. Pursuite has provided a fair amount of evidence to support his assumptions about the origins of the Book of Mormon. He has not proved anything, mostly because much of his evidence is based on sheer speculation, and also because he has largely failed
Professor Nibley’s statement of 20 years ago is still valid, “The evidence that will prove or disprove the Book of Mormon does not exist.”

One final comment is worth scrutinizing: “All that remains for us to do now is to attempt to prove [the Book of Mormon is a product of the nineteenth century] by analyzing The Book of Mormon in relation to its sources” (p. 125). This sentence is both highly valid and somewhat illegitimate. It is sound, for Persuitté has every right (and obligation) to attempt to prove whatever he wants. His entire book is a bold attempt to prove his thesis, but to attempt to prove and to actually prove are two different things.

The illegitimate part of his statement above lies in the notion of his analyzing the Book of Mormon in relation to its sources. The very comment is extremely presumptuous, for it assumes right off that the only source (or even the primary source) for the Book of Mormon is View of the Hebrews. There could be dozens of other sources, mostly ancient, to examine as well, unless of course one accepts in advance as fact Persuitté’s narrow premise that View of the Hebrews is the primary source for the Book of Mormon. Finally, even as a partial test of one theory, Persuitté’s work fails primarily because it is based on extrapolation from asserted rather than from proven facts.

IV

Every author, especially when writing in the genre we call history, undertakes an unspoken, unwritten oath that he or she will be responsible to the audience addressed. This oath of responsibility involves not only reporting an event “as it was,” but also involves maintaining an even, balanced portrayal of all relevant data. Readers have become more and more discriminating in recent years and have become rather intolerant of fallacy. Thus, it shouldn’t surprise us to find many a book review delineating the errors, inconsistencies, and flaws of the work in focus. This review is no exception.

to deal with the evidence which opposes his position and which supports the Latter-day Saint position.

20 Nibley, Since Cumorah, viii.
I would take Persuitte to the woodshed on the following nine issues:

1. His handling of the Anthon episode was poor scholarship, pure and simple (see page 76). I do not fault him for relying on a Mark Hoffman forgery (which invalidates some of his evidence), but, while he is quick to point out the fact that Joseph Smith’s account of the episode contradicts Anthon’s, he fails to inform his readers that Anthon’s two written accounts contradict each other.21

2. His reporting of the time it took to translate the Book of Mormon is inaccurate. Persuitte reports the rate at 2-4 pages per day (see p. 85). Actually, it was a rate of at least 7 1/2 pages per day and possibly as much as 11 1/2 pages per day.22 This is important only because the greater number of pages translated per day would require much greater effort—or divine inspiration—and make forgery far less likely.

3. Persuitte makes much of the fact that the first edition of the Book of Mormon has Joseph Smith’s title listed as “author” rather than “translator” (see pp. 11, 114). Not only has it been demonstrated that the title “Author and Proprietor” conformed to the laws governing copyright in 1830,23 but another question must be raised: If Joseph Smith goofed by identifying himself as “author”—if he made a blunder of that magnitude while trying to deceive the public, could it reasonably be said that such a harlequin could produce the Book of Mormon? Would a forger be so inept as to blow his cover in such a major way in producing the Book of Mormon?

4. After quoting 2 Nephi 30:3-5 (p. 116), a footnote on page 277 claims that Joseph Smith blundered by saying that Book of Mormon peoples were descendants of the Jews.

---

21 In his letter to E. D. Howe, Anthon states that “He [Martin Harris] requested an opinion from me in writing, which, of course, I declined to give.” Later on, in a letter to T. W. Coit, Anthon states that Harris “requested me to give him my opinion in writing. ... I did so without hesitation.” See B. H. Roberts, A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Corporation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1930), 1:102-9.


Persuite’s argument is that only descendants of the tribe of Judah would rightly be called Jews and that an actual Israelite such as Nephi would not have made such an error. First, it must be remembered that many of the Book of Mormon peoples were descendants of the Mulekites, who were from the tribe of Judah. Even more importantly, Israelites such as Nephi seem often to use the term “Jew” in terms of citizenship rather than in terms of specific lineage (see 2 Nephi 33:8). Thus, Paul the Apostle calls himself a “Jew” even though he is a Benjaminite (see Acts 21:39, Romans 11:1).

5. Persuite assumes that 1 Nephi 13:4-5, when referring to the great and abominable church, is a direct reference to the Roman Catholic Church (see pp. 123, 140). This is simply not a part of Mormon doctrine, but merely Persuite’s guesswork.

6. On page 147, Persuite relies on the much-used anti-Mormon argument that 2 Nephi 1:14 is actually pilfered from either Shakespeare’s As You Like It, or Josiah Priest’s The Wonders of Nature. Although this has been brought up before by many other critics, Robert F. Smith has tackled this issue and has come up with very different conclusions.

7. On page 195, Persuite questions the notion that the original text of the Book of Mormon was written in a type of “reformed Egyptian” rather than Hebrew, his argument being that Egyptian would have been the last language chosen since, as Persuite claims, “Egyptian hieroglyphics, even in the hieratic and demotic forms, are not very conservative of space.” In fact, demotic was a type of short-hand Egyptian.


25 One that comes to mind is Jerald and Sandra Tanner, Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse, 1982), 81-82.


27 See “Martin Harris’ Visit with Charles Anthon: Collected Documents on Short-hand Egyptian,” compiled by the F.A.R.M.S. staff,
8. Stating that Wayne Cowdrey was a descendant of Oliver Cowdery (p. 250) is erroneous. In 1984, one year before Persuitte’s book was published, Robert L. and Rosemary Brown published *They Lie In Wait To Deceive, Vol. II*, in which they spent an entire chapter documenting the activities of Wayne Cowdrey and adequately demonstrated that Wayne Cowdrey falsely claimed to be a descendant of Oliver Cowdery for the simple reason that he and his colleagues were in desperate need of some credibility.  

9. Finally, readers will find that this book is sloppy; it is laced with typos, misspellings, and other errors. It appears Persuitte wasn’t very careful in the proofreading of his work (something he accuses Joseph Smith of on pages 91-92). For instance, he is guilty of incorrect use of ellipses for the text of *View of the Hebrews* at least fourteen times. He also makes many minor errors in his reconstruction of the actual text of *View of the Hebrews* in at least seventeen places. Also, his own text is not devoid of typos (pp. 79, 113-14, 119, 129, 139, 142, 170, 172, 178, and 191).

In spite of the above weaknesses, Persuitte’s book does contain a number of strengths. For instance, in spite of his first printed in 1985 as a preliminary report. The evidence provided therein leads one to believe that hieratic and demotic Egyptian are abbreviated and short-hand modes of writing which could have been used to write in less space than that taken by Hebrew.

28 Robert L. and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive, Vol. II* (Mesa: Brownsworth, 1984), 49-74. The Browns are investigative researchers and reporters. They convincingly demonstrate that (a) Wayne Cowdrey frequently claims to be a descendant of Oliver Cowdery; (b) that this claim is false because Oliver Cowdery had no descendants; and (c) Wayne Cowdrey joined the Latter-day Saint Church solely so that he could leave the Church after only a few months of membership and then claim that he was a former Mormon, thus supposedly enhancing his credibility as an anti-Mormon.

29 For examples, see pp. 110, 115, 136, 147, 160, 163-65, and 191, then compare with the original text of *View of the Hebrews*.

30 For examples, see pp. 110, 115, 144-46, 149, 155, 158, 164-65, 169, 173, 183, 191, 195, 197, and 199.
regular use of conjecture, he is fairly persuasive in his writing style. He is able to take seemingly disjointed associations and make them sound as plausible as possible.

One aspect of his writing style that assists him in establishing credibility is the tone. Unlike most anti-Mormon authors, Persuitte sounds almost like a professional historian, writing in a matter-of-fact, somewhat detached style. Contrast that with his anti-Mormon colleagues whose writings often lose credibility at the outset because they are presented in a style that brings to mind a choleric teeming with trumpery, amphigory, and arrogance.

He is also to be credited for being perhaps the first to complete an analysis of View of the Hebrews in any depth. Although I found his very thesis somewhat one-sided and unbalanced, Persuitte is very complete and thorough in that thesis. Also, I would have to credit him for dealing with several old arguments with which Latter-day Saint apologists of yesterday would have countered him.

Finally, every so often Persuitte came up with something he noticed that very few have previously noticed. For example, he notes that a Book of Mormon passage (in 1 Nephi 19:15-16) uses the View of the Hebrews wording "isles of the sea" and "four quarters of the earth" yet later on, in quoting Isaiah 11, the Book of Mormon mirrors the KJV translation "islands of the sea" and "four corners of the earth" (see p. 142).

Thus, although his book is highly speculative, it is well-written speculation. He clearly does a good job in his attempt to establish a connection between View of the Hebrews and the Book of Mormon. He does fall short in those areas I mentioned above as well as in others.31

In the final analysis, many detractors of the Book of Mormon may continue to accept Persuitte's analysis as accurate and fair; Latter-day Saints who have been endowed with a testimony of the Holy Ghost that the Book of Mormon is a divine record will continue to hold Persuitte's research in a very skeptical light. And for those who are not so endowed? Who

---

31 One issue I thought was important on which Persuitte remained silent was the fact that Joseph Smith, on one occasion, actually quoted from View of the Hebrews in a published article (Times and Seasons, June 1, 1842, Vol. III, pp. 813-14.) It is doubtful that a deceiver would deliberately reveal the source of the plagiarism of his magnum opus.
knows? Perhaps this review will aid them in taking a step in the right direction.

Reviewed by David A. Palmer

Professor Paul Dean Proctor of Brigham Young University has produced a colored map of Book of Mormon geography. He is a man of great faith and distinguished service. He also shows insight, as the following statement indicates:

The depository of the plates which Moroni buried after his many years of wandering is not the Cumorah of the ancient Nephites or the doomsday hill of the Jaredites. A multitude of sacred records still lies buried in a cavity in the rock of that ancient site under heavenly protection, yet to come forth in the due time of the Lord.

This statement would certainly seem to be true.

However, the map that he has produced does not really contribute to Book of Mormon geographical studies. He frankly states, “Present day geography was not considered in the make up, only internal descriptions within the book.” Actually, taking that approach, a very insightful and much more accurate reconstruction based entirely on the text has been published by Clark.1 Clark’s reconstruction is in basic agreement with the geographies published by Palmer2 and Sorenson.3 Those volumes not only place the setting in Mesoamerica, where the important ruins dating to Book of Mormon times are found, but specifically suggest identifications of the places and some of the ruins with Book of Mormon names. There are extensive references to field reports giving detailed correlations between the ruins and the history as related in the Book of Mormon.

Although Professor Proctor is acquainted with major organizations doing research in this area, he has elected to construct an internally consistent geography not dependent on

actual sites. The maps are attractive, but I would have found them more useful had they been configured with respect to the real world.

Reviewed by Lewis M. Bastian

The *Book of Mormon: Wide-Margin Edition* presents the complete text of the Book of Mormon in 29 three-hole punched booklets and can be purchased with a handsome three-ring binder. It is printed in large (12 point) type in single columns on the left side of each page, leaving the right lined half of the page for writing space for notes and references. Each of the 29 booklets is numbered in the top right-hand corner with the intent that this can serve as an index for an expanding file of content-related inserts or personal notes of extra length or relevant articles.

The advantages of a looseleaf presentation of the scriptures are readily apparent. What serious student has not been frustrated by the lack of space for notes and commentary as he has used the conventionally bound scriptures? Any teacher of the Book of Mormon will also immediately see the convenience of having the text for study and discussion for a particular class period in a detachable and portable thin booklet with his previously prepared annotations right in the wide margins of the booklet. The idea of being able to file relevant background material right with the scriptural text ought to appeal to any student of the Book of Mormon. And, of course, by adding binders the extent of the file is made practically limitless.

However, this reviewer questions the appropriateness of the booklet format. It seems to add needlessly to the bulk and expense of this edition of the Book of Mormon. I would prefer to have a true looseleaf format with each single leaf being detachable, thus increasing the versatility for making insertions right with the related text and being able to remove for teaching or other purposes the exact pages desired. I also find the right margin ruling too narrow (almost a third narrower than college or narrow-ruled lines). In fact, why provide ruling at all since it limits the options available to the user? Unruled margins (really half pages) would increase the versatility and personal adaptability of this edition. I would suggest also a little more top margin for personal head notes convenient for quick reference. This edition also lacks the helpful convenience of the wonderful cross-reference footnotes in the new (1981) edition of the Book.
of Mormon. Perhaps these issues can be taken into account for any future edition of this admirable undertaking.

Reviewed by Diane E. Wirth

Included in this 1987 edition revised by Wesley P. Walters is a chapter reviewing "attempted defenses" of Book of Mormon archaeology. Also new is a discussion of Joseph Smith's level of expertise in translating Egyptian. The chapter on "Witnessing to Mormons," however, is virtually the same as in Ropp's 1977 edition. The selected and annotated bibliography has also been updated since the first edition.

The book flows well from one topic to another—one of its few redeeming qualities. It commences with a brief rundown of the tremendous growth of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from its inception. The authors write that "it is the Mormons' success in proselytizing that makes this book necessary" (p. 12). This book is, perhaps, rather better than the average anti-Latter-day-Saint book.

The first issue addressed is whether or not Mormons are Christians, and the remark is made that "people in general are not sure what it means to be a Christian" (p. 16). The authors then give their interpretation of common beliefs which, in their opinion, are held by all real Christians, i.e., the true nature of God, Christ, salvation, and the Bible. Scriptures are cited to support their views, but scriptures frequently quoted by Latter-day Saint writers to support Mormon doctrine are minimally used in this work. The first half of the book sets forth more Mormon doctrine than it does the authors' interpretation of what they believe is Christian doctrine.

Rather than rehashing old arguments by anti-Mormon writers, I'll move on to the more pressing topics under fire in my field of expertise, the Book of Mormon and New World archaeology. The following items from *Are the Mormon Scriptures Reliable?* are referred to as Mormon beliefs, but they are not always accurate: for example, "The Book of Mormon involves the migration of two groups of people from the Near East to the North American continent" (p. 32). The Book of Mormon does not designate the landing site as being in North America. "A third migration was small and unimportant" (p.
This refers to Mulek and the people who brought him to a new land across the sea. The people of Zarahemla, where the Book of Mormon tells us they settled, were more numerous than the Nephites and were hardly considered to be "unimportant" (Mosiah 25:2). Referring to Fawn Brodie's book, the authors assert that Joseph Smith made a mistake by saying the Nephites produced barley (p. 36); however, barley has been found in the Americas. Explaining the definition of Elohim, the authors refer to "Elohim" as "simply the Hebrew word for God" (p. 46). However, Elohim is indeed plural in form just as Joseph Smith said. The authors also claim that the Book of Mormon says the people made "coins of gold and silver" (p. 54). However, the word "coins" does not appear in the text of the Book of Mormon.

In addition to the above, the authors are of the opinion that if the Book of Mormon was written in Reformed Egyptian, one would find Egyptian writing in the Americas. Why? We have no reason to suppose that Reformed Egyptian was used by any other than an elect few—by those who were commissioned to keep the records. This form of writing was probably not used by the public.

In order to debunk Joseph Smith's abilities as a translator, the authors bring up the old Kinderhook controversy (p. 56), which has been settled once and for all as a forgery by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Joseph Smith's supposed statement that the Kinderhook plates were authentic and that they were the "records of the descendants of Ham," came from the journal of William Clayton, who wrote in the first person, as though from the mouth of Joseph Smith. A first-person narrative was apparently a common practice of this time period when a biographical work was being compiled. Since such words were never penned by the Prophet, they cannot be uncritically accepted as his words or his opinion.

Attacking Latter-day Saint archaeologist John L. Sorenson's fine work, An Ancient American Setting for the

---

Book of Mormon. Walters rehashes theories of early Church members as to the geography of the Book of Mormon, never acknowledging that there has been no revelation or official statement by Church authorities on this particular subject. New hypotheses are continually being developed in all scientific fields. The same holds true for the so-called field of "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon."

It is true, as Dee Green wrote and as is quoted in this book, that "No Book of Mormon location is known with reference to modern topography" (p. 59). Writers on this subject, such as John L. Sorenson, are careful to state that they see a probable site as such and such—not that these locations are unequivocally to be identified with a particular Book of Mormon locale.

As I've pointed out in my book, A Challenge to the Critics: Scholarly Evidences of the Book of Mormon, numerous anti-Mormon writers, including Walters, have a fascination with pitting one Latter-day Saint scholar against another, as though there is no unity of opinion. Whether Latter-day Saint researchers agree on all aspects of archaeology and what is contained in the Book of Mormon is irrelevant to the truthfulness of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All men are entitled to their opinion, which has no bearing on Church doctrine.

Joseph Smith indicated that truth will yet spring from the earth, and I expect we will see things in the future that will further substantiate to the "doubting Thomas" that the Book of Mormon is indeed a factual, tangible record. Mesoamerican archaeology is in its infancy when compared to the numerous excavations of Egyptian sites. Any Mesoamerican archaeologist would admit we have yet much to learn, especially in regard to those years covering the Pre-Classic period, within which the bulk of the Book of Mormon story falls.

The authors then go through the Doctrine and Covenants, reviewing what to their way of thinking are inconsistencies with the original Book of Commandments and later editions of the now expanded Doctrine and Covenants (p. 63ff). Mormon belief in continuous revelation, or even the idea of filling in gaps

in what were originally brief statements, is given no consideration.  

This section is followed by a comparison between passages in the Doctrine and Covenants and relevant passages in the Book of Mormon, i.e., on the remission of sin and baptism, and on the matter of plural marriage. Both are examples of the authors’ lack of understanding of the scriptures. For example, the latter subject of plural marriage needs to be read and interpreted properly.

The authors quote portions of Jacob 2:23-24, but fail to quote verse 30, which explains that there are times when men are commanded to obey laws for the purpose of raising “up seed unto me,” which laws are unique and timely. This verse refers to the previous verses that state that men should have but one wife, unless otherwise commanded as we find in verse 30. Taking scripture out of context is a tool frequently employed by the anti-Mormon writer.

A major attack is directed toward the book of Abraham (pp. 79ff). Reasoning that numerous words cannot be derived from one Egyptian hieroglyph, and that today’s Egyptologists have a different interpretation than Joseph Smith did, these two authors heap ridicule upon Joseph for his lack of scholarship. Never taken into account is the belief that as a prophet Joseph Smith had the ability, through the power of revelation, to give a full rendering of Abraham’s original intent, regardless of the crude drawings these accounts were based on. Nor do the authors mention the fact that some of these papyri are known to be missing today.

The last chapter of this book, “Witnessing to Mormons,” consists of methods to be used in winning Mormon souls into the Christian fold. Actually, many of these techniques are those used by Mormon missionaries to win converts to the restored church, e.g., “don’t do verbal battle,” “friendship is of the utmost importance,” “being kind,” “be able to teach,” and so on. A warning is given, however, of the futility of attempting to approach or convert Mormon missionaries (p. 100).

To say that some things in the scriptures are figurative rather than literal is also a ploy used by anti-Mormon writers, especially with regard to verses pertaining to the physical attributes of God. Referring to the finger of the Lord in Ether 3,

---

the authors write: "But his anthropomorphism does not prove that God has a physical body any more than Psalm 91:4 [KJV], 'He shall cover thee with his feathers and under his wings shalt thou trust,' proves that God is a cosmic chicken" (p. 107). Any reliable biblical scholar would acknowledge there are symbolic passages of scripture as well as literal passages—this remark was facetious and unscholarly.

Throughout this book it is pointed out that the Book of Mormon does not contain a detailed description of doctrines believed by the Church today, implying that these doctrines were added at a later time and that the full gospel is not contained in the Book of Mormon. Two factors are not taken into consideration: (1) Many doctrines are given as men become ready for them. The early Church of Jesus Christ was not prepared or ready to receive all these things at its inception. Now that we are living "in the fullness of times," more is given; and (2) what has been published as the Book of Mormon is only a portion of an abridgment of a large library of records. The balance of these records will be revealed in the Lord's own due time.

Finally, I must add a personal note. My book, A Challenge to the Critics: Scholarly Evidences of the Book of Mormon, is never mentioned within the text of this work. It is, however, listed in the Bibliography with the note "A handy summary of the current Mormon arguments used to counter the Smithsonian Institution's statements and to defend the Book of Mormon. Her heavy dependence on the scholarship of Brigham Young University writers undercuts the validity of many of her points." The number of citations used in my footnotes by Latter-day Saint scholars is 28, whereas the number of non-Latter-day Saint scholars is 121, hardly a "heavy dependence on the scholarship of Brigham Young University writers." Besides, an argument's validity depends upon its intrinsic merits, and not upon its source.

Reviewed by Kevin Christensen

"Paradigms provide scientists not only with a map but also with some of the directions essential for map-making."¹

T. Kuhn

At the outset of his book, Dan Vogel states his intention "to outline the broad contours of public discussion about the ancient inhabitants of America" up to 1830 and to "determine the extent to which the Book of Mormon may have been a part of that discussion" (p. 5). As such, Vogel provides a timely survey and a useful bibliography, especially for those interested in B. H. Roberts's *Studies of the Book of Mormon*,² but who may feel that the older book represents an incomplete survey, one scholar wide and fifty years deep.

Vogel goes on to argue against the historicity of the Book of Mormon, contending that contemporary sources provide "plentiful and striking" (p. 71) cultural and literary influences for Joseph Smith. He asserts that "some of the major features of the Book of Mormon's history of ancient America originated centuries before in religiously motivated minds and subsequently proved inaccurate" (p. 72). He concludes that scholars seeking to understand the Book of Mormon should focus on the pre-1830 environment and make useful investigations "instead of promulgating illusory and emotional speculations concerning the unknown" (p. 73).

For three reasons, I feel these conclusions are weak. First, Vogel fails to address the question of adequacy during paradigm debates as spelled out in Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Second, Vogel’s approach to the Book of Mormon text rests on questionable assumptions. Third, Vogel’s prodigious research on the pre-1830 environment sharply contrasts with the superficiality of his grasp of the Book of Mormon.

Adequacy and Paradigm Debates

Regardless of how one chooses to view the Book of Mormon personally, as historic, pseudepigraphic expansion, inspired fiction, or humbug, Thomas Kuhn's ideas about scientific paradigms are relevant to understanding the mechanics and the arts of disagreement among scholars and laypersons alike.

Paradigms are the theoretical frameworks and underlying assumptions that structure our approach to the world, whether in a religious, scientific, scholarly, or practical sense. Paradigm assumptions decisively influence just how scholars spend their time, where they direct their attention, how they subjectively evaluate the significance of their observations, and the context in which they make comparisons and interpretations.

Paradigm debates occur when competing interpretive frameworks attempt to win the allegiance of a scientific or scholarly community. A scientific revolution occurs when the inadequacies of a dominant paradigm precipitate a crisis that leads to the development and adoption of another paradigm. The best-known examples of scientific revolutions are when heliocentric astronomy supplanted geocentric astronomy and when Einsteinian physics supplanted Newtonian physics.

No paradigm solves all the problems it defines and no two paradigms leave all the same problems unsolved. "The proponents of competing paradigms are always at least slightly at cross-purposes. Neither side will grant all the non-empirical assumptions that the other needs in order to make its case."

This means that paradigm debates always involve deciding which problems are more important to have solved. The real issue, according to Kuhn, is

which paradigm should in the future guide research on problems . . . which neither competitor can yet claim to resolve completely. A decision between alternate ways of practicing science is called for, and in the circumstances that decision must be based less on past achievement

---

3 Kuhn, Scientific Revolutions, 148.
than on future promise. . . . A decision of that kind can only be made on faith.4

Paradigms cannot be verified because (1) future discoveries may conflict with present theory, (2) another theory may explain present evidence equally well. Paradigms resist falsification because "a network of theories and observations is always tested together. Any particular hypothesis can be maintained by rejecting or adjusting other auxiliary hypotheses."5

Ultimately there are no rules for paradigm choice, but there are criteria commonly agreed upon by which paradigms can be assessed:6

Accuracy of predictions
Comprehensiveness and coherence
Emergence of novel phenomena
Simplicity and aesthetics
Future promise

Each scientist must make his own assessment, weighing each criterion subjectively. The element of subjectivity acts to randomize conclusions, but accumulated knowledge constrains them. The constrained randomness produces a valuable distribution of risks that suggests current chaos theory.7

At the present time no single paradigm prevails in Book of Mormon studies. We have competing theories of historicity, geography, and translation factors. The Book of Mormon fully endorses paradigm comparisons. Alma 32 neatly anticipates and dovetails with Kuhn's ideas for paradigm evaluation. In a striking parallel to Kuhn, Alma asks his investigators to assess his message and to find "cause to believe" in terms of:

Experiment and discernibility (Alma 32:27, 35)
Mind-expanding enlightenment (Alma 32:34)
Fruitfulness (Alma 32:33, 42)
Aesthetics ("the seed is good," Alma 32:33)

6 Kuhn, Scientific Revolutions, 153-59.
Future promise (Alma 32:41-43)

Considering the importance of Kuhn’s work, the appearance of this epistemology in the Book of Mormon impresses me more than I can possibly say. Like Kuhn, Alma is skeptical both of the notion of final proof and of whether such a thing is even desirable. Alma’s contrast between those who simply and finally “know” and those who “have cause to believe” suggests to my mind the closed certainty of the positivist/empiricist/fundamentalist mind-sets, and the contrast with what Ian Barbour calls critical realism.

Empiricist/Positivist

Science starts from publicly observable data which can be described in pure observation language independent of any theoretical assumptions.

Theories can be verified or falsified by comparison with this fixed experimental data.

The choice between theories is rational, objective, and in accordance with specifiable criteria.8

Fundamentalist

God said it.

I believe it.

That settles it.

The problem with positivism, empiricism, and fundamentalism is that they fail to consider that all human activity is limited in terms of temporality (3 Nephi 14:2-3), selectivity (1 Nephi 15:27), subjectivity (2 Nephi 19:6), and context (2 Nephi 25:1, 4-5). Critical realism recognizes these limitations.

Critical Realism

(1) Theory influences observation with the result that all data are to some degree theory-laden. Although proponents of rival theories inevitably talk through each other to a degree, adherents “of rival theories can seek a common core of overlap . . . to which both can retreat.”

---

8 Barbour, Myths, Models, and Paradigms, 3.
Comprehensive theories are highly resistant to falsification, but observation exerts some control over them.

There are no rules for choice between paradigms but there are criteria of assessment independent of particular paradigms.9

Gospel-related questions occasionally lead to what Kuhn calls a paradigm shift. This follows from the specific activities and attitudes the scriptures define as required for seeing truth. One does science in a way that includes a spiritual dimension (see, for example, 2 Peter 1:5-9, Matthew 7, and Alma 32). Christ’s parable of the wine bottles can be understood as describing paradigm conflicts and paradigm shifts.

And no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles; and both are preserved. No man also having drunk old wine straightway desireth the new: for he saith, The old is better. (Luke 5:37-39)

Paul also speaks of the need to be able to make fundamental changes in perspective. “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things” (1 Corinthians 13:11).

Vogel remarks that the “same statement may have different meanings when considered within dissimilar environments” (p. 6). The wine which may burst one wine bottle might fit nicely in another one. Vogel considers this an important point, noting that Jonathan Swift’s apparent prediction of two moons for Mars in Gulliver’s Travels was based on a forgotten, but erroneous astronomical assumption of his day. Therefore the question of adequacy should compel Mr. Vogel to show that his assumptions and explanations lead to a better understanding of the Book of Mormon than the assumptions and explanations of the defenders.

But after raising the question of adequacy in terms of Swift, Vogel ignores the issue for the rest of his book, except in his discussion of tales of metal plates and stone boxes, lost Indian books, and knowledge of Mesoamerican ruins. In these matters, some defenders have claimed too much. However, since the idea of a gold Bible has often been a point of ridicule, defenders have been correct to point out examples of the practice

---

9 Ibid., 113-15.
in the lands and times associated with the ancient context. As to Vogel's other points, such as the problem of producing the contents of a lost Indian book, Vogel begs the question of adequacy. The material that Vogel presents may indeed seem "plentiful" and "striking" compared to nothing (p. 71), but is it adequate compared to the Book of Mormon text?

Vogel also fails to confront the problem of whether the material he presents as "striking and plentiful" might also be expected in an authentic historic text. For example, Vogel’s discussion and repeated descriptions of fortifications and burial mounds (pp. 21-33) should be assessed alongside John Sorenson’s article, "Digging into the Book of Mormon,"10 which includes photographs and a discussion of similar Mesoamerican fortifications dating to Book of Mormon times, and Sorenson’s paper, "Fortifications in the Book of Mormon Account Compared with Mesoamerican Fortifications."11

Vogel further avoids the issue of adequacy by ignoring issues which are difficult to explain in the pre-1830 context. Authors that Vogel cites have raised many interesting problems, and he should assume that a major portion of his audience has some familiarity with the issues. Yet, in Vogel’s discussion, Hugh Nibley is notable only for claiming too much for the metal plates and for providing a response to B. H. Roberts’s study that has “weakness” (pp. 71 and 101, nn. 3 and 5). Richard Bushman’s work is described as “apologetic” (p. 76 n. 7). Blake Ostler’s theory, in Vogel’s view, is noteworthy for including “early nineteenth-century elements, including Joseph’s own inspired additions to the text” (p. 5), but Ostler’s evidences of ancient origin are ignored. John Welch and F.A.R.M.S. do not exist for Vogel.

Vogel’s Nonempirical Assumptions

Vogel makes several assumptions in the course of his work that define his paradigm. First, Vogel justifies a strictly environmental approach to Book of Mormon historicity by

quoting 2 Nephi 25:8: "I know that they shall be of great worth unto them in the last days; for in that day [presumably 1829] shall they understand them" (p. 5). The Book of Mormon actually goes further than Vogel, insisting that understanding the scriptures requires searching, pondering, knowing the appropriate cultural backgrounds and typologies, paradigm assessment, personal experiment, and the spirit of prophecy.

Assumption #1: A closed system: Environment + Imagination = Everything. The environmental research that Vogel provides does serve as an essential check on claims by some defenders that "there were no sources at all from which Joseph Smith might have taken his ideas" (p. 71). However, Vogel takes for granted the question of adequacy by presenting closed system comparisons in which the pre-1830 influences must be adequate. Vogel's method could never uncover unauthentic historical details which challenge the adequacy of his claims. Such details have been discussed at length in works that Vogel cites and are a central concern in the science of textual criticism.12 Kuhn shows that the emergence of such novel details often counts heavily in paradigm choice.

Since Vogel admits that archaeology and anthropology were in their infancy in the pre-1830s (p. 7), he should not claim adequate contemporary sources for the Book of Mormon's Mesoamerican claims (pp. 21-33, 71) without demonstrating a comprehensive adequacy for such details as the 93 Mesoamerican cultural traits cited in John L. Sorenson's paper, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex."13 Quoting Sorenson:

Scholars like Albright have shown that the Old Testament fits into the stylistic and cultural context of the Ancient Near East in the same fashion I here propose for the Book of Mormon in relation to Mesoamerica. In both cases the casual reader does

---

not detect this contextual fit, but the study in depth shows the degree of fit convincingly.¹⁴

Vogel also ignores the Old World context of the Book of Mormon completely. For example, consider the context in which Vogel discusses the Liahona. "Debates about such ocean crossings often turned on the question about navigation. Many argued against migration by sea since the ancients had no knowledge of the mariner's compass" (p. 45). For Vogel, the Liahona is best explained as an anachronistic response to local debate.

Although the mariner's compass had not yet been invented, the Lord provided Lehi with a compass-like instrument, described as a "round [brass] ball of curious workmanship." Inside the ball were "two spindles," one of which "pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness." (p. 51)

Where Vogel sees a magnetic mariner's compass, Hugh Nibley approaches the text against the purported context and provides an alternate picture.

The Liahona was a hollow bronze sphere in which were mounted two pointers, headless arrows that bore mysterious inscriptions and pointed the way that Lehi's party should travel in the desert. Besides pointing the direction, the arrows and the inscriptions also provided special instructions for the journey. They only worked during the expedition to the New World, after which they ceased to function.¹⁵

Nibley then compares the Liahona to belomancy in the ancient Near East:

A recent study by an Arabic scholar has called attention to the long-forgotten custom of the ancient Arabs and Hebrews of consulting two headless arrows whenever they were about to undertake a journey; the usual thing was to consult the things at a special shrine, though it was common also to take such divination arrows along on the trip in a special

container. The message of the arrows, which were mere sticks without heads or feathers, was conveyed by their pointing and especially by the inscriptions that were on them, giving detailed directions as to the journey.16

Vogel mentions aspects of the Liahona that he can relate to the pre-1830 discussion, the round shape, and the pointing spindles, but ignores the odd name, the writing on the pointers, the writing that occasionally appeared on the ball, the fact that the Liahona only worked when Lehi’s people were obedient and stopped working after the voyage, and so on. By Kuhn’s standard, Nibley’s description of the Liahona is more accurate than Vogel’s, more coherent and comprehensive. It introduces novel phenomena, and is, in my view, more aesthetically pleasing and promising. Vogel’s description of the Liahona highlights superficial similarities to a mariner’s compass and ignores profound differences. Such divergent perceptions of the Book of Mormon led Richard Bushman to comment that “Only limited portions [of the Book of Mormon] were intelligible as expressions of American culture.”17 Similar problems of perception and adequacy occur throughout Vogel’s work due to his strict environmental method.

For example, Vogel sees anti-Masonry in the Book of Mormon secret societies but does not respond to work by John Welch, Richard Bushman, Blake Ostler, Daniel Peterson, and John Sorenson that points out contrasts with contemporary writings, ancient parallels to Near Eastern robber bands and Mesoamerican secret societies, and unaccounted complexities such as the occurrence of five separate Gadianton groups within the Book of Mormon.18 Vogel does not explain why an anti-

15 Hugh Nibley, “Howlers in the Book of Mormon,” in The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 244.
Masonic Joseph Smith would join the Masons and borrow Masonic symbolism for parts of the temple rites. Vogel sees anti-Catholicism in 1 Nephi 13-14 where Stephen E. Robinson argues that “Roman Catholicism as we know it did not yet exist when the crimes described by Nephi [and John in Revelation] were being committed.”19 Vogel does not explain why an anti-Catholic Joseph Smith would remark, “The old Catholic church traditions are worth more than all you have said. . . . The character of the old churches have [sic] always been slandered by all apostates since the world began.”20 Vogel claims that Universalists would recognize themselves as those vain and foolish people who taught that “God will beat us with a few stripes and at last we shall be saved in the kingdom of God” (p. 6). I doubt that many Universalist sermons followed the complete text of 2 Nephi 28:8, saying, “Lie a little, take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor.” Vogel’s claim that Corianton was a believer in universal salvation seems unsupported by the text. Corianton was skeptical of foreknowledge of Christ’s coming (Alma 39:17), worried concerning the resurrection (Alma 40:1), and concerned as to God’s justice of restoration for good and evil acts (Alma 41:1; 42:1, 30). His concerns justified his leaving his Zoramite ministry for Isabel, a harlot with many followers, likely a hierodule or priestess in a Great Mother cult in Siron by the borders of the Lamanites.21

Compared to Vogel’s strict environmental approach, Blake Ostler’s “expansion” hypothesis seems to me to be a model of comprehensiveness. Although it is certainly not the final word


20 HC 6:478.

21 See Nibley, The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 542.
on the subject, it does nonetheless try to address the Book of Mormon’s claims to antiquity, its modern context, the complexity of the text itself, and the breadth of previous Book of Mormon scholarship.

Assumption #2: The Nephites are Mound Builders revisited. Vogel spends most of his time on the rise and demise of the Mound Builder myth and portrays the Book of Mormon as a response to that myth. The Mound Builder myth resolved the seeming contrast between the primitive lifestyle of the native populations and the more sophisticated one which the impressive mounds along the Ohio River valley implied for their vanished creators—to say nothing of the even more complex ruins in Central and South America. Some speculated that a white-skinned civilized group had built the mounds and then been destroyed by dark-skinned savages. Vogel points up details of controversies such as tales of lost books on metal plates, elephants, comparisons of Mesoamerican script with Egyptian, and attempts to describe various native words and customs as Hebrew. Various authors suggested pre-Adamites, a lost ten tribes origin, a Babel origin, or both, and debated the merits of sea migrations or Bering Strait crossings. Ethan Smith’s View of the Hebrews and Solomon Spaulding’s Manuscript Found both arose in response to the Mound Builder controversies. But this assumption seems inadequately grounded, and those familiar with the contents of Smith’s View of the Hebrews and Spaulding’s Manuscript Found will detect a retroactive selectivity in Vogel’s descriptions of their contents. Vogel also ignores the implications of Abner Cole’s 1830 “Book of Pukei” satire, which are somewhat worrisome for his thesis. As Richard Bushman has pointed out, Cole added “commonplace symbols of the Indians—the bark canoes, the blankets and


moccasins, decimation by smallpox—[that] should have been in the story but for some reason were not. In their absence Cole fabricated them himself. He had the Nephites descend from the lost ten tribes. . . . Cole made the book comprehensible by adding all the elements Palmyra readers expected and were disappointed to find missing.”

Assumption #3: The Wentworth letter is an accurate guide to the text. Vogel does show that “the compelling questions for Joseph’s contemporaries were very similar to those addressed by the Book of Mormon” (p. 8) as outlined in Joseph Smith’s letter to Wentworth, a portion of which he quotes. Taking the Wentworth summary as representative of the text, Vogel concludes that “major features of the Book of Mormon’s history of ancient America originated centuries before in religiously motivated minds and subsequently proved inaccurate” (p. 72) and that this circumstance seems to favor a modern origin for the text. I’ve numbered these major features as they appear in the Wentworth letter.

In this important and interesting book the [1] history of ancient America is unfolded, from its [2] first settlement by a colony that came from the tower of Babel, at the [3] confusion of languages to the beginning of the fifth century of the Christian era. We are informed by these records that America in ancient times has been inhabited by [4] two distinct races of people. The first were called Jaredites and came directly from the tower of Babel. The second race came directly from the city of Jerusalem, about six hundred years before Christ. They were principally Israelites, of the descendants of Joseph. The Jaredites were [5] destroyed about the time that the Israelites came from Jerusalem, who succeeded them in the inheritance of the country. The principal nation of the second race fell in battle towards the close of the fourth century. The [6] remnants are the Indians that now inhabit this country.

24 Bushman, Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism, 120.
Vogel does show that "each of the elements of the letter . . . had been discussed in some form during the ongoing debate" (p. 8), but he fails to consider whether the letter accurately describes the contents of the Book of Mormon. Can we assume that Joseph Smith was an expert on the Book of Mormon? While we can safely assume that someone who fabricated the text in response to his context would be an expert, a text translator might be naive in some respects. Emma Smith gave the following recollection from the translation:

One time while he was translating [Joseph] stopped suddenly, pale as a sheet, and said, "Emma, did Jerusalem have walls around it?" When I answered, "Yes," he replied "Oh! I was afraid I had been deceived." He had such a limited knowledge of history at the time that he did not even know that Jerusalem was surrounded by walls.26

Furthermore, even if we allow for the possibility that "the ongoing debate" affected the contents of the Wentworth letter, it is by no means clear that we commit ourselves thereby to believing that the contents of the Book of Mormon itself were so affected. Isn't it possible, indeed likely, that Joseph saw these things in the Book of Mormon and covered them in his letter to Wentworth, knowing that these very points would be of special interest to the general populace? All of this should lead us to ask, then, how authoritative a guide is the Wentworth letter to the text of the Book of Mormon on the points I've numbered, and therefore, how adequate a response does Vogel’s research provide compared to the actual text?

Wentworth (1): Is the Book of Mormon a conventional history? John Sorenson argues that the Book of Mormon is a lineage history, selectively concerned with events of interest to a particular line.27 The limited scope and narrow perspective make a great difference in the generalizations we can make.

Wentworth (2): Were the Jaredites the first settlers of America? Vogel claims that Ether tells how life was transplanted, Noah-fashion, by the Jaredites who came from the

27 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 50-56.
confusion of languages to an uninhabited world that had been swept clean by the flood (pp. 49-50).

Yet Ether says nothing about the New World being uninhabited, let alone barren of life. Vogel sees Ether 13:2 as supporting the “notion of a universal flood” (p. 49). “After the waters had receded from off the face of this land [America], it became a choice land above all other lands” (ibid.). But are these waters from the Noah flood or from the creation? (see Genesis 1:7; Moses 2:6-10; Abraham 4:9). Ether is ambiguous. Nowhere does Ether describe the animals on the Jaredite barges as necessary for repopulating an uninhabited world. Vogel cites a claim by W. W. Phelps that Ether’s “deseret” answered the debate over the origin of the honeybee in America (p. 93 n. 94). Yet Vogel should know that all seven references to bees or honey in the Book of Mormon occur in the Old World.28 Moses 7:52 (translated in 1830) described how Enoch received a promise “that a remnant of his seed should always be found among all nations.” Noah was a descendant of Enoch. A remnant would hardly be described as “found among all nations” if the remnant comprised all nations. At the very least, the Moses text removes any requirement that the New World be unpopulated after the flood. Vogel acknowledges in a footnote that the Ether 2:5 reference to “that quarter where there never had man been” can be understood as referring to an Old World location (p. 93 n. 94). Nothing in the text rules out the presence of other inhabitants in the New World. The silence of the text regarding non-Jaredite populations must be balanced against its brevity and the possibilities suggested by Enoch’s blessing and must be acknowledged as ambiguous.

Wentworth (3): The people of Jared did not come from the confusion of tongues at the Tower, but from the confounding of their languages.

That “confound” as used in the book of Ether is meant to have its true and proper meaning of “to pour together,” “to mix up together” is clear from the prophecy in 13:8, that “the remnant of the house of Joseph shall be built upon this land . . . and they shall

no more be confounded," the word here meaning
mixed up with other people culturally, linguistically,
and otherwise.29

Wentworth (4): Does the Book of Mormon specify only
"two distinct races of people" for the New World?
The Book of Mormon describes three migrations to the
New World and leaves open the possibility for others. Neither
the Wentworth letter nor Vogel mentions the Mulekites, who
were more numerous than the people of Nephi (Mosiah 25:2). Were they exclusively Hebrew or of mixed ethnic background? At the very least, on textual and linguistic grounds, we know they mixed with the Jaredite remnants. John Tvedtnes has shown that the Mulekites maintained a separate ethnic identity throughout the Book of Mormon.30 Some Phoenician names in the Book of Mormon have led to suggestions that the Mulekites sailed with the Phoenicians. (For example, Sidon brings to mind the Near Eastern seaport, and Isabel is the name of the Patroness of Harlots in the Goddess religion of the Phoenicians.)31 The Zoramites maintained a distinct identity throughout the Book of Mormon. What was Zoram’s ethnic background? Greek perhaps? What can we say about the Ishmaelites? Did Ishmael’s sons and daughters all marry Hebrews? D&C 3:17-18 speaks of seven lineages who would gain knowledge of the Savior—Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, Zoramites, Lamanites, Lemuelites, and Zoramites. (Mention of the Nephites here requires us to consider at least some Nephites as survivors of Cumorah.) And who were the unnamed “many inhabitants who had before inherited the land” (Helaman 3:5-6)? Must we assume Jaredites when they were not named and were not necessarily in the same location? What about those “many nations” that would overrun the land after the Nephite fall (2 Nephi 1:8)? John Sorenson suggests these could include nearby

232: “Hence, incidentally, the prominence of the bee in Mayan migration legends suggests Mediterranean rather than Asiatic origins.”
American populations, rather than exclusively referring to European “Gentiles.”

Wentworth (5): Nibley, John Sorenson, and recently John Tvedtnes have discussed textual evidences of Jaredite contributions to the Nephite story, that the remnants of the Jaredites (Mosiah 8:12) were not of Coriantumr’s house and therefore not subject to the prophecy that every soul should be destroyed. Sorenson correlates the Jaredite influence with the known Olmec influence on the Pre-Classic Maya.

Wentworth (6): Vogel says, “My own discussion of the ‘Indian’ thus ignores the multiplicity of ethnic groups, languages, and lifestyles because most such discussions in the nineteenth century and earlier ignored such distinctions” (p. 9). He could say the same of his discussion of Nephite and Lamanite groups. Evidence for distinct ethnic groups, languages, and lifestyles exists in the Book of Mormon and checks much of what can and cannot be weighed for and against its claims in an anthropological context.

Vogel tries to link Ethan Smith and the Book of Mormon by stating that “The theory that the Indians were degenerates who destroyed their more civilized brethren rather than the prevalent theory of two distinct races constitutes, so far as can be determined, an original idea with Ethan Smith” (pp. 98-99 n. 90). This is an example of Vogel’s preference for “broad contours.” Even if we dismissed the difference between Ethan Smith’s lost ten tribes (one migration), and Joseph’s seven lineages, Mulekites, Jaredite remnants, unspecified former inhabitants, independent robber bands, and unspecified “many nations” waiting to overrun the land (multiple migrations), the Nephites were not civilized when they were destroyed.

Assumption #4: Mongolian ancestry refutes Mediterranean migrations. Vogel asserts that evidence of predominant Mongolian ancestry for Native American populations contradicts the claims of the text. This claim depends on the validity of the “two distinct races” restriction, the totality of the Jaredite and Nephite destructions, and the validity of Vogel’s geography. His presentation of the evidence of Mongolian ancestry is just as instructive as his treatment of the “two races” problem.

32 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 83-84.
It is now generally accepted that the American Indians are of Mongolian extraction, representing several different physical types probably originating in northern, central, and eastern Asia. They are thought to have migrated across the Bering Strait sometime between 12,000 and 30,000 years ago. The biological linkage of the Indians to Asia is based on common features such as the characteristic eyefold, the pigmented spot which appears at the base of the spine of infants, and the shovel shape of the incisor. These traits have been found in varying proportions among every Indian group studied. (pp. 51-52)

The "varying proportions" is interesting. Sorenson's discussion follows:

Such Asiatic features as the characteristic eyefold, the pigmented spot at the base of the spine of infants, and a special shape of incisor are found in varying proportions among every Amerindian group studied.34

I'll leave the puzzle of similar wording to a footnote.35 I find it more interesting that Sorenson goes on where Vogel stops, discussing evidence that a major part of Native American characteristics comes from adaptation to the environment and that some groups are much less Mongoloid than others. "That raises the question whether at some time in the past, certain peoples in America might have been totally non-Mongoloid."36

34 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 87; cf. 87-91.

Incidentally, my wife has worked in labor and delivery and as an Intensive Care Nursery RN, and tells me that the pigmented spot at the base of the spine of infants is also a Mediterranean feature.

Sorenson quotes several authorities who present evidence of influence from Semitic, Chinese, and black sources as well as from Western Mediterranean migrants. The Mongoloid strain, like the language problem, only creates conflicts when the Book of Mormon is presented as describing exclusive, homogeneous populations.

Assumption #5: Latter-day Saint traditions for geography take priority. Just how much did Joseph know about Book of Mormon geography? How did he arrive at his opinions? Could the local controversies have colored opinions? Vogel’s research could suggest that the Wentworth letter demonstrates that local controversies unduly colored Joseph’s perception of the text. (How could they not?) In this case, how much authority should we give his opinions on this subject? Was he consistent or flexible and, therefore, speculative? Joseph himself said, “A prophet was a prophet only when he was acting as such.” The Book of Mormon itself argues that on some matters a prophet might suppose he understood, and not ask, and therefore not receive revelation (see 3 Nephi 15:15-23 on the matter of other sheep). Even revelation may not be all-encompassing. Nephi says of Lehi’s experience of a vision, “so much was his mind swallowed up in other things that he beheld not the filthiness of the water” (1 Nephi 15:27). Nephi writes of himself “And now, if I do err, even they did err of old” (1 Nephi 19:6).

Alma is especially instructive on the nature and extent and sources for prophetic knowledge:

Now as to this thing I do not know. . . . But behold, the Spirit hath said this much unto me. (Alma 7:8-9)

Now I unfold unto you a mystery; nevertheless, there are many mysteries which are kept, that no one knoweth them save God himself. But I show unto you one thing which I have inquired diligently of God that I might know. . . . Now when this time cometh no one knows. . . . Now, whether there shall be one time, or a second time, or a third time, . . . it mattereth not; for God knoweth all things; and it sufficeth me to know in this case . . . what becometh of the souls of men is the thing which I have inquired

37 Ibid., 88-89.
38 *HC* 5:265.
diligently to know; and this is the thing of which I do know. . . . Behold it has been made known unto me by an angel. . . . Now, whether . . . I do not say; let it suffice, that . . . I do not say that . . . but behold, I give it as my opinion.” (Alma 40:3-5, 9, 11, 19-20)

How much did Joseph really know? Vogel’s efforts to tie his geography to Joseph Smith are pointless unless he can also demonstrate that his geography is accurate. Vogel’s association of the Book of Mormon with the Mound Builder myth depends heavily on the validity of his own geography.

Assumption #6: A total hemisphere geography. For Vogel, the Book of Mormon describes “three areas of settlement which correspond to the three areas of archaeological discovery known commonly in the nineteenth century.” Vogel depicts the land southward (Mormon 2:29) as South America, the narrow neck as the Isthmus of Panama (Alma 22:32; 50:34; 52:9), but sees the Isthmus as encompassing all of Central America, and the land northward, a region of “large bodies of water and many rivers” (Helaman 3:4) as the Great Lakes region.39 The prairies were seen as the “land of Desolation” (Alma 22:30-31; Helaman 3:3-6; Ether 7:6). Vogel associates the New York Cumorah with the purported demise of the Mound Builders in the Great Lakes region.

Vogel shows no evidence of having worked out a consistent internal Book of Mormon geography along the lines of Sorenson’s work or John Clark’s “Key for Evaluating Nephi Geographies.”40 He simply cites the geography of the Mound Builder myth, and overlays the Book of Mormon, drawing support from the Zelph story,41 the Frederick G. Williams claim


that Lehi landed in Chile\textsuperscript{42} (adding in the same sentence a contradictory notice from the \textit{Times and Seasons} that Lehi landed just south of Darien, 3,000 miles north of Chile), an 1834 letter from Joseph to Emma which referred to Illinois as "the plains of the Nephites," and an 1835 Oliver Cowdery letter that the New York Cumorah was the final battlefield of the Nephites and Jaredites.

Acceptance of Vogel's geography depends upon the acceptance of three assumptions, none of which is obvious. First, one must see Alma 22:32 as describing all of Mexico and Central America as the narrow neck. Second, one must accept the accuracy and priority of early Latter-day Saint traditions on Book of Mormon geography. And, third, one must see in Vogel's geographical notions accuracy, comprehensiveness, simplicity, and coherence, as well as greater fruitfulness and future promise than other views can offer.

For the first point, Vogel is aware of the problems that long-distance travel poses for historicity in this geography, but defers to B. H. Roberts. (An implausible geography would strengthen Vogel's case against historicity.) Roberts objected to a limited geography for reasons of silence, the mention in Ether 2:5 of a quarter where man had never been (likely an Old World location), and population statistics and traditions for a New York Cumorah. John Welch has shown that none of Roberts's arguments is compelling.\textsuperscript{43} The Book of Mormon is not completely silent as to outsiders, nor, as a lineage history, need it be especially concerned with them.

Vogel ignores the textual requirement for Cumorah to be near the narrow neck, as discussed by Sorenson, Clark, Palmer, and Sperry. He also ignores the internal travel times that require a limited-region theory.

For the second point, there is no reason to give the Latter-day Saint traditions for geography priority over the requirements of the text regardless of whether or not such beliefs originated with Joseph Smith.

For the third point, Vogel's treatment of geography does not seem to be accurate, comprehensive or coherent, nor,


compared to the rash of studies coming out from F.A.R.M.S.,
does it seem particularly challenging or fruitful.

Vogel rejects Sorenson’s *An Ancient American Setting for
the Book of Mormon*, contending that:

First, Sorenson has been unable to overcome
Mormon traditions regarding Book of Mormon events
outside his limited area. Second, he has unneces-
sarily distorted Book of Mormon passages which do
not fit his theory (e.g., Alma 22:32). Third, he has
excused, minimized, or ignored contradictory evi-
dence. (p. 85 n. 68)

The third objection may come back to haunt Mr. Vogel.

On the second objection, John Clark’s analysis of Alma
22:32 improves on Sorenson’s reading and supports the
plausibility of his overall geography. Vogel cites an unpub-
lished study of his own critiquing Sorenson (p. 85 n. 68).44 I
presume his objections focus on the priority of Mormon tradition
to text and what he sees as “distortion of the text.” The key
traditions have been scrutinized by F.A.R.M.S., and I would
contend that they are secondary to the text in any case. The
narrow-neck problem has been clarified by John Clark. Before
making accusations of distortion, Vogel should consider
Thomas Kuhn’s remark that “Paradigms provide scientists not
only with a map but also with some of the directions essential
for map-making”45 and that, when paradigms change, the world
in which scientists work changes as well. One man’s distortion
is another’s paradigm.

Assumption #7: Homogeneity of text. Vogel assumes
homogeneity of the text. Every description of civilization,
engineering, population, race, and technology is taken to apply
across the entire time scale, culture, and geography.

---

44 See Frank R. Zindler, “East Is East, Except When North,”
*American Atheist* (February 1988): 29-33, 40. Other published critiques
that I’ve seen in the *Zarahemla Record* and *American Atheist*, as well as
George D. Smith’s article, “Is There Any Way to Escape These Diffi-
culties?” The Book of Mormon Studies of B. H. Roberts,” *Dialogue* 17
(Summer 1984): 94-111, focus on the old traditions, the narrow-neck
problem, the question of directions, interpretive quibbles, and minor
technical points.

If Enos describes Lamanites as savage, naked, blood-thirsty warriors, as hunters, as filthy, idle, idolatrous, and as living in tents, then Vogel would have us believe that all Lamanites of all periods and lineages and political affiliations fit that description. When the sons of Mosiah propose to go among the Lamanites, they are met with an incredulous response that suggests extreme prejudice on the part of the Nephites (Alma 26:24). John Sorenson has discussed how the epithets applied to the Lamanites sound like Near Eastern epithets and “probably should be considered a literary formula rather than an objective description.”46

When the sons of Mosiah actually travel among the Lamanites, they find governments, cities, temples, synagogues, houses, prisons, flocks, and converts who became more industrious and more righteous than any of the Nephites. Helaman records how at various times the Lamanites sent missionaries among the Nephites, the most notable being Samuel.

The Nephites, according to Vogel, are uniformly civilized, industrious, and peaceful, building cities, working metal, keeping records, tilling the earth, managing flocks, and wearing clothing. This is in keeping with the Mound Builder myth. Vogel assures us that the Book of Mormon has the degenerate group wiping out the civilized group. Yet the Nephites, according to the Book of Mormon, include those who are lazy, hunters, blood-thirsty, more savage than the Lamanites, idolatrous, ignorant, and brutal. The Nephites also occasionally dwelt in tents. Significantly, at their cultural demise, the Nephites were worse than the Lamanites.

Assumption #8: Pre-1830 discussions of Hebrew and Egyptian as adequate. Vogel describes discussions of Hebrew and Egyptian similarities to Native American languages (pp. 58-59). Does pre-1830 speculation about Hebrew and Egyptian influence on Indian customs and language adequately explain the text?

Is the mention of Egyptian hieroglyphics sufficient to explain the mention of “reformed Egyptian” in the Book of Mormon? Vogel does not mention the Egyptian names like Paanchi, Korihor, Ammon, or the Egyptian literary forms found in the text, such as the colophons.

46 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 90.
He treats the pre-1830 discussion of Hebrew origins for native populations, but ignores the Hebrew names, festival customs, legal practices, and literary forms, such as chiasmus, prophetic lawsuits, and testaments that appear in the text. John Welch shows that none of Ethan Smith’s proofs of Hebrew origin appear in the Book of Mormon. Why not, if Joseph was simply tapping into the environment?

We should also mention Carl Jones’s 1970 paper, “The Anthon Transcript and Two Mesoamerican Cylinder Seals”; Allen Christenson’s 1988 paper on “The Use of Chiasmus in Ancient Mesoamerica”; and Brian Stubbs’s recent work comparing Hebrew and Uto-Aztecan languages. Such studies indicate that an historic Book of Mormon text is entitled to claim Hebrew origins.

Assumption #9: Mechanical translation. Vogel prefers a mechanical translation model. This is not because mechanical translation explains the text, or because it follows from either the contemporary dictionary definitions, or the prophet’s use of the term, the realities of the translation problem, the implications of D&C 1:24 and 9:7, or 2 Nephi 31:2, or even because Vogel takes seriously the idea that Joseph actually translated anything, but because it presents an easier target. Vogel insists on the priority of witnesses who described the translation as mechanical and literal. To his credit, on this point, Vogel does provide due reference to authors claiming

---

49 See D. Michael Quinn, Early Mormonism and the Magic World View (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), 151.
52 My personal feeling is that the views of David Whitmer and Emma Smith were unduly weighted by Joseph’s practice of spelling out the names. Translating a name quite likely involved a different process than translating text, since the idea is to convey phonetics rather than meaning.
other views (p. 75 n. 5). On the other hand, Vogel fails to reference studies on chiasmus by John Welch, on wordprints by John Hilton, or on the nature of the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon by John Tvedtnes, all of which have been used to support the notion of a very literal translation.

Assumption #10: Anachronisms. Vogel treats the issue of anachronisms as though it were settled and final (p. 5). However, the once notorious "land of no return" and "faith, hope, and charity" passages have been found to be formulaic expressions with deep roots. They put the shoe on the other foot, since in both cases one can ask, "How did Joseph know such verses were older than Hamlet or the New Testament?" They demonstrate that the identification of anachronism in a formulaic literature depends on the assumption of adequate research sources. The significance of anachronism depends on assumptions about translation factors (including the legitimacy of what Ostler calls prophetic expansion). All conclusions regarding anachronism in the Book of Mormon must stand on the validity of both assumptions. If either leg fails, the conclusions cannot stand.

The George D. Smith Sunstone article, which Vogel cites (p. 76 n. 16), is severely flawed in this respect. For example, Smith includes a listing of purportedly anachronistic Book of Mormon scriptures next to New Testament verses. The second item on Mr. Smith's list (2 Peter 2:22), if quoted in full, would include Peter's words, "It is ... unto them according to the true proverb." The missing words illustrate that at least one supposed anachronism was already old enough to be proverbial. Others on the same list have close parallels in the Ethiopian book of Enoch, showing that nonbiblical sources might lie behind some of the constructions.

But wo unto the rich. But woe unto you that are rich. (2 Nephi 9:30) (Luke 6:24)

---

55 Ibid., 48.
But woe unto the rich, for ye have trusted in your riches, and from you your riches shall depart. (1 Enoch 94:8)

In considering the possibility of anachronism to the “one fold one shepherd” idea (1 Nephi 13:42; John 10:16), remember that long before the New Testament, David (in Psalm 23), Ezekiel (in chapter 34), and 1 Enoch all used shepherd imagery for God’s dealings with men.56

Mr. Smith’s showpiece is when the Book of Mormon has “Christ quoting the words of Peter, before Peter spoke them” (p. 48). This statement contains several unquestioned assumptions, most notably that Peter’s words were original. In all the years Mr. Smith has brandished this paradox, he has never troubled to ask whether any evidence could make plausible the case that in Acts, Peter was quoting the words of Christ, after Christ spoke them.

(1) Peter was called as an emissary, a sent one, told that the spirit would “bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you” (John 14:26).

(2) Peter’s writings include quotations and paraphrases from earlier writings, including “It is unto them according to the true proverb.” Some of these quotations and paraphrases do not come from known Old Testament writings, but from recently rediscovered writings such as the Dead Sea Scrolls.57

(3) The verses to which Mr. Smith refers, including those he quotes (Acts 3:26 and 3 Nephi 20:26), show evidence of formulaic constructions (deliberately unoriginal), rather than just an exclusive dependence on Deuteronomy 18:15-19.

Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (Acts 3:26)

The Father having raised me up unto you first, and sent me to bless you in turning away every one of you from his iniquities. (3 Nephi 20:26)

56 Even apart from the Book of Mormon, a story of Enoch’s ascension told in 1 Enoch closely parallels a story of Quetzalcoatl’s ascension. See Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechund, Hamlet’s Mill (Boston: Godine, 1977), 77.

I have sent also unto you all my servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, Return ye now every man from his evil way, and amend your doings, and go not after other gods to serve them, and ye shall dwell in the land which I have given to you and to your fathers. (Jeremiah 35:15)

That they may return from their evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. (Jeremiah 36:3)

Repent, and turn yourselves from all your transgressions; so iniquity shall not be your ruin. (Ezekiel 18:30)

Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days. (Acts 3:24)

Yet the Lord testified against Israel, and against Judah, by all the prophets, and by all the seers, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. (2 Kings 17:13)

Moses and Aaron among his priests, and Samuel among them that call upon his name; they called upon the Lord, and he answered them. (Psalm 99:6)
REVIEW OF BOOKS ON THE BOOK OF MORMON


(4) The New Testament contains almost nothing of the Forty-Day Teachings in which Peter was a participant. Yet the noncanonical Forty-Day documents all have recurrent themes that suggest a common source. Again we are not privy to all conversation between Peter and the Lord.

(5) Third Nephi as a whole shows characteristics of typical Forty-Day documents. Peter in Acts may simply be quoting words taught during the Forty-Days in the Old World. Why strain at a gnat when the larger context shows all the characteristics of an authentic camel known to attract such gnats?

(6) Third Nephi contrasts with the typical characteristics of various medieval and recent forgeries.

In comparing theories, we are evaluating explanatory power according to Kuhn’s criteria for evaluating paradigms. Some of Mr. Smith’s predictions regarding anachronism are demonstrably false. Other alleged anachronisms are open to question. He ignores the problems arising when Book of Mormon passages provide close parallel phrasings to ancient writings unknown in Joseph’s day. In arguing that Joseph Smith “could have written the Book of Mormon” based on a “vivid and creative imagination” added to the “common knowledge” of the times, Mr. Smith fails to predict (and makes no attempt to explain) such novel features as the Forty-Day themes found by Nibley or the contrasts with imitation gospels found by Richard L. Anderson. His presentation falls far

61 See, for example, Nibley, Since Cumorah, 163-64; and John Welch, “The Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon,” BYU Studies 22 (Summer 1982): 311-32.
62 Anderson’s “Imitation Gospels,” and Nibley’s “Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum,” are especially relevant to the explanatory power of
short of defining the problem, let alone justifying his conclusions.

Even Blake Ostler, whom Vogel also cites (p. 5), slips up in his presentation of potential anachronisms. Ostler quotes 2 Nephi 9:12-18 alongside various New Testament scriptures, as though "Jacob’s speech reinterprets the KJV snippets into a new synthesis." In accordance with this approach, he declares: "It is conceivable that the phrases approximate the meaning of an original text, and the intricate structure of the passage, known to scholars as ascending synthetic inclusion, seems to require such an original."

While I applaud an approach to translation that acknowledges the legitimate possibility of translator anachronism, Ostler’s presentation here neglects the second leg of a viable approach—adequate research and sources. Why look first in the New Testament for the snippets?

Among the Scrolls is a great “Hymn of Thanksgiving,” a literary composition of real merit yet one which contains hardly a single original line! "These songs are as if woven from quotations from the Old Testament. . . . The style closely imitates that of the Psalms and other poetic writings of the Old Testament. Biblical reminiscences abound, . . . quotations shine out at every moment." . . . If the Book of Mormon actually comes from the Old World religious milieu with which it identifies itself, it should also resort often to set and accepted forms of expression, and the last thing we should expect to find in it would be gropings for original means of expression."

What happens when we follow this hint and examine older writings in comparison to 2 Nephi 9:12-18?

Wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, Thy dead men shall live,
and hell must deliver up its captive spirits, together with my dead body shall they arise.
and the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: . . .
and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored one to the other. . . .

And . . . when all men shall have passed from . . . death unto life, . . .
I will open your graves, and cause you to come out of your graves . . . And shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live. (Ezekiel 37:12, 14)

they must appear before the judgment-seat of the Holy One of Israel;
For he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness. (Psalm 96:13)

and then cometh the judgment, and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God.
The Lord shall judge the people: judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness. (Psalm 7:8)

In those days shall the earth deliver up from her womb, and hell deliver up from hers, that which was received, and destruction shall restore that which it owes. He shall select the righteous and holy from among them. (1 Enoch 1)

And assuredly, as the Lord The Lord liveth. (Psalm
liveth, for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away,

And the Lord said unto Moses, Is the Lord’s hand waxed short? thou shalt see now whether my word shall come to pass unto thee or not. (Numbers 11:23)

The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand. (Isaiah 14:24)

that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still; [This also appears on George D. Smith’s list.]

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. (Daniel 12:2)

And unto this people thou shalt say, Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I set before you the way of life, and the way of death. (Jeremiah 21:8)

Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the Lord your God, which I command you this day; And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the Lord your God. (Deuteronomy 11:26-28)

For all his judgments were before me, and I did not put away his statutes from me.
... Therefore hath the Lord recompensed me. (Psalm 18:22, 24)

wherefore, they who are filthy are the devil and his angels and they shall go away into everlasting fire, prepared for them; and their torment

How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning... Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. (Isaiah 14:12, 15)

I was set up from everlasting. (Proverbs 8:23)

And they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison. (Isaiah 24:22)

And there ye shall remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled; and ye shall lothe yourselves in your own sight for all your evils that ye have committed... Behold, I will kindle a fire in thee, ... the flaming flame shall not be quenched. (Ezekiel 20:43, 47)

How long, Lord? wilt thou hide thyself forever? shall thy wrath burn like fire? (Psalm 89:46)

I beheld that valley in which arose a strong smell of sulphur which became mixed with the waters... Through that valley also rivers of fire
But, behold, the righteous, the saints of the Holy One of Israel, they who have believed in thy Holy One of Israel, they who have endured the crosses of the world, and despised the shame of it, they shall inherit the kingdom of God, which was prepared for them from the foundation of the world, and their joy shall be full forever.

O Lord God of Israel, Thou art righteous. (Ezra 9:15)

Gather my saints together unto me; those that have made a covenant with me by sacrifice. (Psalm 50:5)

thy Redeemer the Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 54:5)

Still he holdeth fast his integrity. (Job 2:3)

He is despised and rejected. (Isaiah 53:3)

For thou shalt not be put to shame. (Isaiah 54:5)

A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. (Jeremiah 17:12)

And I will fasten him as a nail in a sure place; and he shall be for a glorious throne to his father's house. And they shall hang upon him all the glory of his father's house, the offspring and the issue. (Isaiah 22:23-24)

where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? . . . When . . . all the sons of God shouted for joy? (Job
Hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? (Isaiah 40:21)

Thus saith the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, ... Ask me of things to come concerning my sons. ... I have made the earth. (Isaiah 45:11-12)

These Old Testament and Enoch phrasings and imagery support Jacob's formulaic "ascending synthetic allusion" as well as or better than most of Ostler's New Testament references, fit Lehi's context, and are more comprehensive. The line—"endured the crosses of the world and despised the shame" (2 Nephi 9:18) may indeed be translator-dependent on the wording of Hebrews 12:2, depending on how complete our knowledge is of influences on the author of Hebrews and Jacob's sources. Influence from such passages might be a legitimate translator resource, as Ostler argues. But in emphasizing possible translator resources, Ostler did not adequately examine the ancient context. The ancient context must be the first resource if we are to assess the significance and extent of any modern influences through Joseph's "language and understanding."

Assumption #11: Investigation of historicity is useless, and the findings of such investigations are illusory (p. 73). Vogel never clearly states his own position, although he refers to various Latter-day Saints who doubt the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but accept its inspiration. Still, his depiction of the Noah Flood, the Tower, and Adam as the first man, all in fundamentalist terms, in contrast to the date for the Bering Strait migrations of 30,000 to 12,000 years ago, may indicate another priority that weights his assumptions regarding adequacy. Has contemporary science disproved religion and thereby rendered the whole questions of Book of Mormon historicity moot?

As we've seen in discussing the Tower and Flood, Vogel neglects implications of Joseph's revelations that may reconcile traditional science vs. religion tensions at many points. Vogel always resolves ambiguity on the side of scientific
implausibility. Contemporary science is notable for clashing with traditional fundamentalist readings of the scriptures. But fundamentalist readings may owe more to the mindset of the readers than to the text. Wine bottles are one thing, and reality is another.

A naturalistic universe presupposes an environmental Book of Mormon. Vogel may be looking at the Book of Mormon as a puzzle to solve within a naturalistic paradigm, rather than as a challenge to the assumptions of a naturalistic view, and an invitation to assess Alma’s paradigm in Alma 32 towards a theistic faith.

Mastery of the Text

Regarding my assertion that Vogel shows a superficial grasp of the Book of Mormon, one passage deserves special mention. “The Book of Mormon actually gives few details of the observance of the law. It mentions temples but not the ceremonies, priests but not their robes or temple duties” (p. 67). As to the temple in the Book of Mormon, we need to ask whether we would recognize a temple ceremony if we saw one. Vogel should consider how Mormon transmitted the notion that “the Lord doth grant unto all nations . . . all that he seeth fit that they should have” (Alma 29:8) and that “all things


which have been given of God from the beginning of the world, unto man, are the typifying of [Christ]” (2 Nephi 11:4). With this, Mormon is inviting us into the realm of comparative world religion. The implications are far reaching.

**The Temple Context of 3 Nephi 11-29.** In 3 Nephi 11:1, we have a multitude gathered at the temple. According to Mircea Eliade,\(^68\) the three parts of the temple at Jerusalem correspond to the three cosmic regions. The lower court represents the lower regions (“Sheol,” the abode of the dead), the Holy Place the earth, and the Holy of Holies heaven. The temple is always the meeting point of heaven, earth, and hell (Sheol). Considering 3 Nephi as a whole, we find three distinct levels of sacredness.

- **Darkness/Separation:** 3 Nephi 8-10
- **Apotheosis:** 3 Nephi 11:15; 17:24; 18:36-39; 19:14, 25-31; 28:10-18

**The Rites of the New Year.** The destructions described in 3 Nephi become especially striking, not just as perils,\(^69\) but as potent symbols when considered against the pattern of the New Year Temple rites current throughout the ancient world. Mormon tells us that this all happens “in the ending of the thirty and fourth year.” Eliade informs us that ... in the expectation of the New Year there is a repetition of the mythical moment of passage from chaos to cosmos.”\(^70\)

**Regression to Chaos.**

The first act of the ceremony ... marks a regression into the mythical period before the Creation; all forms are supposed to be confounded in the marine abyss of the beginning, ... overturning of the entire social order. ... Every feature suggests

---


\(^69\) For their technical accuracy, see Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 231-38. For their historicity, see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 318-23.

\(^70\) Eliade, *Cosmos and History*, 54 (italics added).
universal confusion, the abolition of order and hierarchy, "orgy," chaos. We witness, one might say, a "deluge" that annihilates all humanity in order to prepare the way for a new and regenerated human species.\footnote{Ibid., 57.}

There arose a great storm . . . also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder. . . . The city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea. (3 Nephi 8:5-6, 9)

\textit{The Perilous Passage.} Every temple, according to Eliade, symbolizes the Center, the zone of the sacred. The road to the center is fraught with perils, because it is in fact, a rite of passage from the profane to the sacred, from the ephemeral and illusory to reality and eternity, from death to life, from man to the divinity. Attaining the center is equivalent to a consecration, an initiation.\footnote{Ibid., 18.}

O all ye that are spared because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? . . . Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you. . . . As many as have received me, to them have I given to become the sons of God. (3 Nephi 9:13-14, 17)

\textit{The Suspension of Time.}

The dead can come back now, for all barriers between the dead and the living are broken (is not primordial chaos reactualized?), and they will come back because at this paradoxical instant time will be suspended, hence they can again be contemporaries of the living. Moreover, since a new Creation is then in preparation, they can hope for a return to a life that will be enduring and concrete.\footnote{Ibid., 62.}
And many graves shall be opened, and shall yield up many of their dead; and many saints shall appear unto many. (Helaman 14:25, and cf. 3 Nephi 23:9-13; 26:15)

*Three Days of Darkness.*

The death of the individual and the *periodic* death of humanity are necessary, even as the three days of darkness preceding the "rebirth." 74

And then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land, insomuch that the inhabitants thereof . . . could feel the vapor of darkness; And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled. . . . And there was not any light seen, neither fire, nor glimmer, neither the sun, nor the moon, nor the stars. . . . And it came to pass that it did last for the space of three days. (3 Nephi 8:19-23)

*Humiliation of the King and the Role of the Scapegoat.*

To Marduk's descent into hell . . . there corresponded a period of mourning and fasting for the whole community and of "humiliation" for the king. . . . At this same period . . . the expulsion of evils and sins took place by means of a scapegoat. 75

I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the father in taking upon me the sins of the world. (3 Nephi 11:11)

*The Sacred Combat.*

The ritual combats between two groups of actors reactualize the cosmogonic moment of the fight between the god and the primordial dragon . . . for the combat . . . presupposes the reactualization of

---

74 Ibid., 88.
75 Ibid., 56.
primordial chaos, while the victory . . . can only signify . . . the Creation.76

That great city Zarahemla have I burned. . . . That great city Moroni have I caused to be sunk in the depths of the sea. . . . And many great destructions have I caused to come upon this land, and upon this people, because of their wickedness and abominations. (3 Nephi 9:3-4, 12)

The Symbolism of Light Coming into Darkness.

Renewal of the world through rekindling of the fire, . . . a renewal that is equivalent to a new creation. . . . It is at this period that fires are extinguished and rekindled; and finally, this is the moment of initiations, one of whose essential elements is precisely this extinction and rekindling of fire.77

I am the light and the life of the world. . . . The light of the body is the eye; if, therefore, thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. (3 Nephi 9:18; 13:22-23)

Coronation.

This triumph was followed by the enthronement of Yahweh as king and the repetition of the cosmogonic act.78

They did cry out with one accord, saying: Hosanna! Blessed be the name of the Most High God! And they did fall down at the feet of Jesus, and did worship him. (3 Nephi 11:16-17)

Sacraments.

This periodic "salvation" of man finds an immediate counterpart in the guarantee of food.79

76 Ibid., 69, 60.
77 Ibid., 67.
78 Ibid., 60.
79 Cf. ibid.
Now, there had been no bread, neither wine, brought by the disciples, neither by the multitude; But he truly gave unto them bread to eat, and also wine to drink. And he said unto them: He that eateth this bread eateth of my body to his soul; and he that drinketh of this wine drinketh of my blood to his soul; and his soul shall never hunger nor thirst, but shall be filled. (3 Nephi 20:6-8)

Baptism.

Baptism is equivalent to the ritual death of the old man followed by a new birth. On the cosmic level it is equivalent to the deluge: abolition of contours, fusion of all forms, return to the formless.\(^{80}\)

Behold, ye shall go down and stand in the water, and in my name ye shall baptize them. . . . And then ye shall immerse them in the water, and come forth out of the water. (3 Nephi 11:23, 26)

Opposition in All Things.

The ambivalence and polarity of these episodes (fasting and excess, grief and joy, despair and orgy) only confirm their complementary function in the frame of the same system.\(^{81}\)

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. (2 Nephi 2:11; cf. 2 Nephi 2:10-27, implied in 3 Nephi 14:13-14)

Recital of the Creation Story.

To listen to the recital of the birth of the world is to become the contemporary of the creative act \textit{par excellence}, the cosmogony.\(^{82}\)

And he did expound all things, even from the beginning. (3 Nephi 26:3)

At-one-ment.

\(^{80}\) Ibid., 59.
\(^{81}\) Ibid., 61-62.
\(^{82}\) Ibid., 83.
Sacrifice is intended "to restore the primordial unity." 83

And now, Father, I pray unto thee for them, and also for all those who shall believe on their words, that they may believe in me, that I may be in them, as thou Father, art in me, that we may be one. (3 Nephi 19:23)

Initiation.

Any ritual whatever . . . unfolds not only in a consecrated space . . . but also in a "sacred time," "once upon a time" (in illo tempore, ab origine), that is, when the ritual was performed for the first time by a god, an ancestor, or a hero. Every ritual has a divine model, an archetype. . . . Not only do rituals have their mythical model but any human act whatever acquires effectiveness to the extent to which it exactly repeats an act performed at the beginning of time by a god, a hero, or an ancestor. . . . Insofar as he repeats the archetypal sacrifice, the sacrificer, in full ceremonial action, abandons the profane world of mortals and introduces himself into the divine world of the immortals. 84

For the works which ye have seen me do that shall ye also do; for that which ye have seen me do even that shall ye do. . . . And ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; . . . ye shall be even as I am, and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one. (3 Nephi 27:21; 28:10)

The 3 Nephi experience follows the pattern of Old World Forty-Day writings, a distinguishing feature of which is an organic structure of rites and ordinances. The original sense of "perfect - telios" as in "Be ye therefore perfect (Matthew 5:48 and 3 Nephi 12:48), "has long been associated with becoming initiated into the great mysteries." 85 The Nephites were gathered at the temple in a covenantal context.

83 Ibid., 78.
84 Ibid., 21-22, 36.
85 F.A.R.M.S. Update, "The Sermon at the Temple," March 1988. The analysis and references immediately following draw upon research done
Thou . . . shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths; 
But verily, verily, I say unto you, swear not at all.
. . . But let your communication be yea, yea, Nay, nay. (3 Nephi 12:33-34, 37)

Some aspects of the Nephite experience are shrouded in secrecy.

And it was forbidden them that they should utter; neither was it given unto them power that they could utter the things which they saw and heard. (3 Nephi 28:14)

Worthiness was very important.

And it was the more righteous part of the people who were saved. (3 Nephi 10:12)

Ye shall not suffer any one knowingly to partake of my flesh and blood unworthily. (3 Nephi 18:28)

This is all a very solemn and holy occasion with somber responsibilities:

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you. (3 Nephi 14:6)

Verily, verily, I say unto you, I give unto you to be the salt of the earth; but if the salt shall lose its savor wherewith shall the earth be salted? The salt shall be thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. (3 Nephi 12:13)

The Nephites were charged to keep several commandments:

Sacrifice of a broken heart and contrite spirit (3 Nephi 9:20)

Obedience (3 Nephi 12:20)
Gospel (3 Nephi 12:31-34; 14:12)
Charge to avoid evil speaking (3 Nephi 12:22)
Chastity (3 Nephi 12:27-32)
Consecration (3 Nephi 13:33; 3 Nephi 26:19; 4 Nephi 1:3)

The Nephite initiation included two levels of priesthood ordinations.

And the Lord said unto him: I give unto you power that ye shall baptize this people. . . . And again the Lord called others, and said unto them likewise; and he gave unto them power to baptize. (3 Nephi 11:21-22)

The disciples bare record that he gave them power to give the Holy Ghost. (3 Nephi 18:37)

The Nephites are warned against Satan:

Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye must watch and pray always, lest ye be tempted by the devil, and ye be led away captive by him. (3 Nephi 18:15; also 2 Nephi 2:29)

There are warnings against false prophets (3 Nephi 14:15-23; also consider Korihor, Sherem, Nehor, Isabel, Gadianton, and Zeezrom as types).

Prayers and Prayer Circles.

After this manner therefore pray ye. (3 Nephi 13:9)

Jesus stood in the midst. . . . Angels descend[ed] out of heaven . . . and encircled those little ones about, . . . and the angels did minister unto them.86 (3 Nephi 17:12, 24)

The climax and purpose of the rites point to deification.

---

86 See also 3 Nephi 19:4-35 for prayer circles on three levels of sacredness, and Nibley, "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," in Mormonism and Early Christianity, 45-99, and "Christ among the Ruins," in The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 407-34.
And ye shall sit down in the kingdom of my Father; yea, and your joy shall be full, even as the Father has given me fulness of joy; and ye shall be even as I am [perhaps I AM], and I am even as the Father; and the Father and I are one. (3 Nephi 28:10)

By this time the Latter-day Saint reader of 3 Nephi may also begin to see increased significance in the frequent mention of white robes and garments throughout 3 Nephi (11:8; 19:25; 27:19), as well as the Lord’s invitation to “thrust your hands into my side, and also that ye may feel the prints of the nails in my hands and in my feet, that ye may know that I am the God of Israel [i.e., a true messenger]” (3 Nephi 11:14), or when “he touched with his hand the disciples whom he had chosen, one by one, . . . and he spake unto them as he touched them” (3 Nephi 18:36) or when the Lord’s voice was heard to say, “Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you” (3 Nephi 9:14).

Therefore, ask, and ye shall receive; knock, and it shall be opened unto you; for he that asketh receiveth; and unto him that knocketh, it shall be opened. (3 Nephi 27:29)

I rejoice in the day when my mortal shall put on immortality, and I shall stand before him; then shall I see his face with pleasure, and he will say unto me: Come unto me, ye blessed. There is a place prepared for you in the mansions of my Father. (Enos 1:27)

In approaching the Book of Mormon through a narrow contextual frame, as though the book simply “solves the problem of how the gospel came to ancient America” (p. 67), Dan Vogel overlooks many aspects of the text that emerge only through broader-based comparisons, appearing only for those with eyes to see and ears to hear.

Conclusions

Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon provides new and interesting information on the pre-1830 environment of the Book of Mormon, especially concerning knowledge of Mesoamerican antiquities. Vogel’s first chapter is marred by the presence of Hoffman materials and the absence of any discussion of such
topics as the witnesses or the reasons for the early collapse of the environmental theory.87 Vogel also illustrates, however unintentionally, that a strict environmental approach cannot answer questions of historicity, though it must provide the context for such questions. Studies assuming historicity seriously challenge the comprehensive validity of Vogel’s conclusion that “The better one understands the pre-1830 environment of Joseph Smith, the better he or she will understand the Book of Mormon” (p. 73), as well as his dismissal of historic approaches as “illusory.” Consider the number of significant studies that F.A.R.M.S. has issued since the 1986 publication of Vogel’s book, not to mention similar studies from other sources. Would we really have been closer to a proper understanding of the Book of Mormon had such works never appeared?

Vogel is a talented and energetic scholar and the world of Mormon letters is bound to be stimulated by his contributions. Book of Mormon scholarship can only benefit from diverse approaches. If some cannot accept a historic view, let them draw benefit in whatever way they can. Ultimately, paradigms and creeds will burst as truth cuts its own way.

---

Because this booklet, by its own admission, is adapted from a "Know Your Religion" lecture given February 1988 in Scottsdale, Arizona (see the title page), the reader does not expect documentation and therefore is pleasantly surprised with what is given. The book is divided into three parts. The author's feelings toward the Book of Mormon and his autobiographical conversion story form the first part. Why this is included among "little known evidences" is never explained. The material presented in the second part treats the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in the nineteenth century. It is unfortunate that what meager new information is presented here (most of the sources quoted have long been in print) is not better documented.

While the title of this booklet seems to have been drawn from the third part, the bulk of the material in this last section is not new, but has admittedly been taken from other sources. Lamentably the information was used uncritically, mixing glaring factual errors and unsupported statements with some few accurate facts. For instance, on page 35 it is stated that "Syrian, Hebrew, Ancient Egyptian, Arabic, and Aramaic" comprise the Semitic language family. This list is not only too exclusive but also too inclusive: many of the East Semitic (Assyrian and Babylonian) and some of the more important West Semitic (Phoenician and Ethiopic) languages have not been included. And Ancient Egyptian is not a Semitic language but rather belongs to the Hamitic family of languages. Both language groups belong to the Hamito-Semitic, or Afro-Asiatic, group, but Hamitic is not Semitic. In addition, there is no such language as "Syrian." Probably Syriac was meant, which is a dialect of Aramaic. (Or was it Assyrian?) On the same page it is stated that Syrian, Ancient Egyptian, and Aramaic "are considered dead languages, and are no longer in use." Aramaic is not dead. Several groups still speak dialects of Aramaic. It is also claimed on the same page that "the Book of Mormon was originally written in the Egyptian language, although 'reformed'," with Mormon 9:32 as a reference. Although the Book of Mormon informs us that Mormon used an Egyptian script on the plates, the underlying language could have been
Hebrew. (To cite a modern example, Yiddish, a language closely related to German, is written in the Hebrew script.) The rest of the booklet argues from the nonposition that it therefore contains Semitisms, specifically Arabisms and not the more likely Hebraisms.

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

This booklet is based on a "Know Your Religion" talk presented by the author in 1988 in Scottsdale, Arizona. Yorgason, noted in Latter-day Saint circles mostly for his works of fiction, has undertaken a scholarly appraisal of the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, he is not well equipped to handle such a task and should, at the very least, have asked an expert to review the text before publication. It could also have used a good editor; because it is essentially a lecture, rather than a written composition, the book breaks most of Strunk's rules of style.

The book is also misnamed. Of its 49 pages, only 16 (Part Three) are really devoted to "evidences" for the Book of Mormon. Part Two comprises historical anecdotes about the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. Parts One and Four are more personal and consist of Yorgason's feelings about the Nephite record and its value in his life. These feelings represent, in my opinion, the only part of the booklet that can be said to be a valuable contribution. But more about that later. First, I shall explain my dismay at reading the rest of the book.

Yorgason's dogmatic assertions about such matters as Lehi's route to the land Bountiful and the location of the Book of Mormon Hill Cumorah bear evidence that he has not followed recent scholarly studies in these areas. Instead, he relies on discoveries of arrowheads and spear points in upper New York State (without regard to their age) and points to mass tombs (also ignoring their late date) and a "white lime" formed from the decay of human bones (ignoring the fact that animal bones are chemically the same as human). He notes a fort cut out of rock, as though it were "Nephite" (though he doesn't say so). The fort, he informs us, contained iron implements and was thought by an early visitor to have been constructed with the aid of gunpowder. These facts alone suggest a very late date, well after the close of Moroni's record.

The back cover speaks of Yorgason's identification of "physical evidences" for the Book of Mormon. Strictly speaking, physical evidences are artifacts found in an archaeological or historical context. Aside from the arrowheads, the spear points, the layer of "lime," and the fort—all of which
postdate the Book of Mormon history—there is nothing "physical" about the subjects discussed in the book.

The back cover describes Yorgason as "an entertaining historical scholar." I would delete the last two words in order to give the statement greater accuracy. Historiography is not Mr. Yorgason's strong suit. He unhesitatingly accepts stories he likes. The anecdotes in Part Two are interesting but should be used with caution. Many of them were told years after the events they describe. For example, Yorgason quotes from David Whitmer's *An Address to All Believers in Christ*, a story relating how Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon. Would he have used, with equal acceptance, some of the other stories told in Whitmer's pamphlet that contradict Joseph Smith's own account?

The Whitmer account is supported by another attributed to Martin Harris, though it is actually secondhand. According to these accounts, during the translation of the Book of Mormon an English sentence would appear written in the stone. Joseph would read it for his scribe. When correctly written down, the sentence would disappear, to be replaced by another. Yorgason invokes this account to claim that the English recorded by Joseph's scribes is a completely exact, perfect transcription.

Though long told among Latter-day Saints, the story does not ring true. The first problem is that of identifying "sentences" in the Book of Mormon. The original manuscript had very little punctuation, and sentences had to be determined by the printer, as Yorgason notes in another place. This punctuation was corrected in several later additions, but is still woefully inadequate in our current Book of Mormon. Scribal errors found in the original manuscript and corrected by Joseph Smith are perhaps the best evidence that the story of the disappearing sentences is untrue. Words may have appeared to Joseph as he rendered his translation, but the idea that they were verified as perfect before disappearing seems contradicted by the fact that Joseph made further corrections in the 1837 and 1840 editions. Prudence requires one to remain cautious when speaking about the means and methods used by Joseph Smith in translating the Book of Mormon.

The story of the cave full of plates inside the Hill Cumorah in New York is often given as evidence that it is, indeed, the hill where Mormon hid the plates. Yorgason quotes one version of the story from Brigham Young and alludes to six others collected by Paul T. Smith. Unfortunately, none of the accounts
is firsthand. The New York Hill Cumorah is a moraine laid down anciently by a glacier in motion. It is comprised of gravel and earth. Geologically, it is impossible for the hill to have a cave, and all those who have gone in search of the cave have come back empty-handed. If, therefore, the story attributed to Oliver Cowdery (by others) is true, then the visits to the cave perhaps represent visions, perhaps of some far distant hill, not physical events.

There is, however, reason to suspect the veracity of the story. Brigham Young, generally cited as a source, recounted it during the conference at which the Farmington Stake was organized in 1877. In the same discourse, President Young preceded the cave story by an account of Porter Rockwell and others finding a cache of Nephite gold which slipped away from them. The purpose of the President's remarks was to dissuade the Latter-day Saints from prospecting for mines. To accomplish his purpose, he told of the belief (commonly held by Joseph Smith and other early Latter-day Saints involved in treasure hunting) that treasures can be moved about in the earth by their guardians. If this is the case, then who is to say where the plates were before Joseph and Oliver supposedly visited the cave? If they could truly be moved about, why not from Mexico, for example?

Part Three of Yorgason's book details some of the linguistic evidences for the Book of Mormon. Most of it is "extrapolated from [Yorgason's] frantic note-taking" during two presentations on the Semitic nature of the Book of Mormon given by Dr. Sami Hanna of the University of Utah. Typed transcriptions of fireside talks by Dr. Hanna have been circulating for some time, and I have read some of them.

I first met Sami Hanna in 1968, when I began teaching Hebrew at the University of Utah. I took several Arabic classes from him and served with him on some faculty committees. He is a fine man and an accomplished Arabic scholar, but he knows no other Semitic languages and has no training in comparative Semitics. Nor does he know ancient Egyptian or its later form, Coptic.

Some of the statements attributed to Hanna are perhaps misunderstandings on Yorgason's part. For example, the back cover says that Hanna's Arabic translation "made available the Book of Mormon, in Arabic, to over 800 million Moslems, including 125 million Arabs." In the text (p. 37), the same figure is given for readers of Arabic, while it is stated that "only
several hundred thousand . . . speak and read Hebrew.” The author of this statement is evidently unaware of the fact that most Muslims do not speak Arabic, and that there are at least several hundred languages spoken by various Muslim peoples throughout the world. As for Hebrew-speakers, the Israelis, now going on four million strong, would be surprised to learn that they are “only several hundred thousand” in number.

Because he does not know Hebrew, Hanna took up the practice of calling the original language of the Book of Mormon “Semitic.” Make no mistake; he means Arabic. Comparing the Nephite record with Arabic is not an entirely unfruitful endeavor. However, a comparison with Hebrew, the Nephite native tongue, would have been better.

Yorgason, evidently following Hanna, lists the Semitic languages as “Syrian,” Hebrew, “Ancient Egyptian,” Arabic and Aramaic, and shows Semitic as a relative of “Afro-Asian.” There are several basic errors in the linguistic pedigree chart he includes in the book. Aramaic and Syriac (Yorgason’s “Syrian”) are, in fact, the same; the Hebrew name for Syria is Aram. Egyptian is not a Semitic language at all, but is one of the subdivisions of Afro-Asiatic. The Semitic family is also part of the Afro-Asiatic family. Hebrew is just as closely related to ancient Egyptian as it is to other Afro-Asiatic languages spoken today, such as Beja, Somali, Hausa, Berber, Chadic, and others. Major ancient Semitic languages not listed on the chart include Akkadian (with later Assyrian and Babylonian forms), Ugaritic, Eblaite, and several Epigraphic South Arabian dialects. The chart further fails to note the Canaanite group of Semitic languages, of which Hebrew, Phoenician, and Punic are a part.

Yorgason (or Hanna?) is also wrong in saying that Hebrew and Arabic are the only Semitic languages still employed today. Several Aramaic dialects are spoken in a few Syrian villages, while others are used in the liturgy of various Christian churches. Samaritan also retains its liturgical value. Amharic, a Semitic tongue, is the principal language of Ethiopia, where its earlier form, Geez, is still used in Christian liturgy.

If, therefore, the Book of Mormon was “originally written in the Egyptian language,” then Arabic can be of only minimal assistance in ascertaining that fact. There are differences of opinion among Latter-day Saint scholars about the exact nature of the writing on the plates, but the majority of those qualified to speak on such matters believe that the underlying language was Hebrew, with Egyptian symbols used to represent the Hebrew
words. (Examples of such writing have been found in archaeological excavations.) If this is true, then a comparison with Hebrew would be the most valuable.

To say that Hanna's Arabic version was a translation of the Book of Mormon "back into its original Semitic cultural format" is an exaggeration at best. Hanna also exaggerated the importance of the Arabic translation by stressing that it was "our Church leaders," "the First Presidency," or "the Brethren" who asked him to do the work, and that it had been decided to do Arabic first because so many more people read Arabic than Hebrew. While living in Israel, I was involved in the groundwork of the plans to prepare the Hebrew and Arabic translations of the Book of Mormon. During President Harold B. Lee's visit, we asked him if a Hebrew translation could be approved. It was subsequently decided that, in order to avoid offending the Arabs, the two would be prepared at the same time. Both projects, however, were coordinated through the Church Translation Department, as with all other "emerging languages." Thus, the decision to translate the Book of Mormon into Hebrew and Arabic originated with the officers of the Jerusalem Branch and was not a deliberate attempt on the part of the Church to reproduce the "original" of that sacred volume.

On pages 38-44, Yorgason gives a list of "Semitic Characteristics of the Book of Mormon," based on Hanna's talks. Some of them are valid, for they apply to Hebrew as well as Arabic. Others lack substance, however. We shall examine some of these.

- Hanna notes that the Semitic languages are written from right to left, which is the way Joseph Smith described the writing on the plates. To Latter-day Saints, who already accept Joseph Smith as a prophet, this is indeed evidence that the writing on the plates could have been Semitic. But it means nothing to nonbelievers, since Joseph wrote that statement several years after the translation, by which time he had already studied Hebrew. It is interesting that he expressly compared the writing direction with Hebrew, not with Arabic or Egyptian.\(^1\)

- Hanna stresses (Nos. 2-4) the paucity of capital letters, paragraphs, and punctuation in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, and attributes this to the fact that these are lacking in the Semitic languages. The phenomenon is more

\(^1\) HC 1:71.
likely attributable to the fact that Joseph Smith dictated the English text to a scribe, who didn’t know where to add the punctuation. Capitalization in the original manuscript is erratic. These features are therefore not evidence for a Semitic original.

- In No. 5, Hanna notes that the Semitic languages have only two “tenses” (a word he would not have used for a more sophisticated audience). He illustrated the reflection of this by referring to the use of compound past tenses with “did” in the Book of Mormon. But since the Book of Mormon has more than two tenses in its verbal structure, this can hardly be taken as serious evidence of a Semitic origin.

- The fact that the Book of Mormon numbering system (e.g., “in the twenty and first”) corresponds to Semitic (No. 7) may be equally well attributed to the influence of the King James Bible, which follows the same system, and whose language forms the basis for the English of the Book of Mormon.

- While many of the names in the Book of Mormon are Semitic (No. 8), many are not.

- Hanna asserts (No. 9) that the sentence structure of the Book of Mormon is Semitic. While this is often true, it is not true of the entire book; otherwise, it wouldn’t make sense in English.

- Hanna says that “The idioms used in the book are purely Semitic.” There are some Semitic idioms in the Book of Mormon, but they are not “purely Semitic.” Indeed, some of the “Semitic” examples he gives are also English. Thus, the idiom “turned him(s)elf about” (rather than “turn around”) is found in the English song “Hokey Pokey.” The term “stiffneckedness,” while assuredly Semitic, is so common in the King James Bible that it has become an English idiom. The use of the word “moon” in place of “month” in the Book of Mormon loses some of its impact when one realizes that the word “month” derives from “moon,” with the suffix “-th.” And Hanna’s rendering of “a special kind of curved sword” for the word ziff ignores the fact that the word is used in a list of raw materials used for adorning buildings! A more reasonable etymology would be the Hebrew word meaning “brilliant,” perhaps referring to a type of metal or metal alloy (such as electrum).

Of particular interest are Yorgason’s comments about the word “curious” in the Book of Mormon: “I had always related the word ‘curious’ to ‘strange’; but according to Dr. Hanna, ‘curious’ actually refers to an instrument of ‘skilled’ or ‘elegant’
workmanship.” Hanna is, of course, correct, but not from the Semitic point-of-view. This was, in fact, a primary meaning of the English word “curious” in Joseph Smith’s day, as any dictionary of that era or one with etymological notes will attest.

There are many evidences for the Semitic background of the Book of Mormon. Most of the best such evidences are not given in Yorgason’s booklet, however. He should have referred to the many other articles written on the subject, including the half dozen I have published. In contrast to Yorgason’s 49 pages, the body of linguistic evidence for the Book of Mormon could fill several volumes.

Yorgason calls Hanna’s talk “perhaps the most crowning, [sic] experience in this treatise.” I found it the most disappointing, not only because Hanna lacks the expertise to discuss the Semitic languages and Hebrew, but also because Yorgason relied on notes concerning a subject he does not understand.

In my years of researching the language of the Book of Mormon and reading the work done by other competent scholars, I have become very impressed by the vast array of linguistic evidence for the book’s antiquity and authenticity. Yorgason’s book, rather than supporting that evidence, is, in my opinion, harmful to the cause of the Book of Mormon. It may impress those who don’t have the background to weed out its inaccuracies, but it will undoubtedly be more fuel to the fire being built by critics of the Book of Mormon. To them and their audience—potential converts to the restored Church—Yorgason will appear to be another example of “Mormon” incompetence and gullibility.

In fairness, however, I must reiterate that I was delighted by the accounts of Yorgason’s personal experiences with the Book of Mormon, found in the early and later portions of the book. His testimony is, in fact, the strongest evidence he presents for the Book of Mormon. And, in the final analysis, it is the strongest evidence any of us could want.
Book of Mormon Bibliography

Adam Lamoreaux

Books


Hemingway, Donald W. *Christianity in America before Columbus?* Salt Lake City: Hawkes, 1988.


Millett, Robert L. *By Grace Are We Saved.* Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989.


Articles


Map

About the Reviewers

Lewis M. Bastian, Ed.D., is an Instructor of Religious Education at Brigham Young University.

Elouise Bell is Professor of English at Brigham Young University.

Susan Easton Black, Ed.D., is Associate Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University.

Kevin Christensen is a technical writer living in San Jose, California.

Richard H. Cracroft, Ph.D., is Professor of English at Brigham Young University.

Eugene England, Ph.D., is Professor of English at Brigham Young University.

John Gee is a graduate student in Near Eastern Studies at University of California, Berkeley.

Gary P. Gillum is Ancient Studies and Religion Librarian at Brigham Young University.

Daniel W. Graham, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Brigham Young University.

William J. Hamblin, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of History at Brigham Young University.

David B. Honey, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Chinese at Brigham Young University.

Paul Y. Hoskisson, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University.

Daniel B. McKinlay is a research assistant for the Encyclopedia of Mormonism.
L. Ara Norwood is a researcher, speaker, and sales trainer in southern California.

David A. Palmer, Ph.D., of Naperville, Illinois, is a chemical engineer with Amoco Chemical.

Daniel C. Peterson, Ph.D., is assistant professor of Islamic Studies and Arabic at Brigham Young University.

Larry C. Porter, Ph.D., is Professor of Church History and Doctrine at Brigham Young University.

Noel B. Reynolds, Ph.D., is Professor of Political Science at Brigham Young University.

Shirley S. Ricks, Ph.D., is production editor for the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

Stephen D. Ricks, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages at Brigham Young University.

John A. Tvedtanes holds graduate degrees in Linguistics and Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Utah.

Bruce W. Warren, Ph.D., is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Brigham Young University.

Diane E. Wirth is a writer and lecturer on Mesoamerican iconography based in Westford, Massachusetts.