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Insights

A WINDOW ON THE ANCIENT WORLD VOLUME 26 | 2006

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Making the Case for Cultural Diffusion in Ancient Times

Old theories die hard in academia, at least when they are entrenched and have been defended intellectually with fervor. Only with overwhelming evidence to the contrary does the institutional status quo crumble and make way for new theories to find legitimacy within the academic mainstream. Illustrative of this struggle for acceptance in the academy has been the contest between the establishment position that ancient American civilization evolved in complete independence from the Old

World and the “cultural diffusion hypothesis.” The latter proposes that American societies did not arise and develop in total isolation but were stimulated by connections from the Old World.

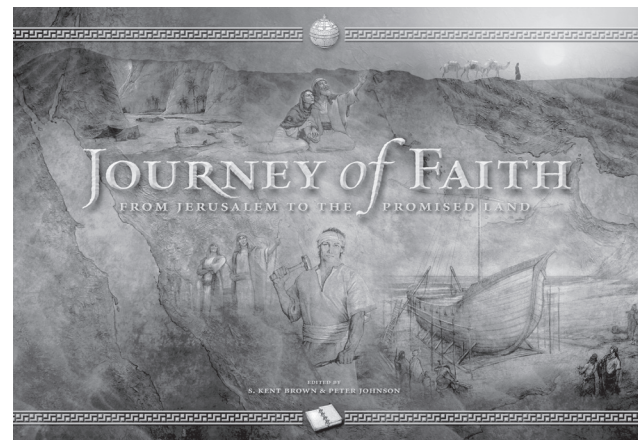
For years John L. Sorenson and a non-LDS colleague, Carl L. Johannessen, have been collecting evidence for interhemispheric contact in pre-Columbian times, a matter that readers of the Book of Mormon are quite at home with. Having amassed a veritable boatload of hard evidence, Sorenson and Johannessen (professors emeriti of anthropology at BYU and geography at the University of Oregon,

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Lehi's Epic Journey Detailed in New Book

The seamless blend of scholarship and artistry of the Maxwell Institute's DVD documentary *Journey of Faith* continues in expanded form in the new book *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land*. Complemented by numerous additional threads of historical detail and scholarly insight, this visually stunning look at Lehi's trek through the harsh Arabian desert reflects a synergistic collaboration of talented scholars, artists, and photographers seeking to illuminate an epic event in scriptural history and situate it in a real-world setting.

The popular DVD version generated much interest as well as numerous requests to publish the original artwork that was featured in the documentary. That response and the fact that a lot of excellent content had to be left out of the film argued for essentially publishing the documentary in book form. As a result, the book contains commentary and many images from the DVD but also much more: a foreword by the editors, FARMS director S. Kent Brown and movie producer Peter



Johnson; Brown's and Johnson's reflections on the project in two separate chapters; additional commentary by scholars; an appendix on the famed Incense Trail across the Arabian Peninsula; a bibliography; and for the first printing of the book a free DVD: *A Filmmaking Odyssey: The Making of Journey of Faith*.

The evocative artwork of Joseph Brickey and Howard Lyon is combined with the superb photographs of Justin Andrews and David Lisonbee to

[continued on page 5](#)

Negative Questions in the Book of Mormon

Much research has been devoted to identifying and examining language patterns in the Book of Mormon that appear to reflect the book's underlying Semitic character.¹ One possible Hebraism in the Book of Mormon that has not received attention is the use of negative rhetorical questions when a positive meaning is intended. Some modern Bible translations now translate these negative questions in a positive or even emphatic way.² This rhetorical device occurs in English, but it is stronger and more common in biblical Hebrew.³

Being aware of negative questions can help shed light on some Book of Mormon passages and in one case pertains directly to a criticism leveled against the book.

In Hebrew, questions that require a yes or no answer are prefixed by *hă* (an interrogative particle), and negative questions are prefixed by *hălô* (the particle plus the word for *no*).⁴ In contrast to a "simple question, when the questioner is wholly uncertain as to the answer to be expected,"⁵ these negative questions, Hebrew scholars have pointed out, sometimes have an "exclamatory nuance" or "a special force of asseveration" (i.e., they are being used for rhetorical effect, conveying positive or even emphatic force).⁶

Old Testament Examples

A few examples will suffice to show that where the KJV translates the underlying Hebrew literally as a negative question,⁷ some newer Bible versions prefer to translate the intended positive or emphatic effect upon the hearer.⁸

Deuteronomy 11:30

KJV **Are they not on the other side Jordan**, by the way where the sun goeth down, in the land of the Canaanites, which dwell in the champaign over against Gilgal, beside the plains of Moreh?

NIV **As you know, these mountains are across the Jordan**, west of the road, toward the setting sun, near the great trees of Moreh, in the territory of those Canaanites living in the Arabah in the vicinity of Gilgal.

Isaiah 10:8

KJV For he saith, **Are not my princes altogether kings?**

JPS For he thinks, "**After all, I have kings as my captains!**"

Judges 4:14

KJV And Deborah said unto Barak, Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera into thine hand: **is not the Lord gone out before thee?** So Barak went down from mount Tabor,

and ten thousand men after him.

NRSV Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day on which the Lord has given Sisera into your hand. **The Lord is indeed going out before you.**" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand warriors following him.


Book of Mormon Examples

One good example of a potentially Hebrew-based negative question in the Book of Mormon comes from Helaman 9, where Nephi is accused of murdering the chief judge, Seezoram. In prophetically sending the authorities to the true assassin, Seantum, Nephi instructs them to ask Seantum, "From whence cometh this blood [on your cloak]? *Do we not know* that it is the blood of your brother?" (Helaman 9:32). In other words, "We do indeed know that it is the blood of your brother." Seantum promptly confesses.

A second example is a well-known passage from Moroni 10:4. Some critics have charged that a positive response about the Book of Mormon as a result of prayer indicates that the Book of Mormon is not true, because of the phrasing of the passage. This argument is strained and untenable given the nature of rhetorical negative questions. Moroni asks that "when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you

that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are *not* true”—rather than “if these things are *indeed* true.” Though from a relatively late period in Nephite history, this example nevertheless seems valid since a form of “altered” Hebrew was still in use, at least for writing (see Mormon 9:33). Additional examples of negative questions may include 1 Nephi 15:12; 2 Nephi 31:7; Jacob 5:48; Mosiah 4:19; 7:23; 20:18; 27:15; and Alma 5:11; 27:18; 39:18; 39:19; 47:34.

The Book of Mormon also asks negative questions in which the speaker answers his own question with “Yea.” This may correspond to a slightly different category of questions using *hālō*, indicating that “an affirmative answer is expected.”⁹ For example, Alma 5:59 reads, “For what shepherd is there among you having many sheep doth not watch over them, that the wolves enter not and devour his flock? And behold, if a wolf enter his flock doth he not drive him out? *Yea*, and at the last, if he can, he will destroy him.” Other examples include 1 Nephi 15:15; Mosiah 12:30; 13:33; Alma 26:35; 32:30; and Mormon 9:16.

Given what we know about biblical Hebrew and the Semitic background of the Book of Mormon, it seems probable that the authors of the Book of Mormon employed negative rhetorical questions to indicate positive emphasis in the same manner as their Old Testament counterparts did. 

By Ben Spackman

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Notes

- 1 See, for example, Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 155–89; and John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1982), 33–52.
- 2 Examples are the NIV (New International Version) and JPS (Jewish Publication Society of America) Bible translations, demonstrating that the decision to translate negative questions positively is not an idiosyncrasy of one translator or theological bias.
- 3 In some ways the Hebrew usage is functionally closer to English question tags meant to affirm the validity of the statement: “It’s hot, isn’t it?” See Bruce K. Waltke and Michael Patrick O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), §40.3n48.
- 4 Some scholars have argued that *lō* does not represent the negative particle, but an asseverative particle as exists in Ugaritic and Arabic. Since the two particles are formally the same, resolving the argument remains methodologically difficult. See Daniel Sivan and William Schniedewind, “Letting Your ‘Yes’ Be ‘No’ in Ancient Israel: A Study of the Asseverative כִּי and $\text{כִּי־וַ$,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 38/2 (1993): 209–26.
- 5 Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), §150 d.
- 6 Paul Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* (Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblio, 1991), §161 b–c and 164 d.
- 7 The literal translation of these questions in KJV English minimizes any potential evidentiary value of this Semitic pattern in the Book of Mormon.
- 8 Further examples are listed in H. A. Brongers, “Some Remarks on the Biblical Particle *h^alō*,” *Oudtestamentische Studiën* 21 (1981): 188–89.
- 9 Waltke and O’Connor, *Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, §40.3n48.

Proceedings of the Tree of Life Symposium

We are pleased to announce plans to publish the proceedings of the recent FARMS-sponsored Tree of Life Symposium, held in September at Brigham Young University. Featuring papers by such noted scholars as Margaret Barker of Great Britain, James Lara of Yale Divinity School, Richard Oman of the Museum of Church History and Art, and Wilfred Griggs of BYU’s Department of Ancient Scripture, this volume will explore religious, cultural, historical, and botanical aspects of this rich and widespread symbol.

Maxwell Institute Scholars Speak at FAIR Conference

Scholars from the Maxwell Institute, as well as a number of authors who contribute to the institute's publications, delivered papers at the recent FAIR conference held in Sandy, Utah, in August. The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing well-documented answers to criticisms of Latter-day Saint doctrine, belief, and practice.

Daniel C. Peterson, professor of Arabic and Islamic studies at BYU and editor-in-chief of the Maxwell Institute's Middle Eastern Texts Initiative (METI), responded to criticisms of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon. "Today's attack on the witnesses focuses on the alleged non-literality of their experiences," he said, with some critics "portraying them as alienated from empirical reality and as having merely imagined the plates, or seen them in a subjective hallucination."

As Peterson pointed out, however, both the Three and Eight Witnesses testified throughout their lives that they saw real plates, with some of them, such as David Whitmer and Oliver Cowdery, specifically dealing with the issue of whether they could have been deceived and insisting that they were not. Moreover, the experience of the Three Witnesses—which included seeing an angel and hearing the voice of God—is "characterized by a marked religious or spiritual tone," while the experience that the Eight Witnesses had of examining and handling the plates "might be labeled an ordinary or natural testimony." A single explanation thus "seems unable to account for the two very different kinds of experience."

Matthew Roper, a resident research scholar at the Maxwell Institute, spoke on "Adam in Ancient Texts and the Restoration." He noted, for example, that the premortal existence of the first man, the necessity of a Savior, and opposition and agency are all "key themes found in both revealed Latter-day Saint teachings and other ancient texts and beliefs about Adam in ancient Judaism, Christianity, and the subsequent religious and cultural

heirs to those traditions." Further, latter-day scripture and a number of ancient texts not available to Joseph Smith both tell how Adam and Eve were visited by heavenly messengers sent by God, something not found in the biblical account. "I submit to you," said Roper, "that the revelations of ancient texts through Joseph Smith are a treasure that we Latter-day Saints have yet to fully value and cherish."


Brian M. Hauglid, an associate professor of ancient scripture at BYU and coeditor of the Maxwell Institute series *Studies in the Book of Abraham*, spoke on the Kirtland Egyptian Papers, a collection of documents written by various individuals that relate to the Joseph Smith Papyri. Hauglid challenged the assertion by critics that the Kirtland Egyptian Papers constituted "translation working papers" for the Book of Abraham. "It's not unreasonable to suggest that the papers were study papers—not translation papers," he said. Such an endeavor would have been quite consistent with the goal of Joseph Smith and his associates to "study and learn, and become acquainted with all good books, and with languages, tongues, and people" (Doctrine and Covenants 90:15). Furthermore, the Kirtland Egyptian Papers display characteristics of having been copied from other documents as opposed to being transcribed from Joseph Smith's dictation as he translated the Book of Abraham.

David G. Stewart Jr., a medical doctor and BYU graduate in molecular biology, spoke on DNA and the Book of Mormon. His well-documented presentation argued that "the claims of critics that DNA evidence disproves traditional Latter-day Saint teachings about Native American ancestry are based in a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of science and an ignorance of history and scripture." Stewart undermined the assumptions that modern Jewish mtDNA accurately represents the mtDNA of ancient Israel and that Native Americans and modern Jews do not share genetic affinities.

As an example of how critics ignore relevant genetic research when it does not serve their purpose, Stewart noted a study in the *American Journal of Human Genetics* in 1996 that concludes that

the founding inhabitants of the New World likely originated in Mongolia *or* in a “geographic location common to both contemporary Mongolians and American aboriginals” (the latter possibility, which Stewart sees as congenial to a theory of common origin in ancient Israel, is ignored by critics). Stewart goes on to show that attempts to use DNA evidence to discredit the Book of Mormon fail to meet rudimentary scientific standards and that “a careful examination of existing DNA data demonstrates that the teachings of Latter-day Saint prophets are fully consistent” with that

data. His paper is scheduled for publication in the forthcoming issue of the *FARMS Review*.


Among the other speakers were Michael R. Ash (“Book of Abraham 201: Papyri, Revelation, and Modern Egyptology”), Matthew B. Brown (“Revised or Unaltered? Joseph Smith’s Foundational Stories”), and Brant A. Gardner (“Defenders of the Book: Surveying the New World Evidence for Book of Mormon Historicity”), all of whom have written for the *FARMS Review*. Many of the presentations will soon be available at the FAIR Web site: <http://fairlds.org/>. 

Lehi’s Epic Journey cont. from page 1

create page after page of stunning color layouts. And the contributing scholars’ insightful observations, not only those included in the film but many more now available for the first time, bring rewarding perspectives on the great faith and sacrifice of Lehi’s party as they journeyed in the desert in obedience to God’s command. With all this information now in book form, the reader can better contemplate and absorb the ideas and images presented.

“It helps us to visualize the story of Lehi and Sariah,” says Brown. “Whether we are talking about the challenges inside the family or about the territory through which they passed, it places these experiences in a vivid, real setting.”

The documentary was filmed in the Middle East at locations that scholars believe mark or approximate the route that took

Lehi’s party across Arabia to reach the seaside location where they eventually embarked by ship to the New World. *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* will enrich your study of the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon. To order a copy, go to the FARMS Web site and, at the bottom of the notice for this book, click on the “more” link to the BYU Bookstore. 




Steve DeVore, producer of the *Journey of Faith* documentary, and film director Peter Johnson meet new friends in the old city of Sana'a, Yemen.

Cultural Diffusion cont. from page 1

respectively) have published the results of their seminal research under the title “Biological Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages.” Their technical report is a chapter in an edited volume published this year by the University of Hawai’i Press, *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*.

The report catalogs over 100 species of flora and fauna that were shared by both hemispheres before Columbus’s day. The evidence is decisive that those organisms neither crossed the oceans by natural means nor were carried by humans across the Bering Strait. For instance, microbiologists agree that the Asian hookworm parasite found in South American mummies could only have reached the Americas via Asian seafarers, since the parasite, before it enters the human digestive tract, must inhabit warm, moist soil—an impossibility for passage via the cold Bering Strait, leaving human migration by sea the only conceivable alternative. The authors discuss many other compelling case studies as well, concluding that “students of the past must look to a new paradigm of human history and communication.”

In the editor’s introduction, Victor H. Mair (professor of Chinese language and literature at the University of Pennsylvania) notes that since Sorenson and Johannessen “have relied on a variety of different types of evidence . . . and have themselves exercised scientific caution in making their claims, it will be virtually impossible to dismiss out of hand all of their concrete, detailed case studies. . . . Consequently, the work of Sorenson and Johannessen is one more reason why fair and open-minded investigators will henceforth have to incorporate pre-Columbian contact in their models for the evolution of civilization in the Americas.”

An expanded version of Sorenson and Johannessen’s study, entitled “Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages to and from the Americas,” can be viewed on the Maxwell Institute Web site (maxwellinstitute.byu.edu). A less-technical version of this study recently appeared in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* under the title “Ancient Voyages Across the Ocean to America: From ‘Impossible’ to ‘Certain’” (vol. 14, no. 2, 2005). 

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The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. The Maxwell Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at the Maxwell Institute include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

The Maxwell Institute makes reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer-reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications.

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