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**Title** Editor's Introduction

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**Abstract** Introduction to the items reviewed and main issues discussed in this issue.

## Editor's Introduction

Daniel C. Peterson

The spring of 1993 saw publication of a volume from Signature Books of Salt Lake City, advancing, yet again, the proposition that "the Book of Mormon isn't historical."<sup>1</sup> The ten essays in the book "challenge . . . perhaps the most cherished and unique Mormon belief—that [Joseph] Smith's 1830 translation of the Book of Mormon was based on writings he found on gold plates left behind by Hebrews who migrated to the Americas in 600 B.C. and were visited by a resurrected Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as the California-based anti-Mormon polemicist Bill McKeever points out, "The book is peppered with criticisms against some of those researchers associated with F.A.R.M.S. (Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies)."<sup>3</sup>

Such criticisms, of course, have hardly been restricted to the book. (Ron Priddis, Signature's publicist and a member of Signature's board of directors, calls F.A.R.M.S. the company's "arch-nemesis.")<sup>4</sup> Thus, for instance, when interviewed in an article in *The Daily Utah Chronicle*,

Greg Jones, the shipper for Signature Books, contrasted Signature's philosophy with that of other, more conservative, organizations, such as FARMS: "They [F.A.R.M.S.] crank out this apologetic material that doesn't hold up to scholarly standards, but it has this sort of pseudo-scholarly appeal to it. It plays on the heartstrings of their readership more than anything," he

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<sup>1</sup> As described by Signature publicist Ron Priddis in Robert Rigney, "Signature Books Carries On Despite Rebuff from Mormon Leaders, Excommunications," *The Daily Utah Chronicle*, 22 November 1993.

<sup>2</sup> Vern Anderson, "Book of Mormon Studied," *Tulare [CA] Advance-Register* (19 June 1993); compare Vern Anderson, "Scholars Doubt Book of Mormon's Antiquity," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 5 June 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Bill McKeever, "Questioning Joseph Smith's Role as Translator," *Mormonism Researched* (Fall 1993): 4.

<sup>4</sup> Cited by Rigney, "Signature Books Carries On."

said. Signature Books, on the other hand, likes to think of itself as encouraging genuine scholarship.<sup>5</sup>

But Mr. Jones's claim seems a foolhardy one. It positively invites irreverent questions and unflattering comment (from both of which I shall refrain). As Hugh Nibley once observed, "Being self-taught is no disgrace; but being self-certified is another matter."<sup>6</sup> However, I suspect it is not so much our scholarly method that has drawn the contempt of Signature's shipper down upon us, but the end to which we have devoted our efforts. In the preface to his 1897 book *The Will to Believe, and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy*, William James commented that "the first four essays are largely concerned with defending the legitimacy of religious faith. To some rationalizing readers such advocacy will seem a sad misuse of one's professional position."<sup>7</sup> Quite so. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. There is, alas, little or nothing that we can do about such attitudes. The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies does have an agenda, and we are perfectly willing to admit that fact to anyone who asks. Moreover, since we are open about our intentions and our loyalties, readers of our work are welcome to bear those commitments in mind as they evaluate it. We do, however, strive constantly to improve our logic and

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<sup>5</sup> Rigney, "Signature Books Carries On"; punctuation slightly altered for improved understanding. A good recent example of supposed F.A.R.M.S. "pseudo-scholarship" is Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch, eds., *The Allegory of the Olive Tree: The Olive, the Bible, and Jacob 5* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1994). Readers can judge for themselves whether this is a scholarly volume, or merely, as Mr. Jones would have them expect, more than six hundred pages of maudlin emotionalism.

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Gary P. Gillum, ed., *Of All Things! Classic Quotations from Hugh Nibley*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1993), 227.

<sup>7</sup> William James, *Pragmatism and Other Essays* (New York: Washington Square Press, 1963), 189. Compare Fawn Brodie's late comment on Hugh Nibley: "This man surely had a touch of genius, and a great linguistic talent. What a pity that he was emotionally trapped by his allegiance to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon." (Letter of Fawn M. Brodie to Everett Cooley, 23 August 1978, cited by Louis Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," 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:lix.)

our evidence, to make our arguments conform to the highest standards we can reach. And we intend to hold our critics to the same standards.

Thus, we turn now to Brent Lee Metcalfe's long-promised anthology of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*.<sup>8</sup> While I was unable to include any shipping clerks, there are nonetheless some fine and scholarly contributors to this volume of the *Review*, and it is a pleasure to thank them for their otherwise unremunerated efforts. I have done nothing to harmonize the reviewers' opinions, and a few relatively minor disagreements will be evident to close readers. I have simply tried to facilitate their having their say. And they have, I think, said it well.

Permit me to say a few words about the organization of this volume of the *Review*. Professor Davis Bitton offers a general reaction to *New Approaches* in his opening essay. He is followed by John A. Tvedtnes, who surveys the whole volume in a more detailed way. Three essays come next (by John Gee, Professor Royal Skousen, and Professor John W. Welch), each of which deals with two or more of the articles in *New Approaches*. There follows a group of seven essays (by Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson, Professor Louis Midgley, Professor Robert L. Millet, Matthew Roper, Dr. James E. Smith, Professor John L. Sorenson, and Martin Tanner) that treat individual *New Approaches* articles. I have also included a lengthy review by Professor William J. Hamblin of a recent *Dialogue* article by Brent Metcalfe that sheds much light on Mr. Metcalfe's method. Finally, I have appended a few remarks of my own on the context from which *New Approaches* emerged, and on the relevance of that context to an evaluation of the book.

I also think it appropriate, here, to give readers a general survey of some of the main issues discussed in the present *Review*:

- In his *New Approaches* essay "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," Anthony A. Hutchinson, an employee of the U.S. State Department currently based in west Africa, asserted that it makes little or no difference whether the Book of Mormon is

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<sup>8</sup> Brent Lee Metcalfe, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), xiv + 446 pp., no index, \$26.95.

considered to be ancient or not. Indeed, he said, it is probably more beneficial, spiritually, to regard it as frontier fiction. Educated and sophisticated Latter-day Saints who continue to believe that the Book of Mormon is what it claims to be are, says Mr. Hutchinson, "idolators." Writing in the present *Review*, Professor Louis Midgley finds Mr. Hutchinson's position mere sentimental incoherence.

- Dan Vogel's "Anti-Universalist Rhetoric in the Book of Mormon" advanced the idea that certain passages and certain figures in the Book of Mormon are best understood when viewed in the context of nineteenth-century America. Martin Tanner responds by pointing out that Universalism is an ancient phenomenon and shows that Mr. Vogel's claim that his argument is irrelevant to the question of the Book of Mormon's historical authenticity is specious.

- Mark D. Thomas, a banker in Washington State, contended in his *New Approaches* article, "A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language," that the sacrament prayers of the Book of Mormon reflect phrases and language that came into being only after the Protestant Reformation. Yet his article professed neutrality on the issue of whether or not the Book of Mormon reflects genuine ancient history. Contributors to this *Review*, however, find Mr. Thomas's case unconvincing. John Gee, for instance, concludes that Mr. Thomas has failed to master the text of the Book of Mormon. And Professor Richard Lloyd Anderson, to whose writings Mr. Thomas is responding, replies that Mr. Thomas has misread the evidence, misunderstood contrary arguments, and in fact fudged the issue of whether or not there really were Nephites.

- Following a rather well-worn "New Approach," Melodie Moench Charles argued that "Book of Mormon Christology" is inconsistent with the concept of the Father and the Son taught by Joseph Smith and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since the Nauvoo period, and that certain Book of Mormon verses actually express a kind of modalistic trinitarianism. Responding in the present *Review*, Professor Robert Millet dismisses Ms. Charles's claim to "let the text speak for itself" as meaningless, and describes Book of Mormon christology as exceptionally rich and deep.

- Stan Larson, an archivist in the Marriott Library of the University of Utah, and David P. Wright, who teaches in the

Department of Judaic and Near Eastern Studies at Brandeis University, offered readers of *New Approaches* two variations on the venerable claim that Joseph Smith plagiarized from the King James Bible in composing the Book of Mormon. Dr. Larson's "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi" argued that the text of 3 Nephi 12-14 follows that of Matthew 5-7 in the King James Version too closely for us to consider it an account of an actual sermon delivered in ancient America. In fact, he alleged, the Book of Mormon is simply, demonstrably, wrong at several points.

But Professor John W. Welch doubts anyone's ability to know, in minute detail, on the basis of textual criticism, what Jesus really said. He demonstrates that the differences in the Greek manuscripts upon which Dr. Larson builds his case do not affect the *meaning* of those texts in any substantive way, and therefore contends that Dr. Larson cannot possibly determine whether the English translation of Christ's sermon to the Nephites (which was, after all, given in yet another language) is right or wrong. Professor Welch shows how Dr. Larson constructs criteria that conveniently allow him to exclude contrary evidence. Also responding to Stan Larson, Dr. Royal Skousen points out that Larson and other *New Approaches* authors have made numerous claims about the Book of Mormon that cannot be substantiated from the critical text and raises doubts about Dr. Larson's views of the relationship between the English Book of Mormon and the King James Bible.

David P. Wright advanced a similar contention in his *New Approaches* essay, claiming that the discussion of Melchizedek in Alma 12-13 is based on that in Hebrews (which, of course, was written long after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem), and therefore cannot plausibly be considered ancient. He identified several elements shared between the two texts and claimed that the density of the similarities, and their identical ordering, demonstrate conclusively Joseph Smith's dependence upon the book of Hebrews. However, Professor Welch finds the parallels between Alma 12-13 and Genesis 14 much more impressive than those Professor Wright advances.

• John C. Kunich, a judge advocate in the United States Air Force, examined scattered clues and decided, in his *New Approaches* paper "Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes," that the numbers of people given or implied in the Book of Mormon are implausibly large. However, Dr.



James Smith, a professional demographer affiliated with Great Britain's Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure, is unimpressed by Mr. Kunich's analysis, and, in an original contribution that goes substantially beyond mere review of another's work, offers his own view of Book of Mormon population growth.

- Deanne G. Matheny, who has been a part-time member of the faculty at Brigham Young University, devoted her *New Approaches* piece "Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography" to a detailed argument against the view of Book of Mormon geography most prominently associated with John L. Sorenson. In this issue of the *Review*, Dr. Sorenson responds, also in detail, and gives us, in effect, an extended and up-to-date reflection on his important book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. He concludes that Dr. Matheny's article is "weak in scholarship and faulty in logic," and emerges from reading it feeling that his own view has, effectively, been confirmed by her failure to find any serious flaws.

- Edward H. Ashment, a California insurance salesman who once studied Egyptology at the University of Chicago, announced in his contribution to *New Approaches*, "A Record in the Language of My Father": Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon," that there *is* no such evidence. Dr. Royal Skousen, on the other hand, criticizes Mr. Ashment's presentation of the evidence, and finds clear signs of Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon. John Gee, who is actively pursuing a doctorate in Egyptology at Yale, thinks that Mr. Ashment has manipulated his data in misleading ways and laments Mr. Ashment's faulty (and occasionally amusing) methodology.

- The editor of *New Approaches*, Brent Lee Metcalfe, a graduate of Salt Lake City's Skyline High School, is currently a technical writer for a Utah computer company. In his article "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," Mr. Metcalfe took a theory of the Book of Mormon's translation sequence advanced by others and argued that it actually reveals, not the order in which Joseph Smith *translated* the Book of Mormon, but the order in which he *composed* it as religious fiction. Mr. Metcalfe argued that there are transparent anomalies in the Book of Mormon text that support his idea that Joseph Smith was the author. Writing in the present *Review*,



however, Matthew Roper examines these supposed discrepancies and demonstrates that they are frequently derived from an unwarranted reading of the Book of Mormon, or can be shown to be entirely consistent with the Book of Mormon's own claims. Professor Royal Skousen questions Mr. Metcalfe's understanding of the original and printer's manuscripts and finds his lexical variants interesting but insufficient. John Gee says that Mr. Metcalfe has failed even to master the relevant contents of the Book of Mormon.

• Mr. Metcalfe also appears in the present *Review* as the author of an article in *Dialogue* that attempted to distinguish "critical scholars" (people pretty much like himself) from "apologists" (people like those affiliated with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies). Professor William J. Hamblin demonstrates that Mr. Metcalfe has created a false dichotomy and sets out a more accurate model of differing perspectives on Book of Mormon studies. In the course of a point by point analysis of Mr. Metcalfe's critique, Dr. Hamblin shows that Mr. Metcalfe commonly misunderstands and misrepresents the arguments of those with whom he disagrees.

The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, nor of the editor of this *Review*, nor of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Furthermore, it must be noted that this is a first response to *New Approaches*; I have little doubt that people associated with F.A.R.M.S. will have more to say about the book with the passage of time.

Common abbreviations that are used in the reviews include *TPJS* for *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith), *HC* for *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 8 vols. (edited by B. H. Roberts), and *JD* for *Journal of Discourses*.

I also wish, as always, to thank all the others who have helped in the production of this volume. Brian Dickman, Robert Durocher, Brent Goulding, Steven L. Mayfield, and especially the remarkable Matthew Roper provided useful materials. Brent Hall helped out in various important ways. Dr. William J. Hamblin, Dr. Noel B. Reynolds, Dr. Stephen D. Ricks, and Dr. Melvin J. Thorne read a number of the essays and offered helpful suggestions (which, on occasion, I actually even accepted). Dr. Shirley S. Ricks did her customary fine job in preparing the

whole thing for printing. With this issue, we move to a semi-annual publication schedule, which means that I will rely even more than before upon the dedication and talents of those who have made this *Review* possible.