



Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

Volume 10 | Number 2

Article 13

1998

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Gee, John (1998) "The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 10 : No. 2 , Article 13.

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

Title The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas

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Reference *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 158-83.

ISSN 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

Abstract Review of *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (1996), by Stan Larson.

Stan Larson. *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon.* Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, 1996. 305 pp., with index. \$24.95.

Reviewed by John Gee

The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas

A glooming peace this morning with it brings,
 The sun, for sorrow, will not show his head.
 Go hence to have more talk of these sad things;
 Some shall be pardon'd, and some punished:
 For never was a story of more woe . . .
 —William Shakespeare¹

One of the main reasons biographies are written is to hold someone up as a model worthy of emulation. The subject of a biography is typically an example for good, but occasionally for ill.² While apostasy is certainly not the greatest object of contemplation for mortals, its study can nevertheless be both fascinating and productive. Moroni, at least at one point, considered his narrative to be a study in apostasy.³ The study of apostasy and apostates, like all tragedy, points out the way not to go; it serves as a negative example. Stan Larson, in his latest book, lovingly portrays Thomas Stuart Ferguson as a man who for years postured as a believer in the Book of Mormon and a devout Latter-day Saint, but who secretly disbelieved and covertly tried to dissuade others from believing.

¹ William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet* 5.3.305–9.

² Biography thus belongs to exemplar historiography; see Daniel C. Peterson and David B. Honey, "Advocacy and Inquiry in the Writing of Latter-day Saint History," *BYU Studies* 31/2 (1991): 142–54.

³ "Give thanks unto God that he hath made manifest unto you our imperfections, that ye may learn to be more wise than we have been" (Mormon 9:31).

Biographies like the book under review are deliberate, intentional acts; they do not occur by accident.⁴ Ferguson is largely unknown to the vast majority of Latter-day Saints; his impact on Book of Mormon studies is minimal.⁵ So, of all the lives that could be celebrated, why hold up that of a “double-acting sourpuss?”⁶ Is there anything admirable, virtuous, lovely, of good report, praiseworthy, or Christlike about Thomas Stuart Ferguson’s apparent dishonesty or hypocrisy? Larson seems to think so: “I feel confident,” Larson writes, “that Ferguson would want his intriguing story to be recounted as honestly and sympathetically as possible” (p. xiv). Why? Do we not have enough doubters? Yet Larson does not even intend to provide the reader with a full or complete biographical sketch of Ferguson’s life, since he chose to include “almost nothing . . . concerning his professional career as a lawyer, his various real estate investments, his talent as a singer, his activities as a tennis player, or his family life” (p. xi). In his opening paragraph, Larson warns the reader that he is not interested in a well-rounded portrait of Ferguson. Nevertheless, he finds time to discourse on topics that do not deal with Ferguson’s life and only tangentially with his research interest. A glance at a few of these is most illuminating; his excurses include:

- The diversity of theories on Book of Mormon geography, without any attempt to evaluate them (see pp. 7–9).
- An attempt to show that an anonymous piece published under the general editorship of Joseph Smith proves that Joseph Smith identified Palenque as a Book of Mormon site (see pp. 20–22).

⁴ Louis Midgley, “More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 310.

⁵ Donald W. Parry, Jeanette W. Miller, and Sandra A. Thorne, eds., *A Comprehensive Annotated Book of Mormon Bibliography* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1996), 146–47, lists four books and four articles by Ferguson out of 6,338 items published before 1994.

⁶ The phrase is John Sorenson’s. This was changed to “double-acting cynic” in the published version; John Sorenson, “Addendum,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 119.

- Another attempt, using the same logic, to show that Joseph Smith identified Quiriguá as a Book of Mormon site (see pp. 22–29).
- M. Wells Jakeman's interpretations of Izapa Stela 5 (see pp. 64–65).
- The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri (see pp. 85–89).
- The restorations of Facsimile 1 of the book of Abraham (see pp. 99–100).
- The so-called Book of Breathings (see pp. 101–4).
- Larson's understandings of the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar (see pp. 104–8).
- Whether or not there is red ink on the Joseph Smith Papyri (see pp. 112–15).⁷

Thus, with the deliberate inclusion of this material and the deliberate suppression of the fuller picture of Ferguson, Larson demonstrates an interest in fashioning propaganda. With this book Larson advocates (perhaps unintentionally) the view that Latter-day Saint doubters should mouth pieties in public and do as they please in private, and, most particularly, that they should covertly seek to undermine the faith of the weak and the faltering. I am not convinced that this is unintentional, since Larson (1) attempts to marshal as many reasons to create doubt as he can, (2) introduces controversies and arguments brought forth after Ferguson's death, and (3) consistently misrepresents the arguments of supporters of the Book of Mormon or the book of Abraham. In an attempt to subvert the weak, weigh down the hands that hang down, and weaken the feeble knees, Larson has carefully fashioned the hagiography of a hypocrite.

In addition to his proselytizing efforts, perhaps Larson's personal fascination with Ferguson (see pp. xiii–xiv)—spurred on both in conversations with Ferguson in 1977 (at church expense) to discuss his doubt (see p. xiv) and by access to some of Ferguson's papers in 1993 (see p. xi)—explains why he thinks

⁷ *The Improvement Era* photographs were printed in color, even if they were not printed in four-color. Larson seems to think that somehow this meant that people were denying that there were rubrics on the papyri. I have never made that claim. It is somewhat amusing to be misrepresented in such a fashion.

“the tortuous odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson deserves to be told” (p. xiv).

“Tortuous” is putting it mildly—the book is a tedious read. Not only has Larson suppressed the fuller picture of Ferguson, but he also tortures his reader by his presentation of evidence. For example, should one look up the note after this sentence—“Due to the influence of M. Wells Jakeman, a fellow LDS student at Berkeley, Ferguson developed a keen interest in the history, culture, and archaeology of Mesoamerica” (p. 2)—one would find not documentation of Jakeman’s influence on Ferguson, not evidence of Ferguson’s interests, but a definition by Norman Hammond of the term “Mesoamerica” (pp. 30–31). Thus, granted Ferguson’s “lifelong fascination with these fields [history, culture, and archaeology of Mesoamerica], he did not pursue a degree in any of these subjects” (p. 2). Did he even take any courses, and if so would that coursework have been worth anything today? This question is relevant because Ferguson’s approach to archaeology was both naïve and dated. For his entire life, “Ferguson remained an amateur in archaeology” (p. 3).

Ferguson’s enthusiastic amateur naïveté plagues his arguments, whether for or against the Book of Mormon. For example, Ferguson’s plant-life test (see pp. 238–39) provides an excellent example of a problematic argument that critics would be wary of using if they thought it through to its logical conclusion. Ferguson professes to be dismayed that “no wheat, barley, figs, or grapes” have been found “in the regions proposed by Norman and Sorenson” as Book of Mormon lands (p. 239). The argument runs as follows: we have as yet found no evidence of these crops in Mesoamerica and therefore they were not cultivated there. The Book of Mormon, however, mentions them; therefore, the Book of Mormon could not have come from Mesoamerica. But the crushing logic of this argument actually works against those who propose that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon in upstate New York in the nineteenth century since figs and grapes do not appear there either.⁸ If the original author(s) of the

⁸ The common farmer in upstate New York cultivated apples, sugar maples, wheat, corn, rye, oats, buckwheat, beans, wild berries, and root crops; see Donald L. Enders, “The Joseph Smith, Sr., Family: Farmers of the Genesee,” in

Book of Mormon must needs have lived in a land where figs and grapes were grown, then Joseph Smith could not possibly have written the Book of Mormon. If the critic responds that Joseph Smith was basing his assessment on biblical passages, then one can also reply that the Book of Mormon passages that mention grapes and figs are also biblical quotations and in turn need not imply that such were available to the Nephites any more than they were available to Joseph Smith. This leaves only one passage that mentions wheat (see Mosiah 9:9) and four passages mentioning barley. Besides the inherent problems of nomenclature,⁹ pre-Columbian barley has in fact been found in the New World.¹⁰ Perhaps no wheat, barley, figs, or grapes have been found in Mesoamerica because "few really good studies of plant remains have been done in Mesoamerica."¹¹ Unfortunately, Larson's book reveals an archaeological ignorance and lack of sophistication to equal Ferguson's.

The Archaeology of Punt

Discussing Book of Mormon archaeology is much like discussing the archaeology of the land of Punt. (We choose Punt although Magan,¹² Meluhha,¹³ Dilmun,¹⁴ or Washshukani¹⁵ could

Joseph Smith: The Prophet, the Man, ed. Susan Easton Black and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1993), 213–18.

⁹ See John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 335–42.

¹⁰ See *ibid.*, 341–42.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 340.

¹² This has been equated with the border of Oman and the United Arab Emirates; see Michael Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Facts on File, 1990), 97, but see also the list of locations (including Egypt) proposed in Wolfgang Heimpel, "Magan," in *Reallexikon der Assyriologie und Vorderasiatischen Archäologie* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1932–90), 7:195–96.

¹³ Normally equated with India. See Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia*, 97. For Ethiopia, see Samuel N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 277. For Nubia, see K. A. Kitchen, *The Third Intermediate Period in Egypt (1100–650 B.C.)*, 2nd ed. (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1986), 143, 154–55.

¹⁴ Normally equated with Qatar or Bahrain. See Heimpel, "Magan," 195; Roaf, *Cultural Atlas of Mesopotamia*, 97; Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 281: "There is

serve equally well.) Punt was a land best known from the inscriptions of the Eighteenth Dynasty queen Hatshepsut (ca. 1472–1458 B.C.), who, after sending trading expeditions there, had the expedition recorded complete with scenes on the walls of her temple at Deir el-Bahri. These scenes depict specific plants, animals, and people.¹⁶

A variety of locations have been proposed for Punt.¹⁷ In the nineteenth century, it was thought to be in Arabia.¹⁸ At various

even some possibility that Dilmun may turn out to include the region in Pakistan and India.”

¹⁵ Washshukani is, according to one authority, “a site to the west of Nisibin which has not yet been located.” Seton Lloyd, *The Archaeology of Mesopotamia* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1984), 160. “Sauštatar had his seat in the town of Waššukanni. It has generally been assumed that this name developed to Uššukani in the Middle Assyrian period and then to Sikāni. According to an Assyrian inscription, the latter place lies at the ‘source of the Habur’ that is, at what is now Ra’s al-‘Ain, and it has just recently proved possible to identify it conclusively with Tell Fakhariyah. It is, however, open to doubt whether Sikāni is really a later form of Waššukanni/Uššukani, because there was already a town Sigan existing in the Hābūr region in the Ur III period. Further, neutron activation analysis of the letters of king Tušratta of Mittani, probably written in Waššukanni, has shown that the trace elements in these clay tablets are very different from those of the tablets from the Middle Assyrian period found in Tell Fakhariya itself. Waššukanni probably lay further to the north, somewhere around Mardin, or more likely, to its west or north-west.” Gernot Wilhelm, *The Hurrians*, trans. Jennifer Barnes (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 1989), 27 (parenthetical references dropped).

¹⁶ See K. A. Kitchen, “Punt and How to Get There,” *Orientalia* 40 (1971): 185–88.

¹⁷ The general opinions have been laid out in Kitchen, “Punt and How to Get There,” 184, and Rolf Herzog, *Punt* (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1968), 25–54. Among recent opinions are the following: “The fabulous land of Punt, the region of fresh myrrh on the Arabian and African coasts south of the Red Sea.” John A. Wilson, *The Culture of Ancient Egypt* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 127 (originally published as *The Burden of Egypt*). Punt was “probably the African coast opposite Aden.” Alan H. Gardiner, *Egypt of the Pharaohs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 37. Punt was “an African land, possibly on the shores of the Red Sea.” William W. Hallo and William K. Simpson, *The Ancient Near East: A History* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971), 263. “Punt extended from the shore of the Red Sea inland into the eastern Sudan.” Miriam Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 1:27 n. 8. “The location of Punt is not firmly established . . . but it is most likely to have been in the region of modern Eritrea or Somalia.” John Baines and Jaromír Málek, *The Atlas of Ancient Egypt* (New

times locations for Punt have been proposed in northern Africa,¹⁹ the entire region from Persia to the coast of the Red Sea,²⁰ India,²¹ or all of East Africa from the Somali peninsula to the cape.²² Some thought that it was not a geographic location at all, but an ethnic designation.²³ One scholar thinks that there were two Punts:²⁴ the location changed from 'Aqîq during the Old and

York: Facts on File, 1980), 20. "The most likely area is the Sudan-Eritrea border zone, rather than further along the coast and even through the straits of Bab el-Mandeb." Barry J. Kemp, "Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period c. 2686-1552 BC," in *Ancient Egypt: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 136-37. "Punt included the coastal plain and the hilly country east of it between latitudes 17° and 12° N, but little of the semidesert and savanna lands east of the hills." David O'Connor, "New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period, 1552-664 BC," in *Ancient Egypt: A Social History*, 270. "At the southern end of the Red Sea," "in East Africa," in Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 434, 452. "The land of Punt is thought to have been situated somewhere between eastern Sudan and northern Eritrea." Nicolaus Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ian Shaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 76-77. Punt was "a region of east Africa. . . . There is still some debate regarding the precise location of Punt. Although it was once identified with the region of modern Somalia, a strong argument has now been made for its location in southern Sudan or the Eritrean region of Ethiopia, where the flora and fauna correspond best with those depicted in Egyptian reliefs." Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1995), 231.

¹⁸ This was the standard viewpoint of the nineteenth century. References have been gathered in Herzog, *Punt*, 25-43. An Arabian location was favored by the Egyptologists Brugsch, Mariette, Dümichen, Krall, and Naville.

¹⁹ Uhlemann thought it was in Mauritania; Herzog, *Punt*, 26.

²⁰ "Le pays de Pount était un vast territoire comprenant la région du golfe Persique, la côte méridionale de l'Arabie et certainement la côte de ce qui est aujourd'hui la mer Rouge." So Naville, as cited in Herzog, *Punt*, 48.

²¹ This speculation was once put forward by Karl Peters; see Herzog, *Punt*, 41.

²² Krall, Glaser, Peters, and Quiring have all advanced this geography; see Herzog, *Punt*, 35 (Krall), 40 (Glaser), 41 (Peters), 52 (Quiring), though Krall did not have it stretch as far as the others did.

²³ Thus Golenishev, Wiedemann, and Petrie, in Herzog, *Punt*, 32, 39. Meinhof equated the Puntites with the Bantu tribes (*ibid.*, 50).

²⁴ Longtime readers of this periodical will remember a similar situation with the two Bountifuls proposed in F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 31-35; for evaluations of this position, see John Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite

Middle Kingdom to Somalia during the New Kingdom.²⁵ At present no more than a general consensus has been reached (along the coast of Eastern Africa, not Arabia).²⁶

The problem with discussing the archaeology of Punt is that it depends on the correct identification of its location. Thus, if one believed with the Egyptologist Karl Peters that Punt was located in Zimbabwe (earlier Rhodesia),²⁷ one would be looking in a much different place than if one believed like David O'Connor that Punt is located on the Red Sea, north of Tokar²⁸ or in the Gash-Baraka region.²⁹ Either of these notions is much different from Rolf Herzog's view that Punt is located along the White or Blue Nile.³⁰ Yet the disagreements among scholars about the location of Punt do not mean that the place never existed.³¹ They do, however, make it difficult to discuss the archaeology of the land of Punt, which, thanks to the Egyptian pictographic record, is provided with far greater potential for archaeological confirmation than the Book of Mormon. To my knowledge, no Egyptologist has felt confident enough about its geographic location to be willing to conduct an archaeological expedition to the land of Punt.³²

Geographies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 21–22; William Hamblin, "A Stumble Forward?" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 73–75.

²⁵ See Abdel Monem Abdel Halim Sayed, "On the Geographical Location of the Land of Punt," in Abdel M. A. H. Sayed, *The Red Sea and Its Hinterland in Antiquity* (Alexandria: Daar al-Ma'rifah al-Gam'iyah, 1993), 98–126.

²⁶ See Kitchen, "Punt and How to Get There," 184–85.

²⁷ This opinion was laid out in Karl Peters, *Im Goldland des Altertums* (Munich: Lehmann, 1902). For a refutation, see Heinrich Schäfer, "Die angebliche ägyptische Figur aus Rhodesia," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 38 (1906): 902–4.

²⁸ See David O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia: Egypt's Rival in Africa* (Philadelphia: University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 1993), xiv, 42, 66.

²⁹ See *ibid.*, 8.

³⁰ See Herzog, *Punt*, 81–83; Kitchen, "Punt and How to Get There," 185.

³¹ Although Hans Winkler thought that it always belonged "to the sphere of mythical and half-mythical narrative" (quoted in Herzog, *Punt*, 50–51), his is a minority sentiment, if not unique.

³² "The region occupied by Punt has not been explored archaeologically." O'Connor, "New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period," 270. This may no longer be true, though I have not yet seen R. Fattovich, "The Problem of Punt in

Furthermore, if someone, convinced by the flawed arguments of Peters, announced because there was no archaeological evidence of Punt from Zimbabwe that he no longer believed that the Hatshepsut inscriptions were historical, one would be inclined to think that person foolish.³³ (Nevertheless, any hopes for the eventual solution to the location are pinned to archaeology.)³⁴ Eventually, we may find archaeological confirmation of the location of the land of Punt, Washshukani, Wawat, or Zarahemla. But, then again, we might not. Thus, rejection of the historicity of the Hatshepsut inscriptions, the Mittani letter, the Biography of Harkhuf, or the Book of Mormon based on the lack of archaeological confirmation of someone's theory of the geographical location of these places demonstrates not wisdom but impatience.

Even in cases where the site is known, there may be no archaeological evidence. A mere one hundred sixty years ago, my ancestors lived along with others of the saints in Kirtland, Ohio. Most of the houses of the saints who lived there at that time are no longer standing. The same holds true for Nauvoo. Furthermore, if archaeological excavations were to be conducted at the sites and nothing found, that would neither prove that the saints did not exist nor that they never lived there; it would show only that no archaeological trace remained, which is a common occurrence. I have surveyed the archaeological remains of the houses where two of my wife's ancestors lived about one hundred ninety years ago. The father's house has only the crude remnants of the foundation stones left, while only the hearthstone of the daughter's house remains. Most people leave little or no archaeologically identifiable

the Light of Recent Fieldwork in the Eastern Sudan," in *Akten München 1985 IV*, ed. Sylvia Schoske (Hamburg: Buske, 1991), 257-72.

³³ Such a person would have to explain the stumps of trees still standing in front of Deir el-Bahari that are said in Hatshepsut's inscriptions to have come from Punt.

³⁴ "At all periods the evidence is too slight to allow an identification of Punt. . . . Until archaeological work uncovers the early history of the Red Sea littoral, Punt will remain a vague designation of the south-eastern commerce of Pharaonic Egypt." *The British Museum Book of Ancient Egypt*, ed. Stephen Quirke and Jeffrey Spencer (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 201-2.

trace. Thus it is a cause of some rejoicing when we can find anything.³⁵

Nor when archaeological evidence is found does it necessarily demonstrate the sort of things we might wish. Take for example the Old Kingdom inscriptions of the Egyptian officials Weni, Harkhuf, and Pepynakht.³⁶ These three inscriptions attest the presence of several Nubian political entities comprised of groups of people at war with each other. As a result of the salvage archaeology of the 1960s, Nubia is one of the most thoroughly investigated places on earth archaeologically. Yet any hope of using material culture (i.e., archaeological evidence) to distinguish the various entities described in Old Egyptian texts has proved fruitless, as the whole length of Nubia during Egypt's Old Kingdom is all undifferentiated C-group culture.³⁷ (Could we determine merely by the material remains where the border was between western Canada and the western United States in the twentieth century?) In Nubia during the Old Kingdom, the archaeology does not match the inscriptions and serves as a warning that politically distinct peoples might not be culturally distinct from their neighbors. The archaeology of Israel reflects a similar situation because religiously distinct peoples are not necessarily culturally distinct.

This is all directly relevant to the case of Thomas Ferguson and Larson's treatment of him. In May 1953 Ferguson picked a spot (Tabasco) that he thought was the land of Zarahemla, and then was disappointed that he could not find any evidence of the Book of Mormon there (see p. 48). He was unwise in this. He assumed that if he simply dug in the ground he would come up with demonstrable proof of the Book of Mormon. But even if the archaeologist digs in the right place, there is no guarantee of finding anything, much less the proof that was sought. If anything,

³⁵ Another recent example of this may be found in Daniel C. Peterson, "Editor's Introduction: Through a Glass, Darkly," *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 (1997): xxiii-xxvi.

³⁶ See Kurt Sethe, *Urkunden des Alten Reichs*, 2nd ed., *Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums* 1 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1932), 98-110 (Weni), 120-31 (Harkhuf), 131-35 (Pepynakht); Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 1:18-23 (Weni), 23-27 (Harkhuf).

³⁷ See John H. Taylor, *Egypt and Nubia* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 13-16; O'Connor, *Ancient Nubia*, 26-36.

archaeological digs are notorious for discovering things that the archaeologists did not suspect, so that the archaeologist often ends up having to ask different questions from the ones whose answers he set out to find.

In his presentation of Ferguson's disappointment, Larson is also misguided. It appears to be Larson's goal to show that no evidence whatsoever exists for the Book of Mormon or the book of Abraham and that it is impossible for there ever to be such. But to suggest that the Book of Mormon is not historical because individuals do not agree on the location of Book of Mormon places (see pp. 7-8) is not a sound argument, even if some of the theories about Book of Mormon geography are likewise unsound.

Maya Archaeology and the Book of Mormon³⁸

Larson goes to some length to try to equate Maya and Book of Mormon archaeology. This, of course, begs an important question. Are the two the same? With all the pains Larson takes to attack John Sorenson's views, he neglects to acknowledge that Sorenson's geography has little if any overlap with Maya lands. Thus Larson's critique of Ferguson's naïveté in dealing with Maya archaeology is irrelevant to Sorenson's geographic model. Of the major Book of Mormon geographic models today, the only one on which Larson's critique has an impact is that of Joseph Allen. Other models, such as those proposed by Richard Hauck, David Palmer, and any model that proposes a narrow neck of land south of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, also survive unscathed. These proposed geographies at most touch only marginally on Maya lands; Sorenson's, for example, only overlaps Maya areas in southern Guatemala and in Chiapas. But "in many ways the Southern Area hardly seems Maya at all from a purely archaeological standpoint, while some of it, such as the central and eastern Chiapas highlands, was only occupied by Maya-speakers at a relatively late date."³⁹ It would be folly to assume, because

³⁸ For the summaries of Book of Mormon geographies in this section, I rely on John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992).

³⁹ Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, 5th ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993), 26.

Larson has demonstrated that Ferguson's theory of Book of Mormon geography is unlikely, that all theories of Book of Mormon geography are unfounded.

It is a common trap to assume that because the Maya produced impressive architecture, beautiful artwork, and intriguing writing they must somehow be connected with the Nephites.⁴⁰ In the Old World, the Egyptians hold a similar position to the Maya in the New World. By comparison, the Israelites produced less impressive architecture, cruder artwork, and a less elegant script than the Egyptians; they did, however, produce the Bible. The Nephites may not have been that much different from their Israelite ancestors; at least evidence indicates this is the case.

Nephite architecture, for example, need not be as elaborate, impressive, or durable as Maya architecture. While the Maya are noted for their limestone-block-over-rubble-core construction with limestone plaster overlays,⁴¹ building with stone is mentioned only once in the Book of Mormon and only for city walls (see Alma 48:8). More common techniques are building with earth (see Alma 48:8; 49:2; 50:2; 53:4) and wood (see 2 Nephi 5:15; Jarom 1:8; Mosiah 11:8–10; Alma 50:2–3; 53:4; Helaman 3:9–11).⁴² Cement (limestone plaster?)⁴³ was used only in the land northward and only when there were not enough trees (see Helaman 3:5–11). Wood was clearly the preferred Nephite building material, but it does not survive well archaeologically, especially in Mesoamerica.⁴⁴ The one significant overlap between Sorenson's geography and Maya lands, Kaminaljuyu, has only "the remnants of adobe-plastered earthen platforms that once

⁴⁰ For cautions on this, see Sorenson, "Viva Zapato!" 315.

⁴¹ See Coe, *The Maya*, 94; Robert J. Sharer, *The Ancient Maya*, 5th ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 630–40.

⁴² For a discussion of the techniques, see Sorenson, "Viva Zapato!" 351–52.

⁴³ "The hearting of Puuc buildings is a solidified lime-based concrete." Sharer, *The Ancient Maya*, 638. For what it may be worth, the Puuc are the northernmost of the Maya.

⁴⁴ The archaeologists excavating the Maya site of Piedras Negras, for example, must rebuild the wooden framework of their camp annually because termites completely destroy the previous year's camp. Any wood not living is subject to this problem in addition to whatever rotting it might suffer from the damp climate (Jessica Childs, personal communication).

supported buildings of wood, plaster, and thatch (basalt and other volcanic stones of the southern areas being used primarily for artifacts such as grinding stones and monuments—and occasionally for drains, steps, and other architectural elements).⁴⁵ This is typical for most of the southern lands of the Maya (i.e., those overlapping with Sorenson's geography):

Ancient building platforms in the southern Maya area were usually earthen-cored and faced with adobe plaster (typically mixed with volcanic ash, which is abundant in the southern area). Owing to the scarcity of suitable, easily worked building stone, even the largest and most elaborate southern Maya buildings were usually constructed of perishable materials, such as pole and thatch, wood, or adobe blocks. Stonework, when encountered, was usually used for pavements, steps, and occasional decorative elements.⁴⁶

In fact, for most of Mesoamerica, "a pole framework supports a thatched roof; walls are usually wattle and daub, a woven lattice of sticks plastered with a thick coating of adobe (mud mixed with straw or other binder). In the hottest regions, house walls are often plastered, allowing the passage of cooling breezes."⁴⁷ To compare the architecture of the Nephites with that found in any particular area, careful attention must be paid to what the Book of Mormon says about architecture, something Larson has not bothered to do.

Though the Nephites seem to have had artwork, little description of it appears in the text. Statues are not mentioned, but idols were had among the Nephites (see Mosiah 27:8; Alma 1:32; 7:6; 50:21; Helaman 6:31), the Lamanites (see Enos 1:20; Mosiah 9:12; 11:6–7; Alma 17:15; Mormon 4:14, 21; 5:15), the Jaredites (see Ether 7:23), and the Zoramites (see Alma 31:1) but the size or any other characteristics are not discussed. Only one stele (?) is mentioned in the Book of Mormon (see Omni 1:20), but nothing other than "engravings" is mentioned on it. The Nephites have

45 Sharer, *The Ancient Maya*, 95.

46 *Ibid.*, 631.

47 *Ibid.*

altars (see Alma 15:17; 17:4), but these are also not described; whether they were made of stone or earth is not even specified. Thus there are no real descriptions of artwork from the Book of Mormon with which to compare the archaeological material.

Nephtite script, if the so-called Anthon transcript is any indication, is not as calligraphic as Mayan script. Though the so-called Anthon transcript contains a mere seven lines of text, it contains about eighty different characters; however, since the sample size is small, one is not able to determine whether the script is syllabic (like Ethiopic) or logographic (like Egyptian or Mayan).⁴⁸ The transcript was in the possession of Oliver Cowdery, who gave it to David Whitmer;⁴⁹ it then passed to the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints with the rest of David Whitmer's manuscripts. If this is the copy of the characters that was taken to Anthon, then it comes from the part of the Book of Mormon that was translated while Martin Harris was the scribe, and thus is from the missing 116 pages. If this were the case, we should expect it to be from Mormon's abridgment of the Nephtite record (see Words of Mormon 1:3-7; D&C 10:30, 38-42). This would mean that it would be from the handwriting of Mormon (after ca. A.D. 362; see Mormon 3:8-11) and not from the small plates. We would then expect it to be a Semitic language written in an Egyptian script,⁵⁰—a Semitic language that had been modified by time and creolization with the American languages,⁵¹ and an Egyptian script that had been modified not only by being engraved on

⁴⁸ "If a known script has a sign-list totalling between 20 and 35 signs, it is probably a system like an alphabet; if between 40 and 90 signs, the likelihood is that we are dealing with a 'pure' syllabry; and if above a few hundred, the system is surely logographic." Michael D. Coe, *Breaking the Maya Code* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992), 43; cf. Johannes Friedrich, *Extinct Languages* (New York: Dorset, 1957), 152-53. Coe was involved in the decipherment of Mayan; Friedrich, in the decipherment of hieroglyphic Hittite.

⁴⁹ See Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin, 1991), 21, 57, 81, 102-3, 107-8, 111-12, 120, 131, 143-44, 188, 193, 198, 212-13, 229.

⁵⁰ See Brian D. Stubbs, "Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages: Let's Void the Void," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 1-49, esp. 2-3.

⁵¹ See John Gee, "Two Notes on Egyptian Script," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 164-65.

metal plates,⁵² but also changed along with the handwriting styles and modifications of the Nephites (see Mormon 9:32). This has then been copied by a nineteenth-century hand in pen and ink. Larson's discussion of the Anthon transcript (see pp. 51–54) shows no understanding of the basic problems of what the Anthon transcript would be if it is genuinely what it is claimed to be. Ferguson's approach (followed by Larson) was naïve; send a copy of a document that dates to the fourth century A.D. to Sir Alan Gardiner, an Egyptologist of wide interests but few after about 1,000 B.C.,⁵³ and ask if it matches the Egyptian scripts that he is familiar with. I am not denigrating Gardiner's phenomenal learning at all.⁵⁴ The Anthon transcript does not look like hieratic or Mayan but we would not expect it to. Some of the individual signs could make sense as Roman period demotic, but there is no reason to expect the script of the Nephites to develop the same way as Egyptian demotic across the ocean. Why then should we necessarily expect it to look identical to the Egyptian scripts so well-known from the Old World? Likewise, if the major geographies do not place the Nephites in the area of the Maya, why should the Anthon transcript resemble Mayan?

Thus nothing from the Book of Mormon indicates that the archaeological grandeur of the Maya should be identified with that of the Nephites. But the Maya are certainly not the only people in

⁵² See John Gee, "La Trahison des Clercs: On the Language and Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 79–99; John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, "Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 156–63.

⁵³ Note the comments of Robert K. Ritner, "Implicit Models of Cross-Cultural Interaction: A Question of Noses, Soap, and Prejudice," in *Life in a Multi-Cultural Society: Egypt from Cambyses to Constantine and Beyond*, ed. Janet H. Johnson (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992), 284–85.

⁵⁴ As a look at his bibliography will attest, Gardiner was very prolific on a wide variety of topics over his long career. Most of his text editions are still the standard works on the subject. Perhaps, however, it is significant that the transcription of the demotic in Alan H. Gardiner, *Egyptian Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1957), plate II, was actually done by Francis Ll. Griffith (see *ibid.*, xiv).

Mesoamerica, and it would be wrong to treat them as though they were.⁵⁵ Surely no one should lose his or her testimony over this.

The Book of Abraham as an Excuse

Larson depicts Ferguson as losing his testimony over the book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Papyri. In this, Larson would have us believe that Ferguson grew out of his naïve beliefs about Book of Mormon archaeology and through his study of the Joseph Smith Papyri matured into the wiser course of being a doubter. Nothing could be further from the truth. If Ferguson was naïve about Book of Mormon archaeology—something he had actually studied—he brought that full naïveté into his study of the Joseph Smith Papyri, a field about which he knew nothing. If Ferguson did lose his testimony of the church through the book of Abraham in the fashion Larson claims that he did, then he exhibited a number of follies that Larson apparently wishes to propagate.

Whether Ferguson recognized that he knew nothing about Egyptian papyri, or not, he sought outside help. But he brought certain assumptions into this quest that doomed his conclusions: (1) Ferguson assumed that the church had all the papyri that Joseph Smith had. (2) He assumed that the individuals whom he consulted about the papyri were experts on them. (3) He assumed that the information he was given was accurate. (4) He assumed that he knew what the so-called Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar was. All of Ferguson's assumptions were incorrect.

Ferguson assumed that the church possessed all the relevant papyri. We know that Joseph Smith originally had at least five papyri,⁵⁶ but we now have only small fragments of three of them, a tiny fraction of what he once had. It is somewhat presumptuous to

⁵⁵ Some students of Mesoamerican archaeology think that a justifiable case can be made for identity or overlap between the Maya and the Nephites. They are welcome to make their case; I do not think that it has been made yet. Until they can make a cogent case, it would be a mistake to restrict the case for the Nephites to the Maya.

⁵⁶ Larson (see pp. 89, 122 n. 16) incorrectly cites my discussion of this issue: John Gee, "A Tragedy of Errors," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 106–9 (Larson cites this as p. 94). He also ignores the obvious implications of the issue.

base a case about what cannot be on what we no longer have, as Larson and Ferguson have done. It would be like complaining that, because a fragmentary copy of a Bible had nothing about Isaiah, there never was any copy of Isaiah. The first order of business in studying the Joseph Smith Papyri from a strictly Egyptological perspective is not to assume that we have all the relevant papyri (as Ferguson did and Larson does), but to determine the nature and extent of the papyri in Joseph Smith's possession. Only when we know what was on all the papyri in Joseph Smith's possession can we then proceed to match Joseph's translation with what was actually on the papyri. Determining the nature and extent of the papyri requires some knowledge of both Egyptology and LDS Church history, and a careful evaluation of the historical evidence. Unfortunately, although several attempts have been made to assemble the information to answer this question, the question itself has rarely been addressed and has not yet been adequately answered.⁵⁷ More is required than simply matching some of the descriptions of vignettes with the vignettes on the remnants of the Joseph Smith Papyri; one must account for all such descriptions. Larson spends several pages matching vignettes from the Tsemminis papyrus (PJS VII+VIII+V+VI+VI+II)⁵⁸ with Oliver Cowdery's description of the papyri (see pp. 108–12). Cowdery notes that there was a judgment scene on the interior of that roll,⁵⁹ but the remaining fragments from the Tsemminis roll contain no such judgment scene. Of course, another possibility remains: The judgment scene described by Cowdery could be from the Neferirtnoub papyrus and the other vignettes could be from that roll as well; in that instance, the whole case as built up by Larson is invalid. Either way, the roll contained more than we have at present. Thus if we had all the papyri that Joseph Smith did, the absence of the text of the book of Abraham would present

⁵⁷ My own attempt is still at press: John Gee, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri," forthcoming in a Festschrift for Richard Lloyd Anderson (entitled *The Scholar as Witness*).

⁵⁸ The usage here is a standard papyrological notation. Papyri with separate identification numbers that are later found to be part of the same papyrus are indicated as joins (+) and listed in the order in which they would have occurred.

⁵⁹ See Oliver Cowdery, "Egyptian Mummies—Ancient Records," *Messenger and Advocate* 2/3 (December 1835): 233–37.

a problem. Since we do not, it does not. Larson and Ferguson underestimate the amount of papyri that are missing. If the Joseph Smith Papyri were standard-sized rolls, then the remaining fragments amount to, at best, approximately 13 percent of what Joseph Smith had, including two entire scrolls of which not a scrap of original papyrus remains.

Since more of the original Joseph Smith Papyri existed in Joseph Smith's day than we have at present, we need to know whether it is possible for a papyrus containing a funerary text to contain other texts as well. It is. Several examples of such papyri are extant.⁶⁰ Therefore, it is fallacious to argue that if the preserved fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri contained funerary texts the papyri in their original state would have consisted only of funerary texts. Although this fact does not prove that they did contain something else, it does show that such a possibility must be seriously considered.

Ferguson assumed that any Egyptologist of his day would certainly be an expert on the Joseph Smith Papyri. This is not necessarily so. I am in no way attempting to demean the qualifi-

⁶⁰ For example, a fragmentary Eighteenth-Dynasty Book of the Dead in Cairo (JE 95575) contains account texts on the front side (recto). Irmtraut Munro, *Die Totenbuch-Handschriften der 18. Dynastie im Ägyptischen Museum Cairo* (London: Kegan Paul, 1988), 1:191–204, Taf. 67–71; 2:Taf. 139–41. Papyrus Vandier also has a Book of the Dead on the verso (back side) but on the recto contains the story of Meryre who (as in the book of Abraham) was sacrificed on an altar; Georges Posener, *Le Papyrus Vandier* (Cairo: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1985). The Book of the Dead of Psenmines (Louvre 3129) and Pawerem (BM 10252) both contain temple rituals; Siegfried Schott, *Urkunden mythologischen Inhalts: Bücher und Sprüche gegen den Gott Seth, Urkunden des ägyptischen Altertums 6* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1929). Both Papyrus Harkness (see Thomas J. Logan, "Papyrus Harkness," in *Studies in Honor of George R. Hughes* [Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1976], 150–61, and Mark Smith, "Papyrus Harkness," *Enchoria* 18 [1991]: 95–105) and BM 10507 (demotic funerary papyri) contain several different texts; Mark Smith, *The Mortuary Texts of Papyrus BM 10507*, Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum 3 (London: British Museum, 1987). This funerary papyrus was found with and written by the same scribe as the Instructions of Onchsheshonqy, which also contains a tale about burning Harsiese on an altar; for the latter see S. R. K. Glanville, *The Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy (British Museum Papyrus 10508)*, Catalogue of Demotic Papyri in the British Museum 2 (London: British Museum, 1955); Lichtheim, *Ancient Egyptian Literature*, 3:159–84; Heinz J. Thissen, *Die Lehre des Anchsheshonqi (p. BM 10508)* (Bonn: Habelt, 1984).

cations of the scholars who commented on the Joseph Smith Papyri in 1967, but merely acknowledging that Egyptology covers over three thousand years of a major civilization spread over thousands of square miles and treats every conceivable facet of that civilization. It is impossible to be an expert on all that material, and most Egyptologists are interested in neither the time period to which the Joseph Smith Papyri date nor the genre to which the remaining fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri belong. Of the Egyptian scholars who voiced their opinion on the papyri either to Ferguson or in print at the time, only Richard Parker specialized in late period texts (mainly astronomical and business documents, not religious). Parker's modest contribution of five printed pages⁶¹ is nothing more than a very preliminary report, and his translation of one of the texts introduced a misreading of one of the key names.⁶² Of all the scholars who worked on the papyri, Hugh Nibley and Klaus Baer spent the most time on them, though they were trained mainly in the Egypt of another era.

Ferguson unquestioningly accepted the opinion of the experts. Anti-Mormons, almost all of whom have absolutely no competence in the relevant areas, usually follow the same method. Since I have a Ph.D. in Egyptology, I am an expert. All anti-Mormons should therefore unquestioningly accept my opinion. Because they regularly employ a double standard, however, I actually do not anticipate any of them unquestioningly accepting my opinion. But should they unquestioningly accept other experts' opinions? This is usually known as "the *fallacy of argument ad verecundiam*," which is

an appeal to authority. . . . This form of error is an egregious but effective rhetorical technique which puts an opponent in the awkward position of appearing to commit the sin of pride if he persists in his opposition.

⁶¹ See Richard A. Parker, "The Joseph Smith Papyri: A Preliminary Report," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 86-88, and Richard A. Parker, trans. "The Book of Breathings," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 98-99.

⁶² See Parker, "The Book of Breathings," 99. The name Parker read as "Remenykay" is actually "Taykhebyt." This misreading has found its way into works by both Nibley and myself, as well as untold anti-Mormon propaganda pieces.

The most crude and ugly form of an argument *ad verecundiam* in historical writing is an appeal to professional status.⁶³

Ferguson was gullible. He put his trust in an opinion based on someone's professional status. He relied on someone who did not believe in something to tell him whether that thing was true; on one level he had predetermined the outcome. This does not mean that the experts were dishonest; they were doing what they were asked to do to the best of their ability. Ferguson took it for granted that the information the experts gave him, often off the top of their heads, was accurate. It was not. For example, Larson erroneously asserts that the Joseph Smith Papyrus I+XI+X "dates to the two-hundred-year period covering the first century B.C. through the first century A.D." (p. 101). Larson has followed Klaus Baer, who dated the papyri to as early as 100 B.C. (see p. 125 n. 63). Baer based his date on Georg Möller's paleography.⁶⁴ Paleographic dates, however, are only as good as the series of dated manuscripts upon which the paleography is based. Möller's paleography, currently the best work available, is weak in the Late Period because few dated hieratic manuscripts upon which to base a hieratic paleography were available.⁶⁵ Nibley dated the papyri to the end of the first century A.D. based on the same paleography and his belief that the Joseph Smith Papyri were connected with the Soter find excavated, like the Joseph Smith Papyri, by Antonio Lebolo.⁶⁶ The Soter find can now be dated to the first half of the second century A.D.,⁶⁷ but though the

⁶³ David H. Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 283.

⁶⁴ See Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie*, 2nd ed., 3 vols. (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1927-36).

⁶⁵ Möller's dated manuscripts are (see *ibid.*, 3:7-14): year 14 of Takelot II (?) (837 B.C.), Darius I, year 12 of Alexander (312-311 B.C.), year 12 of Augustus (9 B.C.), year 21 of Augustus (A.D. 1), A.D. 53, and between A.D. 79 and 138. Thus six dated papyri cover one thousand years. As this averages one dated papyrus every 167 years, it is not a firm sequence upon which to date handwriting.

⁶⁶ See Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 3-4.

⁶⁷ Soter, on his coffin, is called the archon of Thebes, and Soter is indeed given as the archon of Thebes in *P. Brem.* 41 line 5 (dated 107 A.D.), in Ulrich

items from the Soter find all have interlocking genealogies, none of the genealogies of the owners of the Joseph Smith Papyri interlocks with the Soter find. The late Jan Quagebeur, on the basis of prosopography and the use of certain titles, dates Joseph Smith Papyrus I+XI+X to the first half of the second century B.C.⁶⁸ This, however, is the date of the papyrus manuscript and not of the text or texts recorded on it (a mistake Ferguson made which Larson did not). But this illustrates how following the opinions of the experts rather than looking at the evidence can lead one astray.

Is Larson Reliable?

Few people are so important or of such interest historically that their papers merit full publication. Thus the biographer's summary is often all that is published on an individual. The reader is thus at the mercy of the author to present a fair and accurate picture of the evidence. How reliable, then, is Larson's presentation of the evidence? This is an important question because Larson acknowledges he is not interested in providing a full picture of Ferguson; he is fashioning an argument to support his own beliefs. Yet Ferguson's family believes that he never apostatized.

Larson claims that he started working on Ferguson's biography because of "a box of office files documenting Ferguson's research activities in the 1970s and early 1980s," obtained from an anonymous "friend" (p. xi) and now housed in an archive to which Larson controls access.⁶⁹ One cannot help but recall similar provenances given for the Hofmann forgeries. How do we know that these documents are genuine? Can we rely on Larson to pre-

Wilcken, *Die Bremer Papyri* (Berlin: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1936), 95-98.

⁶⁸ See Jan Quagebeur, "Books of Thoth Belonging to Owners of Portraits: On Dating Late Hieratic Funerary Papyri," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. M. L. Bierbrier (London: British Museum, 1997), 74 (for full argument see 72-77); cf. Jan Quagebeur, "Le papyrus Denon à La Haye et une famille de prophètes de Min-Amon," in *Aspekte spätägyptischer Kultur* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1994), 213-25. I have corrected Quagebeur's identification of the papyri slightly.

⁶⁹ Larson is listed as "the librarian in charge of . . . the Utah History, Philosophy, and Religion Archives of the Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah" on the dust jacket of the book.

sent the issues accurately? For one thing, if this box of office files prompted the biography, it is astounding that Larson rarely refers to this correspondence. My confidence is also weakened by his consistent refusal to deal with certain of the arguments that he attacks. Many examples could be given, but a few will have to suffice.

Larson spends ten pages in an effort to make the case that Joseph Smith identified Palenque and Quiriguá as Book of Mormon places (see pp. 20–29). What does all of this have to do with the life of Thomas Ferguson? Nothing. Larson is not including it to round out the picture of Ferguson's life but, it would seem, as a rhetorical trick designed to mislead the reader. He begins his discussion by noting that "it may very well be true that Joseph Smith did not have 'specific knowledge of ancient Book of Mormon geography'" (p. 20).⁷⁰ Nevertheless, although he acknowledges that Joseph Smith's views on the subject are moot, he spends ten pages discussing this supposed item, reserving for a footnote the problem that these views (which he attributes to Joseph Smith), were not written by Smith (see pp. 38–39 n. 95). This tactic leaves the reader with the impression that these are authoritative views on Book of Mormon geography issued by Joseph Smith, and this is disingenuous at best and mendacious at worst.

Larson cites articles and books but shows no indication that he has understood the argument contained in them. Anyone who has read and understood them can only be embarrassed at Larson's misunderstanding and mishandling of the issues. The implications of having only a small portion of the Joseph Smith Papyri have already been discussed in this review, as they were in the review that Larson cites,⁷¹ yet he avoids dealing with these implications in his book. The reader is mortified for Larson when he cites classic studies on Book of Mormon geography by John Sorenson⁷² (see p. 36 n. 67) and John Clark⁷³ (see p. 32 n. 19) and never comes to grips with the need to demonstrate that an area must

⁷⁰ Larson is quoting William J. Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics: Brent Lee Metcalfe's Assumptions and Methodologies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 471.

⁷¹ See above note 56.

⁷² See Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*.

⁷³ See Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," 20–70.

match the Book of Mormon's internal geography before one can even think about comparing any archaeological evidence from the area. In fact, Larson seems blissfully unaware of the basic problems of reconstructing an ancient geography and never deals with this issue (which is a serious difficulty for the point he is trying to make). These problems are clearly laid out in William Hamblin's article, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon."⁷⁴ How could Larson have missed this important work? But he did not miss it. He quotes from it on page 84, note 148. Perhaps this was an inadvertent slip, perhaps not. Larson also cites Hamblin's review of Jerald and Sandra Tanner's book on Book of Mormon archaeology⁷⁵ but ignores Hamblin's comments on their method, which Larson happens to use:

The Tanners seem to be making two fundamental arguments in their booklet, although they do not make these explicit: (1) Latter-day Saints disagree among themselves about Book of Mormon geography and archaeology; and (2) many archaeological discoveries which some Latter-day Saints have attempted to use to authenticate the Book of Mormon are either fraudulent, or have been misinterpreted. Both of these statements are accurate. However, they seem to draw the further conclusion that these two propositions somehow imply that there is therefore no archaeological evidence for, or defensible interpretation of, the Book of Mormon. . . . Even if Latter-day Saints disagree about various aspects of Book of Mormon history, archaeology, and geography, and even if all of the antiquities examined by the Tanners are not authentic, these would still not

⁷⁴ See William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 161-97.

⁷⁵ See William J. Hamblin, review of *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 250-72.

demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is un-historical.⁷⁶

This, briefly encapsulated, is Larson's own approach to the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham: the same argument, the same logical flaws. These are just a few examples of works that registered only in Larson's footnotes, but evidently not in his brain.

When Larson does engage in argument, he often reaches, as Ferguson did, for some professional opinion rather than for evidence and analysis and, even then, the professional opinion is sometimes not reliably presented.⁷⁷ For example, in presenting most of the proposed Book of Mormon geographies, Larson simply cites them. But with his especial target, John L. Sorenson, he takes space to criticize Sorenson's proposed directional system at length (see p. 32 n. 18). In doing so he is less than forthcoming. He cites Freidel, Schele, and Parker as showing that "the Mayan east is oriented to the sun" (p. 32 n. 18).⁷⁸ Yet Freidel, Schele, and Parker—on the very page Larson cites—indicate that in Moomostenango the directions are based on local mountains, not astronomical phenomena.⁷⁹ The ancient Mayan words show no distinct primacy: "East is *ah k'in* ('he of the sun'); west is *ah ak'bal* ('he of the night'); north is *ah uh* ('he of the moon'); and the south is *ah Lamat* ('he of Venus')." ⁸⁰ On the same page these authors note major differences between ancient and modern Maya cosmology and orientation.⁸¹ The pages Larson cites are the notes to the text that discusses correlations between the "Eight-House-Partitions" described in the Tablet of the Cross, the eight

⁷⁶ Ibid., 256.

⁷⁷ On p. 127 n. 81, where Larson endeavors to show a history of my thought on a particular subject, he unaccountably omits my fullest treatment of the subject: John Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 19–84.

⁷⁸ Citing David Freidel, Linda Schele, and Joy Parker, *Maya Cosmos: Three Thousand Years on the Shaman's Path* (New York: Morrow, 1993), 419.

⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, 419 n. 24.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* Note that, since both the moon and Venus move along the ecliptic plane, there is no astronomical reason for them to be associated with north and south.

⁸¹ See *ibid.*, 419–20 n. 26.

partitions of the cosmos shown in the Madrid Codex, and the names of the eight partitions in the Rio Azul tomb.⁸² This evidence actually supports Sorenson's contentions that directionality is modified by local phenomena and that correlations between our directions and individual directions in other cultures are problematic at best.⁸³ If Schele and Freidel "had been arguing about the nature of north and south in Classic Maya thought,"⁸⁴ the problem of directions is hardly as pat as Larson makes it out to be.

At What Cost?

Larson never deals with one issue that lurks in the background: the cost of renouncing the Latter-day Saint faith for what amounts to atheism. If the atheists are right, and the gospel is not true, there is no resurrection of the dead; when a man is dead, that is the end thereof. If the gospel is true, however, death is not the end. If atheism is true, at death Latter-day Saints suffer the same fate as the atheists, but the atheists will not even be around to gloat about it. Less than twenty years after his death, Ferguson has largely been forgotten by those who study the Book of Mormon or work in Mesoamerican archaeology. Twenty years from now, it seems likely that relatively few people will read Larson's arguments or this review of them. Two hundred years from now, Stan Larson and Thomas Stuart Ferguson will be probably be known only to a handful of academics, if that. Two thousand years from now, who would possibly be interested?

If, however, the gospel is true, all of this changes: Stan Larson will still be around, as will the author of this review and anyone who reads it. We can all laugh ourselves silly (or weep) at the flawed arguments that Larson tries to muster. Only if the gospel is

⁸² See *ibid.*, 71–73.

⁸³ See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 38–42; William J. Hamblin, "Direction in Hebrew, Egyptian, and Nephite Language," in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 183–86; Sorenson, *Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 401–15; Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems," 188–89; Sorenson, "Viva Zapato!" 307–14.

⁸⁴ Freidel, Schele, and Parker, *Maya Cosmos*, 75.

true does any of this mean anything at all. Larson seemingly wants the reader to give up the meaning of life and the weight of eternal glory, and offers nothing in return. Like the mugger who demands one's wallet, and takes the credit cards as well as the cash, those who seek to steal the testimonies of Latter-day Saints never inform their victims of the other things they are taking away. A decent atheist may not believe that life has meaning for himself but he would not take away that which gives joy to others.

Of the many problems and flaws of this book, I have dealt here with only a few. Why should the reader waste time on this book when there are more pleasant, important, and worthwhile ways on which to spend it?