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Abstract Review of *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: "Out of the Darkness unto Light"* (2000), by John A. Tvedtnes.

HIDDEN ANCIENT RECORDS AROUND

Marilyn Arnold

Members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—including scholars—will welcome this book. It impressively responds to a favorite argument of skeptics who question the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Critics of the restoration have scoffed at the notion that an ancient record was engraved on metal plates and hidden away for centuries, then later disclosed by a heavenly messenger to a farm boy. With considerable documentation, author John Tvedtnes demonstrates that the record delivered to Joseph Smith from its hiding place in the Hill Cumorah was anything but an anomaly. In fact, Tvedtnes shows, it is one of countless such records to be discovered subsequently “in such vast quantities that our knowledge about the ancient Near East [has] greatly multipl[ied] in just a few generations” (p. 5). Furthermore, “ancient and medieval people commonly believed that sacred books were entrusted to the care of angels” (p. 6). Significantly, discoveries of and about other such records came after Joseph Smith’s time, making it impossible for him to have known about them even if his limited formal education had encompassed such matters.

Review of John A. Tvedtnes. *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: “Out of Darkness unto Light.”* Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000. xii + 266 pp., with two appendixes, annotated bibliography, and subject index. \$14.95.

The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books is presented in an orderly manner, discussing in turn such subjects as the common ancient practice of hiding records in boxes, of sealing books, of hiding sacred relics, and of placing such valuables in mountain repositories under the guardianship of angels. All this preservation activity was done with an eye to the restoration of such records and relics at some future time. The evidence Tvedtnes presents is more than convincing—it is overwhelming. And it should satisfy even the most fastidious scholar. Tvedtnes’s multitudinous sources range from the *Hidden Book of Moses*, “a Christian Gnostic text written in Greek and found in Egypt” (p. 239), to the *Cave of Treasures*, “a Syriac text composed in the fourth century A.D. by Saint Ephram Syrus” (p. 233), to the *Adi Granth*, the “sacred book of the Sikhs (p.228),” enshrined in an Indian temple in the province of Punjab.

In one of the helpful chapter summaries, Tvedtnes points out that, although the practice of concealing records is not limited to any one part of the globe, “it is most prominent in the ancient Near East, the land from which the Book of Mormon people emigrated to the New World.” He concludes, therefore, “that the concealment of the Book of Mormon in the earth is prima facie evidence of the book’s ancient origins” (p. 25).

Replete with stories from countless ancient cultures, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books* is a lively and interesting discourse. For example, in documenting “the use of stone boxes to house documents” (p. 38), Tvedtnes cites a tale from Roman lore. The story tells of a seventh-century king who ordered that he and the books he had written were to be buried in companion stone coffins. When the coffins were found by accident several centuries later, the king’s body had decayed, but the books were intact. Tvedtnes notes that “the practice of concealing records in boxes, particularly stone boxes, . . . predates the Book of Mormon by many centuries and was still being practiced when Moroni deposited the plates in the stone box from which Joseph Smith later removed them” (p. 50).

Only occasionally was I tempted to question the author’s assumptions. One such instance might be the conclusion he draws from 2 Nephi 27:22 and elsewhere that the words *seal* and *hide* are to

be regarded as synonymous. In the Nephi passage, the Lord indicates that the latter-day translator of the record should “seal up the book again, and hide it up.” I confess that the *and* separating the two clauses suggests two distinct and sequential actions to me. From the assumption that *seal* and *hide* have the same meaning in this passage, Tvedtnes draws an intriguing parallel between the “sealing or hiding [of] records up to the Lord” and the sealing of an individual “unto life eternal” until the day of resurrection. The individual and the record will experience a similar “resurrection” in that both are destined to come forth from their burial places (pp. 61–62).

Occasionally, too, in the abundance of evidence Tvedtnes presents, one finds materials that seem somewhat tangential to his subject and purposes. An example of this might be in the discussion of various sealed and open copies of public documents related to land purchases and the like. Then, too, one senses some overlap in the book, especially in the chapter titled “The Records Come Forth” (pp. 167–74), which seems to present materials very much like those in the chapter “Hidden Records.”

But such are minor concerns when taken in the context of the book as a whole. In matters that count, Tvedtnes is sound and thorough. Of special interest to Book of Mormon advocates (as well as detractors) should be the section in which he chronicles accounts in which angels and even God himself deliver lost or hidden books from previous eras to mortals. Some of these accounts closely parallel Joseph Smith’s experience. Of interest, too, is the fact that various sacred relics, including stones, were commonly concealed with hidden books. Among the many ancient records that were hidden in hill or mountain repositories are the famous Dead Sea Scrolls, recovered from caves in cliffs above the sea. Tvedtnes also documents the widespread practice of inscribing records on metal plates, especially on gold plates because of gold’s unusual durability.

The book includes two valuable essays that appear as appendixes, one by Steven W. Booras and the other by Tvedtnes himself. The Booras piece, based on an earlier lecture, is titled “The Book of Mormon and the *Apocalypse of Paul*.” Booras shows the similarities—and differences—between Paul’s apocalyptic vision, purportedly recorded

by Paul and preserved in hiding for later generations, and Joseph Smith's account of the angel Moroni's appearances to him in regard to the plates buried in the Hill Cumorah. Paul's record, incidentally, was not discovered until 1843, and it was not published until 1866. Another such record was the *Apocalypse of Stephen*.

The Tvedtnes piece, titled "Glowing Stones in Ancient and Medieval Lore," expands on his essay previously published in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997). It is an exhaustive and persuasive treatise on a subject that has long been a stumbling block for some readers of the Book of Mormon. It proves that the Jaredites' use of glowing stones to light their enclosed vessels was one incident of many, both factual and folkloric, in which stones with amazing properties were used anciently to illuminate dark interiors. Tvedtnes also mentions the use of stones as sources of spiritual and intellectual enlightenment.