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Title Editor's Introduction: Not So Easily Dismissed: Some Facts for Which Counterexplanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account

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Abstract Introduction to the current issue, including editor's picks. Recent research supporting the authenticity of the Book of Mormon includes evidence that the book was, as witnesses claimed, orally dictated; that its opening chapters accurately depict the ancient Near East in details unknown in Joseph Smith's day; and that many of its expressions and word meanings had disappeared from English before 1700. Such evidence argues against claims that the Book of Mormon was memorized or otherwise cribbed from another document.

Editor's Introduction

NOT SO EASILY DISMISSED: SOME FACTS FOR WHICH COUNTEREXPLANATIONS OF THE BOOK OF MORMON WILL NEED TO ACCOUNT

Daniel C. Peterson

Critics, supporters, and inquirers not infrequently speak of “the FARMS view” of this or that issue connected with the Book of Mormon and related matters. It is important to understand, however, that, on the whole, there *is* no single FARMS point of view.

The overwhelming majority of those who have published with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, of course, believe the Book of Mormon to be authentically ancient and that Joseph Smith did indeed translate it “by the gift and power of God.” If we have a party line, that is it. There are also certain assumptions common to what might be termed a widely shared paradigm among those affiliated with FARMS, which include such ideas as the human fallibility of prophets ancient and modern (without denying their genuine prophethood), some form or other of a limited geographical model for the Book of Mormon, and so forth.¹ If someone insists on

This is a slightly modified version of a paper presented, by invitation, at the 2005 annual meeting of the John Whitmer Historical Association, on 30 September 2005, in Springfield, Illinois. Another, shorter, version of the paper appeared as Daniel C. Peterson, “A Response: ‘What the Manuscripts and the Eyewitnesses Tell Us about the Translation of the Book of Mormon,’” in *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon: History and Findings of the Critical Text Project*, ed. M. Gerald Bradford and Alison V. P. Coutts (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 67–71.

1. Please note that, in speaking of the fallibility of prophets, we do not seek to elevate the relative status of scholars. We are well aware of their fallibility and of the role of intellectuals in the great apostasy and of their checkered record generally.

seeking a consensus statement of FARMS positions, I suppose that the nearest approximation might be the book *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, published by FARMS in 2002, in which thirteen essays by various authors comment on the volume's theme.²

However, in support of its paradigm, FARMS has published tens of thousands of pages of material by, to this point, roughly three hundred and fifty writers, mostly drawing upon ancient history, philology, classics, anthropology, legal history, literary analysis, philosophy, biblical studies, archaeology, Mesoamerican studies, and similar disciplines in order to cast light upon the Book of Mormon.³ I cannot begin to summarize the evidence and analysis they have presented, and I cannot possibly hope to outline all the evidence that I myself think relevant to the question of the origin of the Book of Mormon. So I will content myself with outlining what I see as the relevant implications of two or three relatively recent areas of research focus, while alluding to a few other issues.

I

Professor Royal Skousen of Brigham Young University, an internationally respected linguistic theorist,⁴ has devoted more than a decade and a half to intensive study of the text of the Book of Mormon and most especially to the original and printer's manuscripts of the book. His work has begun to appear in large, handsomely produced volumes published by FARMS.⁵ It is Skousen's strongly considered opinion that

2. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

3. Over 220 authors have had their essays appear in this *Review*.

4. Professor Skousen is, for instance, the author of such works as *Substantive Evidence in Phonology: The Evidence from Finnish and French* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975); *Analogical Modeling of Language* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989); and *Analogy and Structure* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1992); as well as a coeditor of Royal Skousen, Deryle Lonsdale, and Dilworth B. Parkinson, eds., *Analogical Modeling: An Exemplar-Based Approach to Language* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2002).

5. See Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001); and Skousen, ed., *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001).

the manuscript evidence supports the traditional account of the origin of the Book of Mormon and that it does not support the notion that Joseph Smith composed the text himself or took it from any other existing manuscript.⁶ Yet all the witnesses thought that Joseph Smith somehow saw words and read them off to his scribes.⁷ Taken together, these two facts are highly significant. I will briefly examine some of the relevant data.

First of all, the evidence strongly supports the traditional account in saying that the original manuscript was orally dictated. The kinds of errors that occur in the manuscript are clearly those that occur from a scribe mishearing, rather than from visually misreading while copying from another manuscript. (The printer's manuscript, by contrast, shows precisely the types of anomalies that one would expect from a copyist's errors.) Skousen's meticulous analysis even suggests that Joseph was working with up to thirty words at a time.⁸

It is apparent, too, that Joseph could see the spelling of names on whatever it was that he was reading from.⁹ When the scribe had written the text, he or she would evidently read it back to Joseph for correction.¹⁰ So the Prophet seemingly had something with him from which he was dictating and against which he could check what his scribes had written. But what was it? The witnesses are unanimous that he did not have any books, manuscripts, or papers with him

6. See Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 61–93; a revised and shorter version of the same article has been published as Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 22–31; see also Royal Skousen, "The Systematic Text of the Book of Mormon," in *Uncovering the Original Text of the Book of Mormon*, 45–66.

7. See Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon," 62–66. Lyndon W. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), is replete with testimony to this effect.

8. See Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon," 67–75; Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon," 25.

9. See Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon," 76–82; Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon," 27.

10. See Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon," 82–84; Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon," 27.

during the translation process, a process that involved lengthy periods of dictation.¹¹

For example, in an interview with her son, Joseph Smith III, not long before she died, Emma Smith insisted that Joseph had no text with him during the work of translation:

Q. Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read, or dictated to you?

A. He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.

Q. Could he not have had, and you not know it?

A. If he had had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me.¹²

“In writing for your father,” she told her son,

I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us. . . .

The plates often lay on the table without any attempt at concealment, wrapped in a small linen table cloth, which I had given him to fold them in. I once felt of the plates, as they thus lay on the table, tracing their outline and shape. They seemed to be pliable like thick paper, and would rustle with a metallic sound when the edges were moved by the thumb, as one does sometimes thumb the edges of a book.¹³

Now, Emma Smith could speak authoritatively regarding the period during which she herself served as scribe. But what about the much longer period when it was Oliver Cowdery who was taking the dictation? In fact, Emma could speak from personal experi-

11. See Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon,” 62; Skousen, “How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon,” 24.

12. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” *Saints’ Herald* 26/19 (1 October 1879): 289–90; also in Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:541.

13. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 289–90; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:541. Original spellings have been retained.

ence with respect to that time, as well. While they were in Harmony, Pennsylvania—where most of the Book of Mormon text was committed to writing—Emma says that Joseph and Oliver were not far away from her:

Q. Where did father and Oliver Cowdery write?

A. Oliver Cowdery and your father wrote in the room where I was at work.¹⁴

Not long after speaking with her, Joseph III wrote a letter in which he summarized some of her responses to his questions.

She wrote for Joseph Smith during the work of translation, as did also Reuben Hale, her brother, and O. Cowdery; that the larger part of this labor was done in her presence, and where she could see and know what was being done; that during no part of it did Joseph Smith have any Mss. [manuscripts] or Book of any kind from which to read, or dictate, except the metallic plates, which she knew he had.¹⁵

Nor, incidentally, did Emma believe Joseph Smith capable of inventing the Book of Mormon and dictating it off the top of his head. “Joseph Smith . . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter,” her son’s notes report her as telling him, “let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon.”¹⁶

A correspondent from the *Chicago Times* interviewed David Whitmer on 14 October 1881 and got essentially the same account: “Mr. Whitmer emphatically asserts as did Harris and Cowdery, that while Smith was dictating the translation he had no manuscript notes or other means of knowledge save the seer stone and the characters

14. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 290; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:541–42.

15. Joseph Smith III, letter to James T. Cobb, 14 February 1879, Letterbook 2, pp. 85–88, Library-Archives, Community of Christ; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:544.

16. Joseph Smith III, “Last Testimony of Sister Emma,” 290; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:542.

as shown on the plates, he being present and cognizant how it was done.”¹⁷

Similarly, the *St. Louis Republican*, based upon an interview in mid-July of 1884, reported that “Father Whitmer, who was present very frequently during the writing of this manuscript [i.e., of the Book of Mormon], affirms that Joseph Smith had no book or manuscript before him from which he could have read as is asserted by some that he did, he (Whitmer) having every opportunity to know whether Smith had Solomon Spaulding’s or any other persons’ romance to read from.”¹⁸

David Whitmer repeatedly insisted that the translation process occurred in full view of Joseph Smith’s family and associates. It would appear, in fact, that the common image of a curtain hanging between the Prophet and his scribes, sometimes seen in illustrations of the story of the Book of Mormon, was not the usual *modus operandi*.¹⁹ There was indeed a curtain, at least in the latter stages of the translation process. However, that curtain was suspended not between the translator and his scribe but near the front door of the Peter Whitmer home, in order to prevent idle passersby and gawkers from interfering with the work.²⁰

17. *Chicago Times*, 17 October 1881, as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 76. Compare Whitmer’s reply to J. W. Chatburn, as reported in *Saints’ Herald* 29 (15 June 1882), and reproduced in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 92.

18. *St. Louis Republican*, 16 July 1884, as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 139–40. On the so-called Spalding theory, see Matthew Roper, “The Mythical ‘Manuscript Found,’” in this number, pages 7–140.

19. Richard L. Bushman’s *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005) suggests, on pages 66 and 71, that, although it was not used later on, a curtain divided Martin Harris from Joseph Smith during the early period of translation, when Harris served as scribe. Secondhand reports seem to indicate that, for at least part of the time Harris acted as scribe, a blanket or curtain separated him from Joseph Smith and the plates. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 2:248 (*Palmyra Reflector*), 2:268 (John A. Clark), 2:285 (E. D. Howe), and 4:384 (Charles Anthon). See also Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon,” 63–64, who suggests that a curtain or blanket was present at the time Harris obtained a sample transcript and translation to take to Professor Anthon in New York City.

20. See Whitmer’s comments to the *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, as also the summary of an interview with him given in a February 1870 letter from William E. McLellin to some unidentified “dear friends” and the report published in the *Chicago Times*, 24 January 1888. The relevant passages are conveniently available in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 173, 233–34, 249.

In order to give privacy to the proceeding a blanket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eye of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress. This, Mr. Whitmer says, was the only use made of the blanket, and it was not for the purpose of concealing the plates or the translator from the eyes of the amanuensis. In fact, Smith was at no time hidden from his collaborators, and the translation was performed in the presence of not only the persons mentioned, but of the entire Whitmer household and several of Smith's relatives besides.²¹

On another occasion, Whitmer recalled, "I often sat by and heard them translate and write for hours together. Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude the light, and then [read the words?] as they appeared before him."²²

Further evidence that, whatever else was happening, Joseph Smith was not simply reading from a manuscript, comes from an episode recounted by David Whitmer to William H. Kelley and G. A. Blakeslee in January 1882.

He could not translate unless he was humble and possessed the right feelings towards every one. To illustrate, so you can see. One morning when he was getting ready to continue the translation, something went wrong about the house and he was put out about it. Something that Emma, his wife, had done. Oliver and I went up stairs, and Joseph came up soon after to continue the translation, but he could not do anything. He could not translate a single syllable. He went down stairs, out into the orchard and made supplication to the Lord; was gone about an hour—came back to the house, asked Emma's

21. *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 173.

22. William McLellin to My Dear Friends, February 1870, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 233–34.

forgiveness and then came up stairs where we were and the translation went on all right. He could do nothing save he was humble and faithful.²³

Whitmer gave the same account to a correspondent for the *Omaha Herald* during an interview on 10 October 1886. The newspaper relates of the Prophet that

He went into the woods again to pray, and this time was gone fully an hour. His friends became positively concerned, and were about to institute a search, when Joseph entered the room, pale and haggard, having suffered a vigorous chastisement at the hands of the Lord. He went straight in humiliation to his wife, entreated and received her forgiveness, returned to his work, and, much to the joy of himself and his anxious friends surrounding him, the stone again glared forth its letters of fire.²⁴

It would seem from this anecdote that Joseph needed to be in some way spiritually or emotionally ready for the translation process to proceed—something that would have been wholly unnecessary had he simply been reading from a prepared manuscript. As David Whitmer explained, Joseph occasionally “found he was spiritually blind and could not translate. He told us that his mind dwelt too much on earthly things, and various causes would make him incapable of proceeding with the translation.”²⁵

At this point, of course, a skeptic might perhaps suggest that emotional distractions interfered with Joseph Smith’s ability to remember a text that he had memorized the night before for dictation to his naïve secretaries, or that personal upheavals hindered his improvising of an original text for them to write down as it occurred to him. But such potential counterexplanations run into their own serious difficulties: Whether it is even remotely plausible, for example, to imagine Joseph Smith or anyone else memorizing or composing nearly five thousand words daily, day after

23. *Saints’ Herald* 29 (1 March 1882), as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 86.

24. *Omaha Herald*, 17 October 1886, as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 199.

25. Cited at Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 76.

day, week after week, in the production of a lengthy and complex book is a question that readers can ponder for themselves.²⁶ I will simply say that, as someone who writes much and rapidly, who, having kept a daily record of how many words I produce each day over the past five years, has never come close to maintaining such a pace (even on a computer), I find the scenario—for anybody, to say nothing of the poorly educated Joseph Smith—extraordinarily implausible.

An anecdote recounted by Martin Harris to Edward Stevenson seems to argue against the translation process being either the simple dictation of a memorized text or the mechanical reading of an ordinary manuscript surreptitiously smuggled into the room. Harris is speaking about the earliest days of the work, before the arrival of Oliver Cowdery, when he was serving as scribe. Harris “said that the Prophet possessed a seer stone, by which he was enabled to translate as well as from the Urim and Thummim, and for convenience he then used the seer stone.”²⁷

Now, obviously, the scribes needed light in order to be able to write the text down. By way of contrast (pun intended), Joseph seems to have needed to dim the ambient light so as to make the deliverances from the seer stone easier to see. Accordingly, the stone was placed in a hat into which the Prophet put his face. This situation, coupled with the lack of a dividing curtain, would obviously have made it very difficult, if not impossible, for Joseph to have concealed a manuscript, or books, or even the plates themselves. It would also have made it effectively impossible for him to read from a manuscript placed somehow at the bottom of the darkened hat. Stevenson’s account continues:

By aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, “Written,” and if correctly written, that

26. See John W. Welch, “The Miraculous Translation of the Book of Mormon,” in *Opening the Heavens: Account of Divine Manifestations 1820–1844*, ed. John W. Welch, with Erick B. Carlson (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book, 2005), 80, who informs us that the translation of the Book of Mormon took place essentially between 7 April and the end of June 1829, a period of less than three months.

27. Edward Stevenson, “One of the Three Witnesses: Incidents in the Life of Martin Harris,” *Millennial Star* 44 (6 February 1882): 86.

sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraven on the plates, precisely in the language then used. Martin said, after continued translation they would become weary, and would go down to the river and exercise by throwing stones out on the river, etc. While so doing on one occasion, Martin found a stone very much resembling the one used for translating, and on resuming their labor of translation, Martin put in place the stone that he had found. He said that the Prophet remained silent, unusually and intently gazing in darkness, no traces of the usual sentences appearing. Much surprised, Joseph exclaimed, "Martin! What is the matter? All is as dark as Egypt!" Martin's countenance betrayed him, and the Prophet asked Martin why he had done so. Martin said, to stop the mouths of fools, who had told him that the Prophet had learned those sentences and was merely repeating them.²⁸

Furthermore, it is clear from careful analysis of the original manuscript that Joseph did not know in advance what the text was going to say. Chapter breaks and book divisions apparently surprised him. He would see some indication, evidently, of a break in the text, and, in each case, would tell his scribe to write "Chapter." The numbers were then added later. For instance, at what we now recognize as the end of 1 Nephi, the original manuscript first indicates merely that a new chapter is about to begin. (In the original chapter divisions, that upcoming text was marked as "Chapter VIII.") When Joseph and Oliver subsequently discovered that they were instead at the opening of a wholly distinct book, 2 Nephi, the chapter heading was crossed out and a more appropriate heading was inserted. This is quite instructive. It indicates that Joseph could only see the end of a section but did not know whether the next section would be another portion of the same book or, rather, the commencement of an entirely new book.²⁹

28. Stevenson, "One of the Three Witnesses," 86–87.

29. See Skousen, *Original Manuscript*, 164; see also Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon," 85–86; and Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon," 27–28.

Moreover, there were parts of the text that he did not understand. “When he came to proper names he could not pronounce, or long words,” recalled his wife Emma of the earliest part of the translation, “he spelled them out.”³⁰ And she evidently mentioned her experience to David Whitmer. “When Joseph could not pronounce the words,” Whitmer told Edmund C. Briggs and Rudolph Etzenhouser in 1884, “he spelled them out letter by letter.”³¹ Briggs also recalled an 1856 interview with Emma Smith in which “she remarked of her husband Joseph’s limited education while he was translating the Book of Mormon, and she was scribe at the time, ‘He could not pronounce the word Sariah.’ And one time while translating, where it speaks of the walls of Jerusalem, he stopped and said, ‘Emma, did Jerusalem have walls surrounding it?’ When I informed him it had, he replied, ‘O, I thought I was deceived.’”³² As the *Chicago Tribune* summarized David Whitmer’s testimony in 1885, he confirmed Emma’s experience: “In translating the characters Smith, who was *illiterate* and but little versed in Biblical lore, was oftentimes compelled to spell the words out, not knowing the correct pronunciation, and Mr. Whitmer recalls the fact that at that time Smith did not even know that Jerusalem was a walled city.”³³ (The use of the term *illiterate* is potentially misleading here since Joseph Smith was literate, given the now-current meaning of the word. He could read and he could write. But Joseph was not a

30. Edmund C. Briggs, “A Visit to Nauvoo in 1856,” *Journal of History* 9 (January 1916): 454; also in Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:530.

31. Said in a 25 April 1884 interview with Edmund C. Briggs and Rudolph Etzenhouser, published in *Saints’ Herald* 31 (21 June 1884), as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 128. By the time Joseph reached the portion of the Book of Mormon translation that is still extant in the original manuscript, there seems to be little if any evidence of such spelling out; see Skousen, “Translating the Book of Mormon,” 76–78.

32. In the Briggs and Etzenhouser interview, *Saints’ Herald* 31 (21 June 1884), as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 126–27. In a personal communication dated 18 August 2001, Royal Skousen suggests, plausibly enough, that Joseph probably kept pronouncing *Sariah* as *Sarah*.

33. *Chicago Tribune*, 17 December 1885, as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 174, emphasis in the original. Whitmer also mentioned the walls-of-Jerusalem incident in a conversation with M. J. Hubble, on 13 November 1886, as given in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 211.

learned person; he was not a man of letters. Accordingly, in one sense of the word, he was illiterate.)³⁴

In its notice of the death of David Whitmer, and undoubtedly based upon its prior interviews with him, the 24 January 1888 issue of the *Chicago Times* again alluded to the difficulties Joseph had with the text he was dictating: “Smith being an illiterate, would often stumble over the big words, which the village schoolmaster [Oliver Cowdery] would pronounce for him, and so the work proceeded.”³⁵

Thus, we see that Joseph Smith appears to have been reading from something external to himself, but that he had no book or manuscript or paper with him. It seems to have been a text that was new and strange to him and one that required a certain emotional or mental focus before it could be read. All of this is entirely consistent with Joseph’s claim that he was deriving the text by revelation—“by the power of God”—through an interpreting device, but it does not seem reconcilable with claims that he had created the text himself earlier, or even that he was merely reading from a purloined copy of someone else’s manuscript. In order to make the latter theories plausible, it is necessary to reject the unanimous testimony of the eyewitnesses to the process and to ignore the evidence provided by a careful examination and study of the original manuscript itself.

It is also necessary, of course, to interpret away the testimony of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon plates. On the whole, traditional frontal attacks on the sanity and character of those witnesses have gone out of favor; the evidence simply does not sustain such charges. Much more common now is the claim that the witnesses were somehow, owing to their religious credulity, at least intermittently disconnected from workaday reality.³⁶ Time does not permit an exhaustive analysis

34. The use of *literate* in the sense of “learned” is found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, under *literate*. One of the definitions of *illiterate* in the same dictionary reads: “ignorant of letters or literature; without book-learning or education; unlettered, unlearned.”

35. *Chicago Times*, 24 January 1888, as reproduced in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 249.

36. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 18–31.

of this currently fashionable approach, which is sometimes, apparently just to be on the safe side, linked with vague suggestions that Joseph Smith might have helped his gullible friends along with actual forged plates,³⁷ as well as a forged sword of Laban, a bogus Liahona, a fake breastplate, and stage-prop seer stones (Urim and Thummim). I will simply say that I remain deeply unimpressed by such suggestions, which strike me as ideologically driven, embarrassingly tendentious, and desperately *ad hoc*.

Moreover, it strikes me as amusing that the witnesses, a group of early nineteenth-century farmers who spent their lives rising at sunrise, pulling up stumps, clearing rocks, plowing fields, sowing seeds, carefully nurturing crops, raising livestock, milking cows, digging wells, building cabins, raising barns, harvesting their own food, bartering (in an often cashless economy) for what they could not produce themselves, wearing clothes made from plant fibers and skins, anxiously watching the seasons, and walking or riding animals out under the weather until they retired to their beds shortly after sunset in “a world lit only by fire,” are being portrayed as estranged from everyday empirical reality by people whose lives, like mine, consist to a large extent of staring at computer and television screens in artificially air-conditioned and artificially lit homes and offices, clothed in synthetic fibers, commuting between the two in enclosed and air-conditioned mechanical vehicles while they listen to the radio, chat on their cell phones, and fiddle with their iPods—all of whose inner workings are largely mysterious to them—who buy their prepackaged food (with little or no regard for the time or the season) by means of plastic cards and electronic financial transfers from artificially illuminated and air-conditioned supermarkets enmeshed in international distribution

37. Dan Vogel, “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies,” in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 108, casually tosses in the thought, after nearly thirty pages attempting to demonstrate that the witnesses were merely hallucinating, that maybe Joseph Smith actually created some bogus tin plates. This odd throwaway passage suggests the possibility that Vogel may find his hallucination thesis nearly as unpersuasive as I do. See Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), 98–99, for a more recent appearance of Vogel’s tin-plate theory.

networks of which they know virtually nothing, the rhythms of whose daily lives are largely unaffected by the rising and setting of the sun.

Among many other bits of evidence on this point, I am reminded of Martin Harris's 1859 reminiscence to Joel Tiffany about an encounter with the covered plates prior to his experience as one of the Three Witnesses: "While at Mr. Smith's I hefted the plates, and I knew from the heft that they were lead or gold, and I knew that Joseph had not credit enough to buy so much lead."³⁸

I continue to be impressed by the testimony of the witnesses, among whom I include not only the famous Three and Eight but others such as Mary Whitmer, Lucy Mack Smith, Emma Smith, Katherine Smith Salisbury, and Josiah Stowell.³⁹

A knowledgeable academic friend who does not believe in the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon once asked me, since it seems that the plates were not actually necessary to the translation process and were sometimes not even present in the room, what purpose they served. I responded that I did not know, exactly, except for one thing: They are an indigestible lump in the throats of people like him who contend that there were no Nephites but that Joseph Smith was nonetheless an inspired prophet. If the plates really existed, somebody made them. And if no Nephites existed to make them, then either Joseph Smith, or God, or somebody else seems to have been engaged in simple fraud. The testimony of the witnesses exists, I think, to force a dichotomous choice: true or false?⁴⁰

II

As an Arabist, I hope that I can be forgiven an unusual interest in recent studies—chiefly by Warren Aston and S. Kent Brown—appearing to demonstrate that the opening chapters of the Book of Mormon are

38. Joel Tiffany, interview with Martin Harris, *Tiffany's Monthly*, 1859, 169–70.

39. See Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:100 n. 101, 219, 219 n. 4, 221, 221 n. 2, 523–26, 539, 541, and 4:83.

40. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981); Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*; Terry L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 37–42; and Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 76–80.

entirely at home in the ancient Arabian Peninsula.⁴¹ (I myself have sought to show that Nephi’s vision of the tree of life fits its claimed preexilic Israelite milieu in a striking and unique way.)⁴² These studies build upon the pioneering work of Hugh Nibley and of Lynn and Hope Hilton, which, decades ago, had already established the basic Old World route most likely followed by Lehi and his party.⁴³ Some of the relevant information is now easily accessible in a new FARMS DVD entitled *Journey of Faith*, which was filmed on location in Arabia.⁴⁴

George Potter has, in my opinion, almost certainly located Lehi’s “river of Laman”—a “river of water” that, “continually running,” “emptied into the Red Sea.” And anybody who has seen photographs of the sheer granite cliffs that loom over narrow portions of the Wadi Tayyib al-Isim, through which it runs, will have no difficulty imagining why Lehi would term this valley, which he named “Lemuel,” “firm and steadfast, and immovable.”⁴⁵ How did Joseph Smith know about

41. See Warren P. Aston, “The Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi’s Bountiful,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 4–11; S. Kent Brown, “A Case for Lehi’s Bondage in Arabia,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 205–17; Brown, “The Place That Was Called Nahom: New Light from Ancient Yemen,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 66–68; Brown, “New Light from Arabia on Lehi’s Trail,” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 55–125; Brown, “Into Arabia and Across the Sea,” in S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004), 27–63; Brown, “Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 B.C.,” in *Glimpses of Lehi’s Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004); and the DVD *Journey of Faith* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2005).

42. Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191–243; and Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25.

43. The original version of Hugh Nibley’s “Lehi in the Desert” appeared in the *Improvement Era* in 1950, and then as a book in 1952. Now see Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988). See also Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail—Part 1: The Preparation,” *Ensign*, September 1976, 32–54; Hilton and Hilton, “In Search of Lehi’s Trail—Part 2: The Journey,” *Ensign*, October 1976, 34–63; and Hilton and Hilton, *In Search of Lehi’s Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

44. *Journey of Faith*, DVD.

45. See 1 Nephi 2:5–10 and George D. Potter, “A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 54–63, 79. Since the

the Wadi Tayyib al-Isim? Even in our information-rich contemporary environment, what could most of *us* say about it?

Furthermore, the recent publication of inscriptions from three limestone altars that have been found in the ancient temple of Marib, in the Yemen, demonstrates quite unmistakably that the tribal name NHM existed in precisely the right area of Arabia, at exactly the right time that 1 Nephi places the toponym *Nahom* there.⁴⁶ Says one of them, for instance: “Bi’athar, son of Sawad, son of Naw’an, the Nihmite, has consecrated to [the god] Almaqah [the person of] Fari’at.” This seems remarkable in itself, but, strikingly, the Lehite party’s turn due east at Nahom, diverging from their generally southward direction to that point, coincides with the now-demonstrated fact that *all* roads turned east in the region of NHM, including the famous Arabian incense trail and the “shortcuts” across the Ramlat Sab atayn desert. How did Joseph Smith know this? (The “eastward turn” does not appear in any known ancient source, not even in Pliny the Elder’s famous description of the incense-growing lands of Arabia Felix. As Kent Brown has written, “No one knew of this eastward turn in the incense trail except persons who had traveled it.”)

But the story is not over *yet*. How did Joseph Smith know that, by traveling due east from NHM, one would eventually reach a small portion of the Arabian Sea coast—Wadi Sayq—that matches the requirements for Lehi’s Old World “Bountiful,” complete with cliffs, abundant greenery, trees, plentiful fresh water, iron ore deposits, and a sheltered bay where a boat might be safely constructed and launched?

presentation of this paper in Illinois, Jeffrey Chadwick has raised questions about the identification of the Wadi Tayyib al-Isim as the valley of Lemuel. See Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “The Wrong Place for Lehi’s Trail and the Valley of Lemuel,” in this number, pages 197–215. (This is a nice illustration, incidentally, of the nonexistence of a unitary “FARMS position.”) His criticisms merit serious attention, but Wadi Tayyib al-Isim still seems to me a stunningly appropriate place for Lehi’s comments.

46. In contrast to other place names mentioned in 1 Nephi that were given by the Lehtes as they passed through (e.g., “*he called* the name of the river Laman” [1 Nephi 2:8], “*we did call* the name of the place Shazer” [16:13], and “the land which *we called* Bountiful” [17:5]) and, so, would likely have been known only by them, Ishmael was buried in “the place which *was called* Nahom” (1 Nephi 16:34; note the passive voice), suggesting that this was not simply a family designation—and that it preexisted and almost certainly survived beyond their sojourn there.

I will let these thoughts about the Arabian portion of the Book of Mormon represent a much larger number of items of greater or lesser evidentiary value, including, but not limited to, chiasmus,⁴⁷ the Book of Mormon's remarkable complexity and intertextuality,⁴⁸ statistical demonstrations of its multiple authorship (quite distinct from Joseph Smith),⁴⁹ its detailed and accurate depictions of massive volcanic/seismological events⁵⁰ and ancient olive culture⁵¹ and guerrilla warfare,⁵² its underappreciated rhetorical richness and density,⁵³ and its subtle depiction of

47. See John W. Welch, "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 114–31; John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying and Evaluating the Presence of Chiasmus," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 1–14; John W. Welch, "How Much Was Known about Chiasmus in 1829 When the Book of Mormon Was Translated?" *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 47–80; and John W. Welch and Daniel B. McKinlay, eds., *Chiasmus Bibliography* (Provo, UT: Research Press, 1999).

48. See Melvin J. Thorne, "Complexity, Consistency, Ignorance, and Probabilities," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 179–93.

49. See Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," *BYU Studies* 20/3 (1980): 225–51; John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 225–53; and G. Bruce Schaale, John L. Hilton, and John B. Archer, "Comparative Power of Three Author-Attribution Techniques for Differentiating Authors," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/1 (1997): 47–63.

50. See Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 231–38; and Bart J. Kowallis, "In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist's View of the Great Destruction in 3 Nephi," *BYU Studies* 37/3 (1997–98): 136–90.

51. See Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 238–39; and 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 FARMS, 1994).

52. See Daniel C. Peterson, "The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 146–73.

53. See Donald W. Parry, *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998); Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997); Eugene England, "A Second Witness for the Logos: The Book of Mormon and Contemporary Literary Criticism," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:91–125; Marilyn Arnold, *Sweet Is the Word: Reflections on the Book of Mormon—Its Narrative, Teachings, and People* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 1996); S. Kent Brown, "The Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 111–26; George S. Tate, "The Typology of the Exodus Pattern in the Book of Mormon," in *Literature of Belief: Sacred Scripture and Religious Experience*,

what seems to be an authentically ancient coronation ceremony occurring during the Jewish festival of Sukkot.⁵⁴ This is not the appropriate place to discuss how the chronology and demographics of Jaredites and Lehites now seem to correlate rather nicely with what we are learning of the Olmec and the Preclassic Maya,⁵⁵ or to treat the appearance of authentically ancient military simile oaths in the account of Captain Moroni in the book of Alma,⁵⁶ or recently discovered examples of what might reasonably be called “reformed Egyptian,”⁵⁷ or recent theories of the origin of the practice of writing sacred texts on metal plates that put it right in Lehi’s claimed ancestral home at exactly the right time.⁵⁸ I cannot elaborate here on the appearance of cement construction technology at Teotihuacán at just the time the Book of Mormon suggests, and, arguably, in just the right place,⁵⁹ or on the accurate depiction of an urban society and of fortifications that were foreign to the Native Americans Joseph Smith knew but, as we now know, were common among the inhabitants of Mesoamerica,⁶⁰ or on the appearance in the Book of Mormon of prophecies involving units of twenty and twenty twenties (Alma 45:10; Helaman 13:9; Moroni 10:1), much like the *katun*

ed. Neal E. Lambert (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1981), 245–62; Terrence L. Szink, “Nephi and the Exodus,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 38–51; Noel B. Reynolds, “Lehi as Moses,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 26–35; and Noel B. Reynolds, “The Israelite Background of Moses Typology in the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* 44/2 (2005): 4–23.

54. See John Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in *By Study and Also by Faith*, 2:197–237.

55. See John E. Clark, “Archaeology in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (2005): 38–49.

56. See Mark J. Morrise, “Simile Curses in the Ancient Near East, Old Testament, and Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 124–38.

57. See John Gee, “Two Notes on Egyptian Script,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 162–70; 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.

58. See William J. Adams Jr., “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Metal Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 204–6; Adams, “More on the Silver Plates from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (1995): 136–37; and William J. Hamblin, “Metal Plates and the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* (July 1994): 2.

59. See John L. Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?” in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 287–88.

60. See Clark, “Archaeology in the Book of Mormon,” 44.

and *baktun* prophecies of the Maya.⁶¹ I could also discuss how the story of the deliberate burial of the Book of Mormon plates in the face of a military threat matches the story of the Dead Sea Scrolls,⁶² which also tell of a group that left Jerusalem under the leadership of a prophetic leader. I would have liked to comment on the presence of the Semitic-style cognate accusative in 1 Nephi⁶³ and on authentically Hebrew personal names like *Alma* and *Sariah*⁶⁴ and remarkably appropriate toponyms like *Jershon*,⁶⁵ as well as on Lehi's prophetic call as a classic ancient throne theophany vision,⁶⁶ and on the figure of the nonviolent liberator, called in the Hebrew Bible a *moshiah*, who also appears in the Book of Mormon books of Omni and, perhaps significantly, Mosiah.⁶⁷ And there is a great deal more that I could mention.

61. See Clark, "Archaeology in the Book of Mormon," 47.

62. See Klaus Berger, *Qumran: Funde—Texte—Geschichte* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1998), 128.

63. See Brian D. Stubbs, "Book of Mormon Language," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:180; and Kevin L. Barney, "A More Responsible Critique," *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 123–24. For discussions of Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon, see John A. Tvedtnes, "Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon: A Preliminary Survey," *BYU Studies* 11/1 (1970): 50–60; Tvedtnes, "Since the Book of Mormon is largely the record of a Hebrew people, is the writing characteristic of the Hebrew language?" I Have a Question, *Ensign*, October 1986, 64–66; and Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Background of the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 77–91.

64. See Hugh W. Nibley, review of *Bar-Kochba*, by Yigael Yadin, *BYU Studies* 14/1 (1973): 121; Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Alma as a Hebrew Name," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 72–73; Terrence L. Szink, "Further Evidence of a Semitic Alma," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 70; Barney, "A More Responsible Critique," 125–28; Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (1993): 196–200; reprinted as "Sariah in the Elephantine Papyri," in *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 6–10; and John A. Tvedtnes, John Gee, and Matthew Roper, "Book of Mormon Names Attested in Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/1 (2000): 42–43.

65. Stephen D. Ricks and John A. Tvedtnes, "The Hebrew Origin of Some Book of Mormon Place Names," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6/2 (1997): 257–58.

66. See Blake T. Ostler, "The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *BYU Studies* 26/4 (1986): 67–95; and Daniel C. Peterson and Stephen D. Ricks, "The Throne Theophany/Prophetic Call of Mu ammadi," in *The Disciple as Scholar: Essays on Scripture and the Ancient World in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 323–37.

67. See "What Was a 'Mosiah'?" in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 105–7, drawing on a piece by John Sawyer, "What Was a Mōšia'?" *Vetus Testamentum* 15 (1965): 475–86.

But I will content myself with a few more items from Royal Skousen's ongoing work of Book of Mormon textual criticism.

III

Royal Skousen's intensive study of the Book of Mormon text has left him profoundly impressed with its consistency, which has often been marred by subsequent well-intended editing. It has also led him to a strikingly strange perception: The vocabulary and language of the Book of Mormon is not really, as we have often lazily said, King James English. Nor, for that matter, is it nineteenth-century English such as a New York farm boy might have spoken. At point after point, Skousen's study—and please recall that he is a linguistic theorist of international standing—persuades him that the English of the Book of Mormon bears the marks of the seventeenth and even sixteenth centuries (the era of William Tyndale). Lexical evidence suggests that a number of expressions and word meanings present in the original manuscript had been lost from the English language by 1700.⁶⁸ This is a surprising idea for believers; for advocates of nineteenth-century authorship it must seem, if true, positively *weird*.

Finally, here is another oddity: the “if/and” conditional sentence (for example, “If this essay does not come to a halt soon, and I shall go completely mad”), a structure that is utterly foreign to any known dialect or native speaker of English but is characteristic of biblical Hebrew.

Here is how a portion of the book of Helaman read in its original form, before its English was improved:

yea and *if* he saith unto the earth move *and* it is moved
yea *if* he say unto the earth thou shalt go back that it
lengthen out the day for many hours *and* it is done . . .
and behold also *if* he saith unto the waters of the great
deep be thou dried up *and* it is done

68. Royal Skousen, “The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon,” *Insights* 25/5 (2005): 2–6.

behold *if* he saith unto this mountain be thou raised up and come over and fall upon that city that it be buried up *and* behold it is done

and *if* the Lord shall say be thou accursed that no man shall find thee from this time henceforth and forever *and* behold no man getteth it henceforth and forever

and behold *if* the Lord shall say unto a man because of thine iniquities thou shalt be accursed forever *and* it shall be done

and *if* the Lord shall say because of thine iniquities thou shalt be cut off from my presence *and* he will cause that it shall be so (Helaman 12:13–21, punctuation omitted)

And this is the original reading of another, much more famous, passage:

and *if* ye shall ask with a sincere heart with real intent having faith in Christ *and* he will manifest the truth of it unto you by the power of the Holy Ghost. (Moroni 10:4)⁶⁹

It is difficult for me to imagine that Joseph Smith or any modern author proposed for the Book of Mormon spoke in “if/and” conditional sentences. But an ancient Hebrew speaker would have, and I suspect that what we may have in these instances is a kind of contamination—familiar to any serious translator—of the target language by the habits of expression in the original language (which, in this case, would be Hebrew or something very like it).⁷⁰

Research by those affiliated with FARMS has certainly not answered all objections to the antiquity and authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Along with the work of others, however, it has answered enough of them, and proposed enough powerful positive evidence, and raised enough intriguing questions, that I, for one, feel entirely

69. Skousen, *Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 2:760, 973–74. The original manuscript for these passages is not extant.

70. For a very recent discussion of striking evidence of an original Hebrew text underlying the Book of Mormon, see Thomas A. Wayment, “The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 98–103.

comfortable, on a purely rational and academic basis, in affirming as my own belief not the “FARMS” view of Book of Mormon origins but that claimed by the book itself, the account to which Joseph Smith and the other witnesses testified and for which, ultimately, Joseph gave his life.

A Note Regarding the Previous Issue

Among its many excellent essays, the *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005) included a review by Dr. Ryan Parr of a book by Simon Southerton criticizing Mormonism and attacking the Book of Mormon,⁷¹ to which Southerton has taken exception in a statement posted on the Signature Books Web site. I invited Dr. Parr to comment, briefly, on Southerton’s response, and this is what he sent to me on 30 December 2005:

In his response to a recent FARMS review of his book *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA and the Mormon Church*, the foundational reason for Dr. Simon Southerton’s disaffection from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is evident; he writes, “I accepted without question the widespread urban legends in the church.”⁷²

71. Ryan Parr, “Missing the Boat to Ancient America . . . Just Plain Missing the Boat,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 83–106. Dr. Parr’s is simply the latest of several essays on the topic to have been published by FARMS. Articles in the *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003) include Daniel C. Peterson, “Prolegomena to the DNA Articles,” 25–34; David A. McClellan, “Detecting Lehi’s Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?” 35–90; Matthew Roper, “Nephi’s Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations,” 91–128; Matthew Roper, “Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy,” 129–64; Brian D. Stubbs, “Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing,” 165–82; and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Charge of ‘Racism’ in the Book of Mormon,” 183–97. Articles in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003) include John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, “Before DNA,” 6–23; Michael F. Whiting, “DNA and the Book of Mormon: A Phylogenetic Perspective,” 24–35; John M. Butler, “A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist,” 6–37; and D. Jeffrey Meldrum and Trent D. Stephens, “Who Are the Children of Lehi?” 38–51. See now also Dean H. Leavitt, Jonathon C. Marshall, and Keith A. Crandall, “The Search for the Seed of Lehi: How Defining Alternative Models Helps in the Interpretation of Genetic Data,” *Dialogue* 36/4 (2003): 133–50.

72. See www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing3.htm (accessed 23 January 2006).

This admission relates mainly to the common Latter-day Saint view that Lehi, his family, and those who journeyed with him are the exclusive ancestors of all Native American populations; however, genetic analyses of these groups demonstrate an Asian, as opposed to an ancient Near Eastern, origin for these aboriginal people. Nevertheless, a substantial Asian presence in the New World, prior to 600 BC, is not inconsistent with the Book of Mormon. Southerton admits as much when he says, “In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. If a small group of Israelites, say less than thirty, entered such a massive native population, it would be very hard to detect their genes today.”⁷³

The difficulty begins immediately following this, as he continues, “However, such a scenario does not square with what the Book of Mormon plainly states and with what the prophets have taught for 175 years. The Book of Mormon records that soon after their arrival in the Americas, the descendants of Lehi ‘multiplied exceedingly and spread upon the face of the land’ (Jarom 1:8).”⁷⁴ Taken word-for-word, a narrow interpretation of this verse is to be had; however, this information is recorded nearly 200 years after Lehi’s group landed in what is believed to be Mesoamerica. It is now at least the third or fourth generation dating from that event. (Jarom refers to his son Omni, with a possible succeeding generation following, given the age of Omni.) Speaking collectively of all people in the land, whom he refers to as Lamanites (non-believers) and Nephites (believers), the statement “multiplied exceedingly upon the face of the land” is not inappropriate. As for what the prophets have taught, genetic integration means that a subset of Mesoamericans, with Asian genetics, were the Book of Mormon people. Yet why should anyone reasonably expect Joseph Smith, or any of the prophets, to be experts

73. See www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing2.htm (accessed 23 January 2006).

74. See www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing2.htm (accessed 23 January 2006).

in population genetics or in the anthropology of aboriginal Americans? Joseph was fairly candid about his human nature, which applies to all of us: “I told them I was but a man, and they must not expect me to be perfect; if they expected perfection from me, I should expect it from them.”⁷⁵

At the conclusion of his response to the FARMS review, Southerton writes, “In the final analysis, this really has very little or nothing to do with the larger question of religious faith and much to do with conservatism, literalism and theological calcification.” Yet, ironically, Southerton’s admission of relying upon “the widespread urban legends in the church” seems to indicate a similar stubborn (secular) calcification and an absence of due diligence in matters of faith. Religion and faith demand a vision of hope married with a firm belief in positive possibilities and outcomes. Casting doubt and aspersions on urban legends simply obstructs that vision for some, but it does not obscure the overwhelming vista of the restoration for many others.⁷⁶

With Dr. Parr, I too am struck by Simon Southerton’s effective concession of the fundamental point made by writers for FARMS on the subject of Amerindian DNA and the Book of Mormon over the past few years, and I think it bears repeating: “In 600 BC there were probably several million American Indians living in the Americas. If a small group of Israelites, say less than thirty, entered such a massive native population, it would be very hard to detect their genes today.”⁷⁷ Thus, the so-called issue of Amerindian DNA and the Book of Mormon proves not to really be about genetics at all. It actually

75. *History of the Church*, 5:181.

76. Ryan Parr, e-mail correspondence to Daniel C. Peterson, 30 December 2005.

77. Blake Ostler also calls attention to Southerton’s admission, in a superb and substantive letter published recently in *Sunstone*. See Blake T. Ostler, “Simon Says, But That Doesn’t Make It So,” *Sunstone*, November 2005, 4–8. The letter can be read online at the magazine’s Web site, via www.sunstoneonline.com/magazine/mag-issue-139.asp (accessed 23 January 2006). Just preceding Ostler’s letter, incidentally, is a fine letter from my colleague Larry Morris, addressing the vital significance of the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

comes down to how the Book of Mormon is to be interpreted and to how its history is pictured. Are we to be ruled by the Mormon “urban legends” to which, even after he himself has repudiated his faith, Simon Southerton insists we are bound, or should we favor what the text of the Book of Mormon itself says (and does not say)? The answer seems rather obvious.

In This Issue

One of the most surprising developments of recent years has been the reappearance in certain circles, yet again, of the theory that the Book of Mormon derives from a manuscript romance written by one Solomon Spalding.⁷⁸ The second volume of Francis W. Kirkham’s now largely forgotten but groundbreaking and still useful *A New Witness for Christ in America* chronicles the gradual abandonment of the Spalding theory between roughly 1901 and the publication of Fawn Brodie’s *No Man Knows My History* in 1945.⁷⁹

By the summer of 1977, however, the notorious anti-Mormon demagogue “Dr.” Walter Martin had engaged a trio of evangelical Protestants in an attempt to resuscitate the Spalding theory.⁸⁰ They

78. The name is frequently also spelled as *Spaulding*. The only surviving Spalding manuscript—and the only one known to have ever actually existed—was published most recently in Kent P. Jackson, ed., *Manuscript Found: The Complete Original “Spaulding Manuscript” by Solomon Spaulding* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996).

79. Francis W. Kirkham, *A New Witness for Christ in America*, vol. 2, *Attempts to Prove the Book of Mormon Man-Made Analyzed and Answered* (Independence, MO: Zion’s Printing and Publishing, 1951). A classic (and highly critical) article on the subject is Lester E. Bush Jr., “The Spalding Theory Then and Now,” *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 40–69. Rex C. Reeve Jr., “What Is ‘Manuscript Found?’” in Jackson, *Manuscript Found*, vii–xxviii, gives a useful brief overview. Charles H. Whittier and Stephen W. Stathis, “The Enigma of Solomon Spalding,” *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 70–73, provide a helpful biographical sketch of Spalding. Brodie’s still-important critique of the Spalding theory occurs as “Appendix B: The Spaulding-Rigdon Theory,” in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed. rev. and enl. (New York: Knopf, 1975), 442–56. The best biography of Joseph Smith is now Bushman’s *Joseph Smith*, which pays only scant attention to the Spalding theory (on pages 90–91, 97).

80. On the late “Dr.” Walter Martin, see the fascinating and revealing materials gathered in Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, vol. 3 (Mesa, AZ: Brownsworth, 1986). Martin’s poorly grounded fascination with the Spalding theory is discussed by Louis Midgley, “A ‘Tangled Web’: The Walter Martin Miasma,” *FARMS*

claimed that a small portion of Solomon Spalding's allegedly lost original manuscript actually still existed, and that, astonishingly enough, it appeared within the original Book of Mormon manuscript (where it included the text of 1 Nephi 4:20–12:8). In order to prove their assertion, this trio recruited three handwriting experts to whom they exhibited photocopies of selected pages of the original Book of Mormon manuscript as well as photocopied samples of Solomon Spalding's penmanship. Each of the three handwriting analysts thereupon furnished initial, preliminary reports declaring that the handwriting samples appeared to be similar. They cautioned, however, that, before issuing a final verdict, they expected to examine the originals of the documents that had been shown to them. Impatient to get on with things, however, Martin's three evangelical agents immediately contacted the *Los Angeles Times* and other news outlets in order to trumpet a "discovery" that, he and they eagerly hoped, would toll the death knell for both the Book of Mormon and Mormonism.

As a native of southern California who was still living there at the time, I remember this incident well, and I recall hearing that one couple living in my stake had immediately resigned from the church over the seemingly devastating news. Meanwhile, church historian Leonard J. Arrington declared that "The whole theory is ridiculous."⁸¹

Amidst the heavy media coverage that followed, the handwriting analysts traveled to Salt Lake City, where each examined the relevant section of the Book of Mormon manuscript, and at least one also apparently went to the archives of Oberlin College in Ohio, where the original Spalding manuscript resides. While in Utah, each of the

Review 12/1 (2000): 371–434 (especially 399–404, 406–7). The amazing tale of Martin's abortive joint venture with Wayne Cowdrey, Howard Davis, and Donald Scales is documented in Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, vol. 2 (Mesa, AZ: Brownsworth, 1984). The four astonishing volumes of the Browns' *They Lie in Wait to Deceive* series are now available from the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR) via www.fairlds.org/pubs/liw/.

81. "Statement of Leonard Arrington, LDS Church Historian, 28 June 1977, Historical Department of the Church," cited in Bush, "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," 61. In his 1998 memoir of his service as church historian, Arrington evidently did not find the episode worth mentioning. See Leonard J. Arrington, *Adventures of a Church Historian* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

experts was also shown an 1831 manuscript corresponding, in modern Latter-day Saint editions, to Doctrine and Covenants 56. This manuscript referred to persons, places, and doctrines—for example, Selah J. Griffin, Newel Knight, Thomas B. Marsh, Ezra Thayre; Thompson, Ohio; and “inheritances” in “the land of Missouri”—specifically relevant to the newly organized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1831. It seemed to be written in the same unidentified hand that, when it appeared in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, the three evangelicals claimed to be Solomon Spalding’s. Spalding, however, had died in 1816.

One of the handwriting analysts, William Kaye, nonetheless submitted a final report favorable to Martin’s three evangelical factotums. However, another of the analysts, Henry Silver, withdrew from the matter altogether, publicly complaining that the three evangelicals had exploited him and that his views had been misrepresented,⁸² while the report submitted by the third analyst, Howard Doulder, was decisively unfavorable to the evangelicals’ case.

Undeterred, though, Martin’s three cocrusaders—Howard A. Davis, Donald R. Scales, and Wayne L. Cowdrey—published *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* in late 1977.⁸³ In this volume, they reproduced the favorable preliminary reports of their three handwriting analysts, as well as positive final reports from Silver⁸⁴ and Kaye and a

82. See Brown and Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, 2:3–26.

83. Howard A. Davis, Donald R. Scales, and Wayne L. Cowdrey, with Gretchen Passantino, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* (Santa Ana, CA: Vision House, 1977). On page 166 of the book, incidentally, and elsewhere, Wayne Cowdrey claimed to be a direct descendent of the Book of Mormon witness and scribe Oliver Cowdery. (Note the different spellings of their last names.) However, since five of Oliver Cowdery’s six children died in either infancy or early childhood, and since the only surviving child, a daughter, died without having borne any children, Wayne Cowdrey’s claim appears somewhat unlikely to be true. On this and certain fascinating related matters, see Brown and Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, 2:49–74. Until his assertion was exposed as false, Walter Martin claimed to be a descendant of Brigham Young. See Brown and Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, 3:67–91.

84. Henry Silver claims, however, that the second report attributed to him is a fabrication, that he was “repeatedly misquoted in newspapers and other publications,” and that he never rendered a “second (final) opinion.” See Brown and Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive*, 2:20, 15.

resoundingly negative final verdict from Howard Doulder; however, they omitted any reference to the 1831 manuscript of Doctrine and Covenants 56.⁸⁵ Thereafter, as historian Richard Bushman remarks, the Spalding theory resumed its “status [as] an historiographical artifact without credibility among serious scholars.”⁸⁶

That status did not, however, prevent it from continuing to flourish in certain regions of the anti-Mormon demimonde. “One . . . can reasonably expect,” wrote Lester Bush in the fall of 1977,

that new variants will, like the influenza, reemerge every now and then. The strength of these will probably be, as in the most recent instance, inversely proportionate to the publicity with which they are heralded. One newspaper headlined this latest episode, “BOOK OF MORMON’S AUTHENTICITY DOUBTED BY HANDWRITING EXPERTS.” More aptly the title could have been, “THE LATE REVEREND SPALDING DISINTERRED . . . BUT SLATED FOR REBURIAL.”⁸⁷

In seeming fulfillment of Bush’s prophecy, two of Martin’s three cocrusaders—Wayne Cowdrey and Howard Davis—are now back again after the passage of nearly thirty years. Assisted by a new fellow laborer, Arthur Vanick, they offer the world part deux of their never-fully-dead campaign: *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma*.⁸⁸ This time, though, there is no mention whatever of handwriting analysts nor any claim to have found Solomon Spalding’s penmanship in the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon.⁸⁹ Fortunately for them, the slightly modified title of the volume and its new publisher apparently relieve its authors of any obligation to inform their readers that it is actually a revision of a book that has enjoyed a colorful and

85. Davis, Scales, and Cowdrey, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* 173–88.

86. Bushman, *Joseph Smith*, 91.

87. Bush, “The Spalding Theory Then and Now,” 63, capitalization and ellipses in the original.

88. Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick, *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005).

89. As my colleague George Mitton observes, the Scales appear to have fallen from their eyes on at least *that* matter.

fascinating history of its own. The introduction merely states that “some of this evidence has been previously published” (p. 17).

Matthew Roper examines this latest incarnation of the Spalding theory at considerable length and finds it as unconvincing as it has always been. Advocates of the Spalding theory of the origin of the Book of Mormon believe that the book’s historical portions derive from a hypothetical second Spalding manuscript—the first, when recovered, having fundamentally failed to live up to their hopes. The religious content of the Book of Mormon, they say, was grafted onto an essentially secular historical novel. But this, it frankly strikes me, is rather like suggesting that, in the story of King Kong, the parts about a giant ape were tacked onto what was originally merely a story of a romantic ocean voyage to an exotic island. The Book of Mormon’s religious content is indissolubly linked with its historical narrative. Many years ago, a high school friend of mine found herself at a Christmas party at the nearby California Institute of Technology, in the course of which an exceedingly famous Nobel laureate physicist began to hold forth on C. S. Lewis’s *Perelandra* trilogy of science fiction novels.⁹⁰ He professed to love them, except, he said, for “all the vile religious propaganda” that Lewis had supposedly tacked onto his plots. With quite remarkable courage, my teenage friend challenged the illustrious professor, contending (correctly) that the religious elements in the novels are not merely “tacked on” but are integral to Lewis’s story. But if that is so in the *Perelandra* books—as it plainly is—it is many times more so in the narrative of the Book of Mormon. (One of the many bizarre and incoherent aspects of the 1977 *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* project was its insistence that the manuscript of 1 Nephi 4:20–12:8 is in Solomon Spalding’s hand. That passage, as even the most cursory examination will show, is anything but secular.)

I have written previously of the striking inability of critics of the Book of Mormon to agree on a single coherent and comprehensive counterexplanation for it.⁹¹ This continuing phenomenon is neatly

90. They are, in order, *Out of the Silent Planet*, *Perelandra*, and *That Hideous Strength*.

91. Daniel C. Peterson, “‘In the Hope that Something Will Stick’: Changing Explanations for the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): xi–xxxiii.

illustrated when *The Spalding Enigma* is compared with Dan Vogel's *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, which is critically examined in this number of the *FARMS Review* by Alan Goff.⁹² It is also noteworthy that Dan Vogel, in his massive collection of Mormon documents, does not reproduce the Spalding materials—not even “the collection of affidavits gathered in 1833 by Doctor Philastus Hurlbut, a disaffected Mormon, asserting that Joseph Smith, Jr., plagiarized the Book of Mormon from an unpublished manuscript prepared by Solomon Spaulding (or Spalding).”⁹³ Why did Vogel not reproduce these affidavits and other Spalding-related materials? Why push all those documents aside without argument? Vogel insists that “these documents shed no light on Mormon origins.”⁹⁴ Put another way, they do not fit comfortably within his amateur attempt at psychoanalyzing Joseph Smith. However, the efforts to link Solomon Spalding to the Book of Mormon shed much light on the desperate efforts of most critics from 1834 until Brodie in 1945, as well as of some modern critics like Walter Martin and his associates, to discredit Joseph's story of his recovery of the Book of Mormon, to find some source for it other than Joseph Smith or (horrible thought!) God. Now, some of the affidavits gathered by Hurlbut (and others) can in fact be made to fit Vogel's explanation. In that case, they seem to him to be evidence that sheds light on Mormon origins. Otherwise, he brushes them aside.

It is intriguing to notice the rather similar behavior of E. D. Howe, the publisher of Philastus Hurlbut's affidavits and the earliest popularizer of the Spalding theory of Book of Mormon origins. Knowing that Spalding had written a manuscript about a pre-Columbian voyage from the Old World to the New, Hurlbut and Howe eagerly anticipated that it would prove to be the source of the Book of Mormon. To their intense disappointment, however, the manuscript, when obtained with the permission of Spalding's widow in 1833, betrayed

92. For a previous review of the Vogel book by a historian and a psychiatrist, see Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, “No, Dan, That's Still Not History,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 205–22.

93. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv.

94. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 1:xiv.

no meaningful similarity to the book published by Joseph Smith. So they suppressed it.

Q. Mr. Howe, did Hulburt bring the manuscript to you he got of Mrs. (Spaulding) Davidson?

A. Yes, he brought one; but it was not the one we wanted; it only told about some tribes of Indians and their wars along the lakes here and pretended to be the writing of some ship-wrecked crew. It was the wars of the Winnebagoes, Chicagoes or Niagaras, I believe.

Q. Why did you not publish it?

A. Because it did not do us any good.⁹⁵

Fortunately, it was rediscovered (in Hawaii!) in 1884, and devotees of Solomon Spalding as the real author of Mormonism's eponymous scripture have since labored mightily to convince others that there had to have been a *second* manuscript (Deutero-Spalding, if you will) that, surely, must have been the source for the Book of Mormon.

Apologists for the Spalding theory and would-be psychobiographers such as Vogel are both committed, of course, to the notion that the Book of Mormon is fraudulent. "I'm trying," Vogel admits, "to establish the BofM is not historical."⁹⁶ But, thus far, psychobiographical approaches to the Book of Mormon have flatly and directly contradicted the Spalding manuscript theory, since, rather than claiming that the historical portions of the book were written by a man who died in 1816, when Joseph was only ten or eleven years old, they insist that the historical portions of the Book of Mormon reflect the autobiography of Joseph Smith himself.⁹⁷

95. E. L. Kelley, *Public Discussion of the Issues between the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Church of Christ (Disciples), Held in Kirtland, Ohio, Beginning February 12, and Closing March 8, 1884, between E. L. Kelley, of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and Clark Braden, of the Church of Christ* (St. Louis: Christian Publishing and Smart, 1884), 83, original spelling of names retained.

96. Dan Vogel, posting at the FAIR message boards, www.fairboards.org/index.php?showtopic=12015&st=225 (accessed 15 December 2005).

97. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004). Other attempts to read the Book of Mormon as Joseph's autobiography

There is often a notably *ad hoc* character to the arguments adduced to justify the claim, and, almost always, a resolutely dogmatic refusal to acknowledge contrary evidence. For instance, when I recently asked Vogel, effectively, if he was willing to grant the existence of any evidence at all, however weak or slight, that would tend to support the claims of the Book of Mormon, he responded, “I don’t think there is any evidence for Book of Mormon historicity.”⁹⁸ He thus summarily dismisses the many thousands of pages of materials published by FARMS and others over the past several decades; nothing in them, in his view—not a single solitary thing—counts as even negligible evidence for the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

Vogel also dismisses the testimony of the witnesses to the Book of Mormon—as, indeed, he must do if he is to preserve his unbelief. A marvelous example of *ad hoc* improvisation occurs in his 2002 essay on “The Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies,” where, after a lengthy attempt to discredit the witnesses by portraying them as alienated from empirical reality and as having merely imagined the plates of the Book of Mormon, or seen them in a subjective hallucination, he suddenly introduces the idea, without even a trace of supporting evidence, that Joseph Smith might perhaps, conceivably, have faked a set of tin plates in order to deceive his friends.⁹⁹ As I have remarked before, it is very much to his credit that Vogel appears, at least, to find his own main thesis nearly as weak as I do. However, rigidly unwilling to accept the testimony of the witnesses at face value, he invents an

include Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999), reviewed in Michael D. Jibson, “Korihor Speaks, or the Misinterpretation of Dreams,” *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 223–60; and William D. Morain, *The Sword of Laban: Joseph Smith Jr. and the Dissociated Mind* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1998), reviewed in Richard N. Williams, “The Spirit of Prophecy and the Spirit of Psychiatry: Restoration or Dissociation?” *FARMS Review of Books* 12/1 (2000): 435–43.

98. Dan Vogel, response posted on the FAIR message boards, www.fairboards.org/index.php?showtopic=12015&st=345 (accessed 29 December 2005).

99. Vogel, “Validity of the Witnesses’ Testimonies,” 108. The indispensable work on the subject continues to be Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980), though he has, in the meantime, authored a number of extremely important relevant studies.

unevidenced and rather implausible pseudofact in order to salvage his rejection of their claims.

There is a striking element of desperation in this maneuver. “How often have I said to you,” explained Sherlock Holmes to Dr. Watson, “that when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth?”¹⁰⁰ For Dan Vogel, the historicity of the Book of Mormon is, at bottom, simply impossible. “The case [against the Book of Mormon] has been closed for some time,” he declares, even if believers in the book and its scholarly defenders “just haven’t realized it.”¹⁰¹ Dogmatically committed to his position, Vogel is willing to resort to what seem to me painfully obvious *ad hoc* just-so stories in order to eliminate evidence that challenges his position.¹⁰²

It is difficult, in this context, not to be reminded once again of the late Western historian Dale Morgan, an atheist who, in 1945, wrote a letter to his fellow historian Juanita Brooks, a believing Latter-day Saint, in which he candidly acknowledged that

With my point of view on God, I am incapable of accepting the claims of Joseph Smith and the Mormons, be they however so convincing. If God does not exist, how can Joseph Smith’s story have any possible validity? I will look everywhere for explanations except to the ONE explanation that is the position of the church.¹⁰³

And that, in fact, is precisely what E. D. Howe, the man who brought Philastus Hurlbut’s affidavits to the world in *Mormonism Unveiled*, apparently did. “What do you know personally,” he was asked, “about the Book of Mormon and the Spaulding story being the same?”

100. Arthur Conan Doyle, “The Sign of Four,” in *The Complete Sherlock Holmes* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1930), 111, emphasis in the original.

101. Dan Vogel, posting on the FAIR message boards, www.fairboards.org/index.php?showtopic=12015&st=405 (accessed 1 January 2006).

102. Vogel’s attempt to explain the witnesses away has recently been examined by Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses,” 18–31.

103. Dale Morgan to Juanita Brooks, 15 December 1945, at Arlington, Virginia. Transcribed in John Phillip Walker, ed., *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 84–91, quotation on 87. Gary Novak is to be thanked once again for calling this item to our attention.

A. I don't know anything.

Q. Why did you publish a work claiming that the Book of Mormon was the Spaulding Romance?

A. Because I could better believe that Spaulding wrote it than that Joe Smith saw an angel.

Q. Are those your grounds?

A. Yes, sir, they are; and I want you to understand that you can't cram the Book of Mormon down me.

But the exchange isn't quite over yet:

Q. Do you swallow the Bible?

A. That is my business.

Q. Have you not published a pamphlet which does not endorse the Bible?

A. Yes, I have.¹⁰⁴

Suppression of contradictory explanations and information is even more blatant in a recent film entitled *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*, produced and aggressively marketed by an anti-Mormon enterprise located in Brigham City, Utah, that operates under the name Living Hope Ministries. Brant Gardner demonstrates, in detail, how the film, in an effort to destroy the faith of Latter-day Saints, misrepresents the factual situation with regard to both the Book of Mormon and the Bible.

A personal note: One of the more graceless moments in the film comes when it presents a decontextualized clip from a videotaped lecture of mine after which Tom Murphy declares that "Dan Peterson is lying."¹⁰⁵ Murphy suggests to his audience that I was saying that schol-

104. Cited in Kelley, *Public Discussion*, 83.

105. The filmed lecture (entitled "A Scholar Looks at Evidences for the Book of Mormon") is available via farms.byu.edu/multimedia/index.php?cat=BOM (accessed 11 January 2006). I wrote to Murphy on 7 November 2005 to chide him for what I regard as, among other things, a gratuitous and unprofessional public insult and, frankly, to give him an opportunity to apologize. Responding that same day, he was unashamed. He repeated and underscored his accusation and, in fact, broadened it to include essentially everybody else affiliated with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

ars everywhere, in and out of the church, find the claims of the Book of Mormon largely unobjectionable—a proposition that, had I really advanced it, could, of course, be instantly demonstrated false and might even qualify me as certifiably insane. But I have never said anything of the sort (nor even thought it). My specific point, in the comment to which Murphy objects, has nothing whatever to do with demographics, geography, technology, ecology, metallurgy, archaeology, or anything of the sort, as Murphy should have realized and as he could easily have determined, if by no other means, by *asking* me. Whether deliberately or out of careless incompetence, Murphy and Living Hope Ministries have grossly misrepresented my position, a position that I have explained in scores of public lectures. (The very fact that I have published many thousands of words defending the Book of Mormon against criticisms demonstrates beyond reasonable dispute that I am both aware of such criticisms and willing to publicly acknowledge them.) My point in the passage from the lecture that Murphy or his handlers carefully extracted to serve as their straw man is a simple and very limited one, essentially stylistic, which I stand by and which I am quite willing to defend: The Book of Mormon does not strain to create an aura of pseudo-oriental exoticism or antiquity; apart, obviously, from its miracles and revelations, and apart from the visit of Jesus Christ to the Nephites (though, really, even in those cases), its narrative is sober, understated, conforming to ordinary quotidian experience of cause and effect, unmarred by the excesses that make much medieval hagiography so literally incredible. It reads like real history. It is reminiscent, rhetorically, of the better ancient and medieval chronicles, and, indeed, of the Bible. When Murphy brands me a liar for having asserted this, besides revealing either his failure to grasp my point or a cavalier unconcern about accurately representing the opinions of those whom he has been engaged to attack, he coarsens the discourse in a way that is both shamefully uncivil and wholly unjustifiable and that his avowedly Christian sponsors should not be seeking to promote with their film.

Incidentally, while the anti-Mormon agenda of Living Hope Ministries is anything but subtle (despite their pretense of simply “investigating” the claims of the Book of Mormon), I do not want it to be

thought that anybody here is accusing most of the experts who appear in the film of being anti-Mormons. Unlike Tom Murphy and one or two others among the film's stars, they seem to have no particular animus against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. By the same token, though, it also doesn't appear that they have any particular interest in, knowledge of, or expertise regarding Mormonism and the Book of Mormon. They may or may not have known, exactly, for what kind of a film they were being interviewed, but it is very likely that they were heavily dependent upon what Living Hope Ministries told them about the contents of the Book of Mormon, and on how the issues were framed for their comment. However, in view of the egregious manner in which Tom Murphy and his handlers misrepresented *me*, I am not at all confident that Latter-day Saint beliefs were fairly and accurately represented to *them*. There is, in fact, despite the filmmakers' brief, perfunctory nod in the direction of Mormon scholarship and its arguments, no real reason apparent anywhere in the film to believe that they understand, or are even aware of, the considerable body of Book of Mormon scholarship that has been produced since the 1950s and that has exploded in the past twenty-five years—a fact that, in and of itself, is enough to reveal their supposedly careful investigation for what it actually is.¹⁰⁶

Also in this number of the *Review*, Boyd Petersen, both a son-in-law of Hugh Nibley and his award-winning biographer, examines to devastating effect Martha Beck's regrettable but highly creative *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*, which appears to have been very loosely inspired by her upbringing as a Nibley daughter in Utah County.¹⁰⁷ As the saying goes, whoever claims that you cannot change history has not written his memoirs. Ms. Beck, by the way, is regularly featured, and her book is promoted, on Oprah Winfrey's

106. At an absolute minimum, the makers of *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon* could have profited from a careful reading of 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.

107. Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002), won the 2003 Turner-Bergera Best Biography Award from the Mormon History Association.

Web site, and her dubious but emotional memoir of triumph over personal horror was published by Crown Books, a subdivision of Random House.¹⁰⁸ With that in mind, it is fascinating that, even as I write, Oprah Winfrey is embroiled in controversy for her promotion of James Frey’s apparently fraudulent but emotional “memoir” of triumph over personal horror, *A Million Little Pieces*—recommendation #56 of Oprah’s Book Club—which was published by yet another subdivision of Random House, Anchor Books. To cite a common paraphrase of a passage from the philosopher George Santayana, those who do not learn from history are condemned to repeat it.¹⁰⁹

Ray Huntington evaluates Kent Brown’s recent collection of Book of Mormon studies, and Richard Dilworth Rust reviews James T. Duke’s appreciation of the Book of Mormon as literature. Blake Ostler critiques a recent attempt by a pair of prominent evangelical intellectuals to argue that it is the Latter-day Saints, rather than they themselves, who are out of step with current scholarship on the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Royal Skousen looks at recent work on the text of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, while Kerry Muhlestein discusses the work of his fellow Latter-day Saint Egyptologist, Michael Rhodes, on some of the materials from the Joseph Smith Papyri. In his essay on “Jews and Mormons: Similarities and Differences,” the Israeli scholar Raphael Jospe argues for the importance of greater understanding and dialogue between Jews and Latter-day Saints and points to some of the issues that divide us as well as a few of those on which we can find common ground. He specifically addresses the often fruitful tension that exists between universalism and particularism in the two faiths, both historically and today. My own “Reflections on Secular Anti-Mormonism” ponders the functionally atheistic (or, at least, agnostic)

108. Martha Beck, *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* (New York: Crown, 2005). See also the previously published reviews of Beck’s book by Kent P. Jackson, “Leaving the Facts and Leaving the Faith,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 107–21; and Gregory Taggart, “How Martha Wrote an Anti-Mormon Book (Using Her Father’s Handbook as Her Guide?),” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 123–70.

109. The original quotation, from George Santayana, *The Life of Reason* (New York: Scribner’s Sons, 1905), 1:284, reads, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.”

assumptions that have clearly come to dominate western Europe and the elite American media in recent decades and that, sadly, have made inroads among some Latter-day Saints as well. Finally, a word about Jeffrey Chadwick's evaluation of a book by George Potter and Richard Wellington on Lehi's travels in the Arabian wilderness: Among the editors of this *Review* and others involved with the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, there is some disagreement with Professor Chadwick's views; the lack of a single monolithic "FARMS position" on many issues related to the scriptures is clearly illustrated by this fact, and by the fact that without hesitation we nonetheless publish Chadwick's argument. The editorial policy at the *FARMS Review* continues to be what it has always been: We find someone who is qualified to have an opinion on a particular issue, and we then let that person say what he or she wants to say.

Editor's Picks

And now, once more, I list some of the items treated in the present number of the *FARMS Review* and append some rather subjective ratings to them. These ratings were determined in consultation with the two associate editors and the production editor of the *Review*, but the final responsibility for them is mine. Reviewed items that fail to appear in this list were omitted because we could not recommend them.

This is the scale that we use in our rating system:

- **** Outstanding, a seminal work of the kind that appears only rarely
- *** Enthusiastically recommended
- ** Warmly recommended
- * Recommended

So here are the items that we recommend from this number of the *FARMS Review*:

- *** S. Kent Brown, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights*
- *** Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary*

- ** Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds. *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*
- ** Kent P. Jackson, *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*
- ** George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness*
- ** James T. Duke, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon*

Finally, it is a pleasure, as always, to thank those who have made this number of the *FARMS Review* possible. First and foremost, of course, I wish to thank the reviewers, who receive no compensation for their work beyond a free copy of the item they are reviewing—and, commonly, not even that. Louis Midgley and George Mitton, my two associate editors, made invaluable contributions by offering their wisdom, knowledge, and experience, as well as their time and energy. Shirley Ricks, the *Review's* production editor, actually makes the thing happen. Alison Coutts reads each review and article and assists greatly in keeping us on course with her excellent suggestions and comments. Paula Hicken does an outstanding job of overseeing the source checking and proofreading and was aided in these tasks by Angela Barrionuevo, Emily Bytheway, Krista Garbett, Lia Madsen, Drew Robbins, Amanda Smith, and Sandra Thorne. Jacob Rawlins, in his competent way, brought the reviews and articles into their final typeset format. My wife, Deborah Peterson, read a substantial portion of this number and gave very helpful advice. Elizabeth Watkins provided help in the early organization and structure of one review. We called upon Kent Jackson for his expertise and express our appreciation for his input on one lengthy review. Other individuals who should not be forgotten include John Gee and Stephen Ricks, who served as technical advisers on various points.

