The Book of Mormon

Arno Schmidt
Hans-Wilhelm Kelling, translator
John Durham Peters, translator
Joseph M. Spencer, translator

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I could no longer respect myself were I to learn of a book I did not know, but of which there were a hundred thousand copies in the world.

—Lichtenberg

The Mormons are right!

—Schopenhauer

If perhaps I am certain of nothing else, I am indeed certain of one thing: I cannot resist holy books. Understand me correctly, however. I regard all of them highly—the fiery bass voices of the Qur’an; Gautama’s all-tolerating claptrap of wisdom; the large compendium of Jewish cultural history called the Old Testament—but I refuse steadfastly to link the word “truth” with any of them. Whoever imagines that he possesses the truth has lost it in that very same instant. Truth has no meaning for us. Nothing would be more unfortunate than some kind of 5 percent clause of the Spirit,¹ and nothing more ridiculous than when one prophet

1. Schmidt is referring to the German law that a political party must reach 5 percent to be viable in Parliament.
calls out another as a fanatic. Not one Church, but rather fundamentally Churches; not one Sacred Scripture, but rather numerous Sacred Scriptures. Hence, if you wish, a resigned—but in my experience quite therapeutic—agnosticism as foundation, yet at the same time a tireless hunt for one's own mistakes and one's own lack of knowledge—and, besides that, working diligently.

In my specific case, this means to produce literature or to report about it.

Without question, the Book of Mormon has so far received the worst reception of all sacred books. While other sects from the same period like the “Bāb” or “Bahā’ī” are taken fairly seriously, the Mormons have almost always been denied such justice—whether from the old “Rohnert” or the latest Fischer Lexikon, we have been consistently misinformed already for fully 130 years now. In this case, to leave reporting to theologians while hoping for objectivity is unrealistic. And one can look wherever one wishes: none of the authors can ever have taken the trouble to even glance at the Book of Mormon, let alone to read it carefully—which I, for one, did twice (once in German, once in English). For the remainder of my life, however, I shall hardly find time to pick it up again.

The most frequent expressions of solemn abhorrence completely miss the crux of the matter. Of course, the language of the Book of Mormon reflects the language of the Bible, but not with the skill of the malicious ventriloquist. Nor is the hairsplitting art of an intellect that loves to stroll into the unverifiable (if not the absurd) considerably greater here than elsewhere. Certainly, one can regard the whole thing as a Haggadah to the Old and New Testaments, and the local-patriotic attempt to connect the USA closely with the Christian tradition is unmistakable. Nevertheless, the oft-mentioned connection of the Book of Mormon with Solomon Spaulding's lost manuscript would be partly

2. Author of Kirche, Kirchen, und Sekten (1888).
correct at best. In reality, as far as this text is concerned, we might be dealing with “automatic writing,” as even the “generally well-informed” *Encyclopaedia Britannica* calls it. In other words, Joseph Smith, from whom the Book of Mormon stems, was (as even the so-called “Deseret Script” might indicate?) presumably a “writing-medium.” Parapsychology is quite familiar with such phenomena.

But all that is rather unimportant in the last analysis. For once, let us seriously consider the Book of Mormon as a thought-world in itself—a task for which the depressing Lichtenberg motto above is valid to a surprising degree. No one need be concerned about being worse-off for reading the Book of Mormon. And anyone who, after the last war (so far), heard the Mormon [Tabernacle] Choir sing is likely to agree with the judgment of Karl May’s wife: “It was as if we were hearing other-worldly singing.”

Far far away in the west
There is a land so fair
Many a weary pilgrim
Has turned his count’nance there.

Atop its highest summits
Gleams white eternal snow
And lovely in the valleys
The placid lake does glow.

They’ve raised up new cottages
With love and faithfulness

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3. Spaulding’s work is referred to as the *Lost Manuscript* in English in Schmidt’s original essay.
4. The phrase “automatic writing” is in English in the original.
5. Schmidt seems to be referring, anachronistically, to the Deseret alphabet.
6. Compare Mark Twain’s judgment: “The Mormon Bible is rather stupid and tiresome to read, but there is nothing vicious in its teachings” (Mark Twain, *Roughing It* [New York: Harpers, 1871], 119).
7. This remark was uncited by Schmidt—it was possibly a spoken comment from a private conversation.
In my mind's eye I behold
Dear friends of worthiness.

Of course I will remember
The land of friends and youth
But my people are out west
Where I have found a home.\textsuperscript{8}

That was once [verse 2 of] number 107 in the [German] hymnbook of
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Corporation of Public
Law, Berlin-Dahlem, Am Hirschsprung 60—the present address, which
now sounds somewhat curious.\textsuperscript{9} But what would not be curious in
Germany?

3

In the last analysis, what is decisive for the inquiring reader is a reading’s
“poetic usefulness”—that is, what it offers by way of “thought games,”
interpolations, suggestiveness, or to what degree it inspires poets and
authors.

For us—and rightly so—the Bible indisputably dominates on this
point: “Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home, / She stood
in tears amid the alien corn” (Wordsworth)\textsuperscript{10)—the many Cain’s (Byron’s
was not the first), Klopstock’s \textit{The Death of Adam}, Bodmer’s Noahide. But

\textsuperscript{8} Schmidt quotes “Süß warst du Heimat mir” or “Sweet were you, my homeland,
to me.” We quote from \textit{Gesangbuch für die Schweizerische und deutsche Mission der
Kirche Jesu Christi der Heiligen der letzten Täger}, 5th improved and expanded ed. (Bern:
Suter, 1890), 200–02. Schmidt’s hymnal, as noted, was published in Berlin. We have
tried to preserve the meter and, loosely, the rhyme scheme, of the original hymn. Verse
3 explicitly mentions Utah; it is clearly a call to come-to-Zion-in-the-West. Thanks to
Kristine Haglund and Ardis Parshall for helping us track it down.

\textsuperscript{9} Presumably, the legal language from before the formation of the Federal Republic
sounds strange; Schmidt’s point is that the German past is problematic!

\textsuperscript{10} Schmidt quotes here, in German paraphrase, from John Keats’s “Ode to a Nightingale,”
which he misattributes to William Wordsworth. We have provided the Keats
original.
no need, in this connection, to argue that the Qur'an is rich in potential by referring to Hafez or to *Omar the Tentmaker*. A more immediate nice example is [Karl] May's *Am Jenseits* (although May directly treats the Mormons in this volume maliciously; he depicts many diabolically beautiful rogues—after all, it was May's lot to be poorly informed most of the time). From the Buddhist world, let us vicariously mention Gjellerup's *The Pilgrim Kamanita* (wholly refined persons read Indian love lyrics “before” that novel). It remains to be investigated whether the Book of Mormon could also provide a stimulating effect.

And I refer—I emphasize this—not to the *external* history of Mormonism, although much of interest might be offered there: the great trek to Utah under Brigham Young; the “Miracle of the Seagulls”; the horror stories of “Danites” with one shot of “Feme”; Joaquin Miller, “The Danites in the Sierra” (drama, 1877); Karl Löffler-Tornow, *Der Geisterseher; oder: Die Mormonen-braut* (1869; The Ghost-Seer, or the Mormon Bride); Thomas Dunn English (compare Poe), *The Mormons* (drama, 1858); Johann Brandl, *Die Mormonen* (opera, 1879; The Mormons); Oppermann, in his *One Hundred Years* (1870), benevolently lectured about the publication (“Hauptstelle,” Vol. VIII, pp. 231–70); an early and—because of its daring affirmation of such “conditions”—strange yet detailed portrayal can be found in the extensive half-novel “Californien und das Goldfieber” (1863; California and the Gold Fever) by a certain “Dr. Zimmermann” (i.e., W. F. Vollmer). He has one of his heroes, the German physician Franke, marry three beautiful sisters at the same time and with the best bourgeois success. Do I still have to mention the delicious catchword “polygamy”? (That, by the way, is the only thing an average German mind will know about Mormonism. Let me emphasize that *not one word* about it can be found in the Book of Mormon. It was really only a brief

11. Hafez is the great Persian poet of the fourteenth century; *Omar the Tentmaker* was a 1922 silent film.
12. *The Pilgrim Kamanita* is a 1906 novel written in Danish by Karl Adolph Gjellerup. Gjellerup won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1917 (for his poetry).
interregnum, which, by the way, is capable of very, very thoughtful aspects. The above citation by Schopenhauer refers precisely to it. And the argument that Pastor Zimmer so indignantly relates, with which a Utah-German woman coolly confronted him—"Pluralism? That is, after all, something beautiful. I would not object if my husband were to become a Mormon and take one or two additional young women. Then the housework would be a bit easier for me"—one can't help but smirk at her naively down-to-earth realism.) In the following, I therefore intend to proceed strictly as reporter and to confine myself to the Book of Mormon.

4

For this reason, let me introduce it externally:

The Book of Mormon may be obtained at the address noted above, in paperback—£2.00 the German edition, £3.00 the English edition, prepayment required. I quote from an English paperback version (Utah 1950) and two German hardbound versions (Basel 1946 and Berlin 1950). The first English edition of five thousand volumes was published in 1830 (and apparently has become a rarissimum). At the time of publication, Joseph Smith, obeying an explicit divine injunction, set the price at $1.25. In 1879, the Book of Mormon appeared for the first time divided into chapters and verses (which is known to have occurred with the Bible only in the sixteenth century as well) by Orson Pratt, one of the great dogmatists of Mormonism, as Sidney Rigdon was as well. From 1920 onward, a handy two-columned edition became available. It contained historical dates, a table of contents, pronunciation of proper names—a helpful additional apparatus indeed. For example, the double-columned index contains forty-five pages. And since a "good index" is generally regarded as having one page of the index for every twenty pages of text, this edition is even among "the best." The footnotes contain a huge number of parallel verses. As always, somewhat forced "references" are not lacking, such as "Are unbaptized children damned? Read Moroni 8." But after all,
this is a common custom, and this is found also at the beginning of my
King James Bible: "Is business slow? Read Psalm 37." The numerous
references to Bible verses form a study in themselves. The "dovetailing"
is as good as a theological mind could ever want—for example,
that Isaiah 29:4 predicts Smith's finding of the "plates of Nephi" on
September 22, 1827, in the Hill Cumorah, etc., etc.

Unfortunately, I have had no access to the first German translation
by Taylor & Dykes from 1852 (translations into more than a dozen
languages are available). This translation was later reworked by Schonfeld. The version presently available is by Jean Wunderlich, 1924. It was
revised once more in 1950.

The experienced translator will immediately notice that the German
edition has almost exactly the same number of letters as the English
original, which is impossible! Because of the well-known "monosyllabic"nature of English, every translation must in principle accept an
enlargement factor of 1.10 or very close to it. To determine whether the
translator has abbreviated or diluted the text, no more certain a crite-
rian exists than counting letters. If therefore the German translation
of the Book of Mormon has only a factor of 1.00, the text must somehow
have been "abridged"—and a closer examination reveals that the biblical
phase "and it came to pass;" 14 recurring in the English text several thou-
sand times, has been replaced in the German translation by "( ),"
and thus has become, thank goodness, more readable. The countless phrases
have been honestly identified for the philologist, and thus the issue with
the enlargement factor is accounted for. We, the other translators, need
not be ashamed!

5

One of the first things not to be scornful about that strikes the seeker
after inspiration right away is the roll call of names: "Lehi and Morian-
ton, Amaleki and Helaman, Zoramites and Rameumptom, Curelom

and Cuumom.”\textsuperscript{15} Not for nothing did Schlagintweit already write: “The huge number of melodious names is astonishing!”\textsuperscript{16} Yes, yes, but such “astonishment” is only another expression for the genuinely embarrassing fact that a million people live in word-worlds of which we know nothing! We are so miserably informed that, as ridiculous as it sounds, it constitutes a pronounced “feat” if I allow a brief synopsis to follow regarding the contents of the Book of Mormon and its fifteen books, containing a total of 239 chapters and 6,604 verses:

1. 1 Nephi (22 chaps. / 618 verses, 600–575 BC): 1–16 Lehi, his wife Sariah, and his four sons, Laman, Lemuel, Sam, and Nephi, leave Jerusalem and travel into the Arabian desert. Lehi’s sons return once more and fetch the sacred brass plates. Continued travel; the Lord presents them with the Liahona, the guide. / 17–18 Irreantum or the Great Waters. Voyage through the Indian Ocean to the American West Coast. / 19–22 Nephi’s prophecies (cf. Isaiah 48–49).

2. 2 Nephi (33/779, 575–545 BC): 1–4 Lehi’s teachings and death. / 5 Nephi leader of the people; his brothers rebel, and are punished with dark skin, that is, become “Lamanites”-Indians. / 6–24 Jacob, Nephi’s brother, preaches and admonishes (cf. Isaiah 50, 51, and 2–14). / 25–33 Nephi’s prophecies.


\textsuperscript{15} Schmidt’s misspelling of “cumom.”

\textsuperscript{16} Robert von Schlagintweit, nineteenth-century travel writer, author of Die Mormonen (1874).
7. Words of Mormon (1/18, c. AD 385): Later redactional note.
9. Alma (63/1,975, 91–53 BC): Report of Alma the younger, the high priest and chief judge of the people of Nephi. 1–7 He preaches successfully. 8–16 Battle with the godless city of Ammonihah. 17–26 Adventures of the sons of Mosiah; battles with the Lamanites. 27–35 Lamanite wars. 36–42 Alma's commands to his sons, Helaman, Shiblon, and Corianton. 43–44 Moroni's battle with the Lamanites. 45–62 Helaman's account of the Nephite people, their dissensions and wars. 63 Emigration of numerous Nephites to the northern part of North America.
11. III Nephi (30/785, 1 BC–AD 25): 1–7 Nephi's reign; sign of the birth of the Savior. Internal disputes among the Nephites. 8–28 Natural upheavals proclaim the crucifixion of Christ: his appearance to the Nephites; repetition of the Sermon on the Mount; institution of the Communion; calling of twelve disciples, etc. 29–30 Warnings of Mormon, the plates' redactor.
12. IV Nephi (1/49, AD 35–321): Short chronicle: Two-hundred-year long prosperity of the Church of Christ; thereafter, however, dissention and degeneration.
13. Mormon (9/227, AD 322–421): 1–5 Internal unrest; as well as battles against the Lamanites and Gadianton robbers. 6
Final battle at the Hill Cumorah; The Lamanites’ victory. / 7–9 Moroni completes the account of his father Mormon. 17

14. Ether (15/433, c. 2280–600 BC?): 1–6 Account of the first immigration from Palestine to the USA. / 7–15 Development of the kingdom; battles; here also last battle near Cumorah. Ether’s final words.

15. Moroni (10/163, AD 400–421): 1 The desolate state of Moroni, the last of the Nephites. / 2–9 Teachings and exhortations to future, still-unborn people. / 10 Moroni’s final words; he seals the record.

Two things should be added. First, that—unsurprising to any expert on Holy Writ—here, too, books were lost: for example, the oft-cited prophets Zenos and Zenock. And, finally, that an uncomfortably wide back door is left open with the claim that not all plates have yet been “unsealed.” This may be acceptable to established clerics, but my inexpert hunch is that a philological “quagmire” certainly opens up with that sort of thing.

6

Here and now, let me quickly point to only two-and-a-half topics—first, the First Book of Nephi and the settlement of America in three waves from Palestine.

In about the year 597 BC, when Zedekiah was king in Judah, there lived a pious Jew named Lehi with his extended family in Jerusalem. He rightly became increasingly uncomfortable about the “political situation,” a feeling that was confirmed by a few unpleasant visions. Lehi, just to be cautious, “moved away” to near the Red Sea, to the southeast. (Forgive my mode of expression, but the term “emigration” always reminds one all too fatally of “our” time.) “Visions of the tree, the river, and the iron rod.” The real hero is Lehi’s youngest son, Nephi, who zealously continues writing on the mysterious “plates.” One of the nice

17. A minor error on Schmidt’s part. Moroni’s writing starts in chapter 8, not 7.
episodes is the "Liahona Legend" (a term strangely missing from the index; one must look it up under "compass").

1 Nephi 16:9–12; 17:4–5: "And it came to pass that the voice of the Lord spake unto my father by night, and commanded him that on the morrow he should take his journey into the wilderness. / And as my father arose in the morning, and went forth to the tent door, to his great astonishment he beheld upon the ground a round ball of curious workmanship; and it was of fine brass. And within the ball were two spindles; and the one pointed the way whither we should go into the wilderness. / And we did gather together whatsoever things we should carry into the wilderness, and all the remainder of our provisions which the Lord had given unto us; and we did take seed of every kind that we might carry into the wilderness. / And it came to pass that we did take our tents and depart into the wilderness, across the river Laman. / . . . / And we did sojourn for the space of many years, yea, even eight years in the wilderness. / . . . And we beheld the sea, which we called Irreantum, which, being interpreted, is many waters."

At that place, Nephi then constructs vessels, and gets with them into the—well, "we with our upper-class consciousness" would say "the prevailing westerly of the Southern Hemisphere"—and they finally land, 589 BC, in the "promised land," which might correspond approximately to today's Peru. (It could also be Chile; Mormon geography appears still to be in a sorry state, not only with respect to this particular counter-Kon-Tiki.)

Of course, the older brothers revolt against the inspired youngest son—it is, after all, an age-old fairy-tale motif—and not only during the long crossing (recalling Columbus parallels), which understandably wrecked their nerves, but also soon after landing. The Lord, however, promptly smites them because of their sinfulness and malice,

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18. Schmidt here quotes 1 Nephi 16:9–12; 17:4–5. We have reproduced the current English text here, with one exception: We have eliminated instances of "it came to pass that" where they are missing from Schmidt's German edition. In more recent German editions, the phrase has been restored as "Und es begab sich."

19. Thor Heyerdahl's balsa wood ship Kon-Tiki sailed in 1947 across the Pacific from east to west.
punishing them with a “skin of blackness” and above all with “general
wildness”\(^\text{20}\) — and thus the Indians’ origin is explained in the Book of
Mormon. But before the anthropologist’s head shakes too violently,
I would like to offer for consideration that the source and origin of
the Indians had become one of the very great enigmas of ethnography
immediately after the discovery of America: nomads, of brownish-red
skin, with considerably hooked noses, unusually well-spoken, “in tents,”
“mound builders,” no less than unpleasantly skilled “scalp-takers.”

“Zebulon shall dwell at the haven of the sea” [everything Genesis,
chap. 49 now]: Had they not welcomed the first white men, whether Cap­
tain John Smith by his Pocahontas or the pilgrim fathers by Massasoit? /
“Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the
horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward”: Could one thus portray
much more precisely the stalking of the Reds against the Whites, who
strangely ride on horseback? “Gad, a troop shall overcome him”: How
often regular troops were mobilized against them. / “Benjamin shall ravin
as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall
divide the spoil.” / “Naphtali is a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words:”\(^\text{21}\)
/ And all that must now be done is to make their language unintelligible
and to spread them out over the surface of the wide world—as famously
happened with Etemenanki’s construction.\(^\text{22}\) / And the “lost ten tribes of
Israel” are also frequently mentioned. / And whoever still doubts—such
can only be a malicious or senseless person!—let him open Psalm 68:22:
“But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such
an one as goeth on still in his trespasses.”\(^\text{23}\) (And the race-proud who wish
to mutter about “oriental gruesomeness” might reflect that even the Visig­
oth Fuero Juzgo knows of the punishment of *capillos et cutem detrahere.*\(^\text{24}\))

\(^{20}\) Schmidt uses the term *Verwilderung allgemein,* also used in German discussions
since the late eighteenth century in reference to how civilized people can run to seed.

\(^{21}\) Schmidt here quotes Genesis 49:13, 17, 19, 27, 21. We have followed the KJV.

\(^{22}\) This is the tower of Babel, via the name of the ziggurat in Babylon.

\(^{23}\) The passage is Psalms 68:21 in the KJV.

\(^{24}\) Latin for *to remove skin and hair.* In choosing a Goth, Schmidt reminds his
readers that Germanic peoples are perfectly capable of cruelty and violence, an obvious
anti-Nazi comment.
Anyway, the theory is old, and the Book of Mormon is but a final, not insignificant summary. One can already read about it in *Simplicissimus* or in Lessing’s reviews. Its inventor was a certain Montezinarius, and the first publication about it was the *Spes Israelis* of Manasseh ben Israel (Amsterdam 1650).\(^{25}\) With such minimal erudition, I merely wish to hold to one point: the “Lamanites” of the Book of Mormon are not half as absurd as those of other faiths—who have their own peculiar whims as well—would like to persuade us. And the point of view must still be considered that we might be dealing here with an honorably crafty attempt to provide an adequate genealogy for the new, great continent in a local-patriotic way. (If, then, all things being equal, the foreword to the Book of Mormon again claims that the history of America is “foretold”\(^{26}\) in it—1 Nephi 13 is supposed to point to Columbus in verse 12, to the Puritans in 16, to the Revolutionary War of 1776–1783 in verses 17–19—then this foreword, written in 1830, so clearly “after” the book appeared, bites off a bit too much.)

During the slow, elaborately portrayed, continued colonization, the descendants of Nephi twice more meet other Palestinian emigrants: Omni 1 and Alma 27, a people in the land of Zarahemla; and, at last, opening a final grand prospect, a Book of Ether is discovered. Jared, familiar from Genesis, moved with his brothers about the time of the Flood and the construction of the Tower to the northwest—thus to Europe. He reaches the coast (one might imagine Brittany or, for my part, Ireland), and thus speaks the Lord (Ether 2:16ff.):

> Go to work and build, after the manner of barges which ye have hitherto built. . . . And they were small, and they were light upon the water, even like unto the lightness of a fowl upon the water. / And they were built after a manner that they were exceedingly tight, even that they would hold water like unto a dish; and the

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26. The word “foretold” is in English in the original.
bottom and the sides thereof were peaked; and the top thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the length thereof was the length of a tree, and the door thereof, when it was shut, was tight like unto a dish. / . . . / For behold, ye shall be as a whale in the middle of the sea.28

Shining stones are half found, half produced, serving as lamps during the voyage.

And he did put forth the stones into the vessels which were prepared, one in each end thereof; and behold, they did give light unto the vessels. And thus the Lord caused stones to shine in the darkness / . . . / And they were many times buried in the depth of the sea, because of the mountain waves which broke upon them, and also the great and terrible tempests which were caused by the fierceness of the wind. / . . . / And thus they were driven forth; and no monster of the sea could break them, neither whale that could mar them.29

And this, again, is indeed not an image to be scoffed at: hollow dugouts (as Wayland the Blacksmith30 in the North knows them), illuminated by shining crystals, with “the raging deep in the darkness” all around (Ether 3:3).31

The history of the subsequent dispersion is summarized in Ether 15:20 in words that are probably valid for all “pioneers”: “They slept on their swords.” Endlessly confusing and complicated crisscrossing movements

27. Schmidt here skips over a few words in the text, which read as follows in English: “and the bottom thereof was tight like unto a dish; and the sides thereof were tight like unto a dish; and the ends thereof were peaked.”
29. Here, Ether 6:2–3, 6, 10.
30. Figure in Norse mythology.
31. “The raging deep in darkness” is in English in the original.
from A to Z: "the battle at Mount Riplah," small and large cities are founded: "And the people who were in the land northward did dwell in tents, and in houses of cement, and they did suffer whatsoever tree should spring up upon the face of the land" (Helaman 3:9); "and Mosiah built a tower near the temple; yea, a very high tower, even so high that he could . . . overlook the land of Shilom" (equivalent to a skyscraper; Mosiah 11:12). And over the course of the centuries, the generations are "bumped off" in the well-known fashion, factually and relentlessly: "Coriantur was the son of Moron. / And Moron was the son of Ethem. / And Ethem was the son of Ahah. / And Ahah was the son of Seth. / And Seth was the son of Shiblon. / etc., etc." And "judges" are appointed; everything is consolidated, measures and weights: "Now the reckoning is thus—a senine of gold, a seon of gold, a shum of gold, and a limnah of gold. / A senum of silver, an amnor of silver, an ezrom of silver, and an onti of silver. / A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold, and either for a measure of barley" (Alma 11:5ff.). This Alma shares traits with Moses in that, like Moses, his own death is recorded in his book. No one sees him die; he disappears: "Kings should disdain to die, and only disappear." And again the Lamanites attack, "and they came up upon the north of the land of Shilom, with their numerous hosts, men armed with bows, and with arrows, and with swords, and with cimeters, and with stones, and with slings; and they had their heads shaved that they were naked; and they were girded with a leathern girdle about their loins" (Mosiah 10:8)—but, alas, as previously stated, even apparently such instructive verses as Alma 22:27–34 hardly clarify the geography of the Book of Mormon—this would be a fruitful field of activity for a patient detective-philologist. Because everything must be localized in "God’s own Country," one reads many verses with a knowing smile:

32. Schmidt confuses King Noah and Mosiah here.
33. This is Ether 1:7–11.
34. This is Alma 11:5–7.
35. The quotation—which comes from Thomas de Quincey (Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, ed. Richard Garnett [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, 1885], 254)—is in English in the original.
“Behold, this is a choice land, and whatsoever nation shall possess it shall be free from bondage, and from captivity, and from all other nations under heaven” (Ether 2:12; compare also Alma 46:17—“No kings to rule America!—Read 2 Nephi 10:10”). 36

How much the Lord regards his “New World” to be at least equal to the Holy Land—if he does not in fact prefer it?—can perhaps be extracted from 2 Nephi 10:3: “Wherefore, as I said unto you, it must needs be expedient that Christ—for in the last night the angel spake unto me that this should be his name—should come among the Jews, among those who are the more wicked part of the world; and they shall crucify him”—and, as can be seen from the chronological note on the bottom right on that page, the “last night” occurs “between 559 and 545 B.C.” To which we casually join Mosiah 3:8ff., where “Mary” is already known, and the designation “Christians” is accepted from 124 BC—which brings me to the last of my topics, which will indeed be interesting to many.

Already from the table of contents, it will have become apparent that the Third Book of Nephi, which spans the years from 1 BC to AD 35, must be one of the most significant ones. It impressively portrays how those in the USA sense what is taking place over yonder in Palestine from omens, miraculous events, and atmospheric occurrences: “For behold, at the going down of the sun there was no darkness; and the people began to be astonished” (3 Nephi 1:15), “and also a new star did appear” (3 Nephi 1:21), “and they knew that it was the day that the Lord should be born” (3 Nephi 1:19). Then another thirty years of thoughtlessness, “and now it was in the days of Lachoneus . . . , for he did fill the seat of his father and did govern the people that year” (3 Nephi 6:19; probably

36. “God’s own Country” is in English in the original, as is the quoted explanatory reference at the end of the parenthetical: “No kings to rule America!—Read 2 Nephi 10:10.”
a Pilate parallel; by the way, as reported in 3 Nephi 2:8, all at once in that miraculous night, a new calendar had begun). Now moving on, beginning from chapter 8:

And in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month, there arose a great storm, such an one as never had been known in all the land. / And there was also a great and terrible tempest; and there was terrible thunder, insomuch that it did shake the whole earth as if it was about to divide asunder. / And there were exceedingly sharp lightnings... and the city of Zarahemla did take fire. / And the city of Moroni did sink into the depths of the sea, and the inhabitants thereof were drowned. / And the earth was carried up upon the city of Moronihah, that in the place of the city there became a great mountain. /... / But there was a more great and terrible destruction in the land northward; for behold, the whole face of the land was changed, /.../ and the highways were broken up, and the level roads were spoiled, and many smooth places became rough. / And many great and notable cities were sunk, and many were burned, and many were shaken till the buildings thereof had fallen to the earth, and the inhabitants thereof were slain, and the places were left desolate. /.../ And there were some who were carried away in the whirlwind; and whither they went no man knoweth, save they know that they were carried away.37

(Here, permit me to make an incidental remark—and I really do not intend it to be a bad joke!—that the similar story of Flying Robert was for me always by far the most fascinating account in the whole of Der Struwwelpeter.38 I am most strongly predisposed to grey and windy matters. Thus, “pleasant regions” are not for me.) And after three hours of intensity, darkness covers the land, “insomuch that the inhabitants thereof who had not fallen could feel the vapor of darkness; / And there could be no light, because of the darkness, neither candles, neither torches; neither could there be fire kindled with their fine and

37. Here, Schmidt quotes 3 Nephi 8:5–10, 12–14, 16.
38. Classic German children’s stories by Heinrich Hoffmann (1844).
exceedingly dry wood, so that there could not be any light at all.”\(^{39}\) I would like to stress that an expression like “that there could be no light, because of the darkness” does not by any means constitute “significant nonsense,” but is rather a fitting subtlety, if not sheer profundity. After those signs, a voice is heard throughout the land—the voice of Christ; afterward, some hours of rest; and so on for three days.

Now chapters 11–28 follow, the three appearances of the resurrected Savior in the USA: “And as they understood they cast their eyes up again towards heaven; and behold, they saw a Man descending out of heaven; and he was clothed in a white robe; and he came down and stood in the midst of them.”\(^{40}\) He preaches a sermon (closely based on Matthew 5–7), heals the sick, and also at this point calls twelve disciples and apostles: “Nephi and his brother . . . , whose name was Timothy, and also his son, whose name was Jonas, and also Matthoni, and Mathonihah, his brother, and Kumen, and Kumenonhi, and Jeremiah, and Shemnon, and Jonas, and Zedekiah, and Isaiah” (3 Nephi 19:4). Then he leaves the Nephites and ascends to heaven; returns again, 19–26; and then a final, third time in 3 Nephi 27–28 (at this last point, however, there is the rather odd move that, according to their own explicit desire, three of the named disciples will not taste death; rather, they will wander and teach on the earth until Judgment Day).

Here, in Third Nephi, where most of the basic Mormon teachings are proclaimed, there would, of course, be endless opportunities for theologians from other churches to “butt in”—such as: that little children have no need for baptism, yet that deceased persons can be quasi-“after-baptized”; 3 Nephi 24:8, the introduction of a church tax;\(^{41}\) 3 Nephi 18:1–14, sacraments; chapter 21, on the New Jerusalem; or even “life-after-death concepts”—all tricky questions, about which there still exists no consensus. (But Cave! The Book of Mormon knows very well how to fight back if necessary, should an adversary become too aggressive. “And I beheld this great and abominable church; and I saw the devil

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39. This is 3 Nephi 8:20–21.
40. 3 Nephi 11:8.
41. Schmidt is referring to tithing.
that he was the founder of it. / And I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing, and I saw many harlots.” Ooh la la! Thus, 1 Nephi 13:6–7.)

9

“Enough for now,” many will say. “Enough reported,” I also say.

A final, summary judgment perhaps could be given in Luther’s words concerning other “apocryphal writings”: “They are not to be regarded as equal to Holy Writ; they are, however, good and useful to read.” Whoever wants to can mutter “amusing and peculiar”—and whoever cannot help himself at all, may thunder about “hellish deception.” Should someone be very enthusiastic, he can additionally order—for exposition or expansion—Doctrines and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. (However, as stated above, this requires prepayment; both books are bound in one volume: English £2.50, German £5.25—and, on request, you will receive a few free trial copies of Der Stern, the monthly Mormon magazine.)

Whoso readeth, let him understand; he that hath the scriptures, let him search them.

—3 Nephi 10:14

Hans-Wilhelm Kelling received his PhD in German Literature from Stanford University and is professor of German and Russian at Brigham Young University. Specializing in German Romanticism, he is the author of numerous scholarly books and articles. He is also the translator of many works into German, including many Latter-day Saint works.

42. Schmidt’s spelling.
43. The titles are in English in the original.
44. This website wonderfully archives all issues of Der Stern in pdf format, http://www.lafeuilledolivier.com/Olivenblatt.html.
John Durham Peters is María Rosa Menocal Professor of English and Film and Media Studies at Yale and is the author of Speaking into the Air (1999), Courting the Abyss (2005), The Marvelous Clouds (2015), and Promiscuous Knowledge (forthcoming, co-authored with the late Kenneth Cmiel). He has also published several essays and articles on topics related to Latter-day Saint history and culture.

Joseph M. Spencer is assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He is the author of dozens of articles and the author or editor of six books. He serves as the editor of the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies and as the associate director of the Mormon Theology Seminar. He and Karen, his wife, live with their five children in Provo, Utah.