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# THE FARMS REVIEW

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# THE FARMS REVIEW

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# THE FARMS REVIEW

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## 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.<sup>1</sup> If someone insists on

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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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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,<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> It is Skousen's strongly considered opinion that

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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.<sup>6</sup> Yet all the witnesses thought that Joseph Smith somehow saw words and read them off to his scribes.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

It is apparent, too, that Joseph could see the spelling of names on whatever it was that he was reading from.<sup>9</sup> When the scribe had written the text, he or she would evidently read it back to Joseph for correction.<sup>10</sup> 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

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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.<sup>11</sup>

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.<sup>12</sup>

“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.<sup>13</sup>

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-

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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.<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup>

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.”<sup>16</sup>

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

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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.”<sup>17</sup>

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.”<sup>18</sup>

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*.<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup>

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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.<sup>21</sup>

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."<sup>22</sup>

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

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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.<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup>

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.”<sup>25</sup>

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

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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.<sup>26</sup> 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.”<sup>27</sup>

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

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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 engraved 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup>

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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.”<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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.’”<sup>32</sup> 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.”<sup>33</sup> (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

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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.)<sup>34</sup>

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.”<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup> Time does not permit an exhaustive analysis

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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,<sup>37</sup> 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

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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."<sup>38</sup>

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.<sup>39</sup>

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?<sup>40</sup>

## 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

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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.<sup>41</sup> (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.)<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.<sup>44</sup>

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-Ism, through which it runs, will have no difficulty imagining why Lehi would term this valley, which he named "Lemuel," "firm and steadfast, and immovable."<sup>45</sup> How did Joseph Smith know about

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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-Ism? 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.<sup>46</sup> 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?

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presentation of this paper in Illinois, Jeffrey Chadwick has raised questions about the identification of the Wadi Tayyib al-Ism 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-Ism 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 Lehites 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,<sup>47</sup> the Book of Mormon's remarkable complexity and intertextuality,<sup>48</sup> statistical demonstrations of its multiple authorship (quite distinct from Joseph Smith),<sup>49</sup> its detailed and accurate depictions of massive volcanic/seismological events<sup>50</sup> and ancient olive culture<sup>51</sup> and guerrilla warfare,<sup>52</sup> its underappreciated rhetorical richness and density,<sup>53</sup> and its subtle depiction of

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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 Schaalje, 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.<sup>54</sup> 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,<sup>55</sup> or to treat the appearance of authentically ancient military simile oaths in the account of Captain Moroni in the book of Alma,<sup>56</sup> or recently discovered examples of what might reasonably be called “reformed Egyptian,”<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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,<sup>59</sup> 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,<sup>60</sup> 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*

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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.<sup>61</sup> 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,<sup>62</sup> 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 Nephi<sup>63</sup> and on authentically Hebrew personal names like *Alma* and *Sariah*<sup>64</sup> and remarkably appropriate toponyms like *Jershon*,<sup>65</sup> as well as on Lehi's prophetic call as a classic ancient throne theophany vision,<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> And there is a great deal more that I could mention.

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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 Muḥammad," 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.<sup>68</sup> 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

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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)<sup>69</sup>

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).<sup>70</sup>

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,<sup>71</sup> 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.”<sup>72</sup>

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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](http://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.”<sup>73</sup>

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).”<sup>74</sup> 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

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

74. See [www.signaturebooks.com/excerpts/Losing2.htm](http://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.”<sup>75</sup>

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.<sup>76</sup>

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.”<sup>77</sup> Thus, the so-called issue of Amerindian DNA and the Book of Mormon proves not to really be about genetics at all. It actually

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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](http://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.<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup>

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.<sup>80</sup> They

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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."<sup>81</sup>

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

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*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/](http://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,<sup>82</sup> while the report submitted by the third analyst, Howard Doullder, 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.<sup>83</sup> In this volume, they reproduced the favorable preliminary reports of their three handwriting analysts, as well as positive final reports from Silver<sup>84</sup> and Kaye and a

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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.<sup>85</sup> Thereafter, as historian Richard Bushman remarks, the Spalding theory resumed its “status [as] an historiographical artifact without credibility among serious scholars.”<sup>86</sup>

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.”<sup>87</sup>

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*.<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> 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

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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.<sup>90</sup> 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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> 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).”<sup>93</sup> 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.”<sup>94</sup> 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

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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 Niagaries, I believe.

Q. Why did you not publish it?

A. Because it did not do us any good.<sup>95</sup>

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."<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup>

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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](http://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.”<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup> 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

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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](http://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?”<sup>100</sup> 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.”<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup>

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.<sup>103</sup>

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?”

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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](http://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.<sup>104</sup>

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."<sup>105</sup> Murphy suggests to his audience that I was saying that schol-

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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](http://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.<sup>106</sup>

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.<sup>107</sup> 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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>

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)

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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.



READING BETWEEN THE LINES:  
BOOK OF MORMON INSIGHTS  
FROM S. KENT BROWN

Ray L. Huntington

Readers interested in gaining new insights about the Book of Mormon (which is certainly the focus of this book) will not be disappointed with Kent Brown's *Voices from the Dust*. There are, of course, other books on the market with similar intentions. None, however, will eclipse what Brown has accomplished in his brief book. There is a good reason for that. The author has limited his focus and discussion to six topic areas—areas in which he appears to be comfortable and extremely competent. His competence flows from a solid academic background in Near Eastern studies and languages, as well as from living and researching in the Middle East. In short, his professional expertise, research, and Middle East savvy enable him to view the Book of Mormon in unique ways.

As mentioned earlier, *Voices from the Dust* focuses on six areas: Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, the wilderness experience of Arabia, King Benjamin's discourse, the missionary experiences of Mosiah's sons, Christ's visit to the New World, and Moroni's world. While the book focuses on events beginning in Lehi's Jerusalem and concludes with Moroni and the collapse and destruction of Nephite society, it

Review of S. Kent Brown. *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights*. American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2004. xvi + 219 pp., with chronological chart. \$18.95.

leaves major gaps in the Book of Mormon narrative. Even so, Brown provides detail and depth for those parts of the story on which he has chosen to elaborate.

In the review process, one must ask the following questions: Did the author remain true to his thesis or the intent of his writing? More important, did he provide the reader with new insights and perspectives from the Book of Mormon? Did he seek to enlighten the reader with new ways to view information from the Book of Mormon? Brown believes he did and makes that claim in the book's introduction: "In all, these studies take Book of Mormon students into places where few studies have ventured, probing possibilities that enrich our understanding of people who made a difference, who kept the faith, and who believed that God had orchestrated events in their lives" (p. xv). Through his constant "probing [of] possibilities," Brown provides the reader with a fresh set of lenses through which to view Book of Mormon events and people in unique ways. He also links many of these events to the Old and New Testaments. In sum, the author has been true to the aims of his book.

Brown wastes little time in introducing the reader to new possibilities and insights from the Book of Mormon. For example, in the chapter dealing with Lehi's departure from Jerusalem, he explores four potential routes Lehi and his family may have taken from Jerusalem to the Red Sea. In addition, he also identifies two promising locations for the family's first major encampment: Wadi al-Ifal or Wadi Tayyib al-Ism. Moreover, he explores the probable types of sacrifices Lehi offered (peace and burnt offerings) and, more important, the reason(s) Lehi may have offered them. Brown's insights and commentary make sense and also push the reader to think about issues and ideas that are often not contemplated when reading the Book of Mormon.

Of great interest in the first chapter is Brown's perspective on both Lehi's and Nephi's dreams. He asserts that Lehi's vision of the tree of life is not only a powerful lesson on the atonement, the house of Israel, and the state of Lehi's family, but also provided Lehi with a "glimpse of what lay ahead in his route through southern Arabia": lonely, long stretches of desolate land, deep wadis or canyons "impossible to cross" (reminiscent of the great and terrible gulf mentioned in Lehi's dream),

“seasonal streams [that] would fill with mud and debris” (the filthy water), and verdant areas graced not only by sources of water but also by “lush vegetation represented by the tree full of delicious fruit” (p. 12). This notion is unique and worth considering.

Brown also draws some fascinating conclusions about Nephi’s character when describing his reaction to Laman and Lemuel’s disputations about their father’s dream. In brief, the new insights found in the first chapter are a foreshadowing of what awaits the reader in the following pages.

In his treatment of Lehi’s travels in the Arabian wilderness, the author again reads between the lines and fills in missing gaps of the wilderness narration by using later commentary from the Book of Mormon. For instance, he illuminates the family’s Arabian wilderness experience by citing Alma 9:10, 22 (Lehi’s family encountered enemies, famine, and sickness during their wilderness sojourn), Mosiah 1:17 (they experienced a lack of progress in their journey and were driven back), 2 Nephi 3:1 (Lehi referred to “the days of my greatest sorrow”), and Jacob 7:26 (they were outcasts from Jerusalem). These commentaries involving the wilderness trek are supplemented by Brown’s description of the Liahona and insights into the types of tents, provisions, and pack animals they may have used—including some useful facts about the ships of the desert (camels, pp. 30–31). He also discusses the role of women in the ancient Near East and how this normative behavior played out in their wilderness journey. Perhaps his best work in this chapter is his description of the land Bountiful based on his research in the area of Dhofar. Lastly, the author draws five comparisons between Lehi and Moses (both with extensive experiences in a wilderness setting). These insights are illuminating and serve to “peel back” the text in order to reveal the events in a different light—a much different light indeed.

Chapter 3 (King Benjamin’s address) and chapter 4 (the missionary experiences of Mosiah’s sons) follow the same patterns established in the first two chapters—one insight followed by another. For instance, Brown illuminates King Benjamin’s address by weaving it into the broader fabric of Nephite history—a history that reminds the reader

of two separate groups (the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla) becoming one. He discusses some of the challenges of bringing two separate and diverse groups together. Leadership, language, and religion, according to Brown, would have been a few of the weighty issues facing the newly formed society. Contention would also have been a by-product of their union. Thus, Brown suggests, King Benjamin intended to unify this people, transfer royal authority, and give them a new name (the name of Christ) through his sermon. The watchword of chapter 3, however, is the atonement. And here Brown does a superb job of tying Old Testament temple themes (e.g., sacrifice) into Benjamin's atonement address. This chapter also has excellent insights into individual covenants, national covenants, and coronation rites in the Book of Mormon.

Chapter 4 is alive with wonderful insights, but it is chapter 5, "The Majestic Christ," that may be the author's strongest contribution. Here, Brown examines the resurrected Christ's visit to the land Bountiful. His motives are clear: he strives to set out what the Savior did in the brief span of three days that would infuse a spirit of unity and love that lasted for almost two hundred years. He addresses this issue by contrasting Jehovah's appearance on Mt. Sinai with his appearance at the temple in Bountiful. On both occasions, according to the author, Jehovah referred to himself as "I Am" (see 3 Nephi 11:10). The use of the title, Brown indicates, was to remind the people that he was the "God of the Israelite Exodus, an event which heretofore had stood as the unequalled demonstration of God's love for His people" (p. 132). This fact was certainly not lost on these people who were so familiar with Old Testament history. Brown maintains that the Savior's use of the title "I Am" in his appearance to the Nephites was designed to teach them that the atonement had now eclipsed and supplanted the exodus as the grand proof of God's love.

Brown discusses the issues of ordinances and doctrines taught by the Savior during his brief visit. As if that were not enough, he also talks about the concept of the promised land, the architecture of the temple, sacred space, the role of the Nephite Twelve, and the law of consecration. His best writing, however, is devoted to the Savior's



interaction with little children. Here, more than any other place in the book, are wonderful insights into the character of Jesus and the importance of little children in God's kingdom.

Although the last chapter, devoted to Mormon and Moroni, does not contain as many new insights as previous chapters, it is nicely written and will help the reader appreciate the difficult tasks both Mormon and Moroni faced. *Voices from the Dust* is an excellent book that will provide fresh perspectives and new insights into the world of the Book of Mormon. It is well written and will be engaging to most readers. This book will be extremely useful for anyone wanting to study the Book of Mormon in greater depth or who will be teaching this text in a class setting.



# THE MYTHICAL “MANUSCRIPT FOUND”

Matthew Roper

In 1834, relying on testimony gathered by one Doctor Philastus Hurlbut (a former Mormon who had been excommunicated from the church for immoral behavior), E. D. Howe suggested that the Book of Mormon was based on an unpublished novel called “Manuscript Found,” written by a former minister named Solomon Spalding.<sup>1</sup> In statements collected by Hurlbut, eight former neighbors of Spalding said they remembered elements of his story that resembled the historical portions of the Book of Mormon. Some said they recalled names shared by Spalding’s earlier tale and the Book of Mormon. Others claimed that the historical narrative of both stories was the same with the exception of the religious material in the Book of Mormon. Howe suggested that, by some means, Sidney Rigdon, a former Campbellite preacher in Ohio and Pennsylvania who had joined the church in November 1830, had obtained a copy of “Manuscript Found” years before and had used it as the basis for the Book of Mormon, to which he also added religious material. Rigdon, Howe argued, must have conspired with Joseph Smith to pass the Book of Mormon off as a

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1. Solomon Spalding’s name is sometimes spelled Spaulding.

Review of Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick. *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma*. St. Louis: Concordia, 2005. 558 pp., with appendixes. \$16.99.

divinely revealed book of ancient American scripture as part of a moneymaking scheme.<sup>2</sup> Subsequent variants of this hypothesis have been published from time to time.<sup>3</sup>

Once the standard critic's explanation of the Book of Mormon, the Spalding (or Spalding-Rigdon) theory has fallen on hard times. The first significant blow to this explanation came with the rediscovery in 1884 of an original Spalding manuscript known today as "Manuscript Story."<sup>4</sup> In 1833, Hurlbut borrowed the manuscript from Spalding's widow and entrusted it to Howe. In his book, Howe briefly described the document but, finding it did not support his theory, argued that the Book of Mormon was based upon a now lost second manuscript on ancient America. After 1834, "Manuscript Story" was either lost, misplaced, or knowingly suppressed. The recovery of this Spalding manuscript in 1884 and its subsequent publication did much to undermine confidence in the Spalding theory, even among critics, since the manuscript did not seem consistent with the statements published by Howe. Another blow to the theory came in 1945 when Fawn Brodie published her popular biography of Joseph Smith,<sup>5</sup> in which she rejected the Spalding theory and crafted an alternative theory similar to that

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2. E. D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: or, a faithful account of that singular imposition and delusion, from its rise to the present time. With sketches of the characters of its propagators, and a full detail of the manner in which the famous Golden Bible was brought before the world. To which are added, inquiries into the probability that the historical part of the said Bible was written by one Solomon Spalding, more than twenty years ago, and by him intended to have been published as a romance* (Painesville, OH: By the Author, 1834), 278–90.

3. For a brief overview, see Lester E. Bush Jr., "The Spalding Theory Then and Now," *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 40–69.

4. *The "Manuscript Found" or "Manuscript Story," of the Late Rev. Solomon Spaulding . . .* (Lamoni, IA: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1885). The first Latter-day Saint edition was published as *The "Manuscript Found": Manuscript Story* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1886). The most recent publication of this manuscript is Solomon Spaulding, *Manuscript Found: The Complete Original "Spaulding Manuscript,"* ed. Kent P. Jackson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1996). When quoting from *Manuscript Story*, I will reference this more recent edition.

5. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith*, 2nd ed., rev. and enl. (New York: Knopf, 1993). Brodie's book was originally published in 1945. See Louis Midgley, "F. M. Brodie—"The Fasting Hermit and Very Saint of Ignorance": A Biographer and Her Legend," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 147–230.

advanced by Alexander Campbell in 1831. In Campbell's view, Joseph Smith stood alone as the author of a fictional Book of Mormon. Like Campbell, Brodie argued that the Book of Mormon was a product of Joseph Smith's imagination and creative ability and that common and popular ideas and sources would have supplied all that was necessary for him to create such a book. Subsequently, most critics of the Book of Mormon have followed some variant of Brodie's thesis. But in more recent years, as the Internet has opened up an additional venue for the dissemination of "information," the Spalding theory has made a modest comeback. Spalding advocates such as Dale Broadhurst have taken advantage of the Internet to provide a forum for similarly disposed critics of the Book of Mormon.<sup>6</sup>

*Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon? The Spalding Enigma* (hereafter referred to as *The Spalding Enigma*) is the latest attempt to breathe new life into the Spalding theory. Its authors, Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Arthur Vanick, have produced previous works on the subject,<sup>7</sup> always contending, as they do in the present work, that other critics such as Brodie have wrongly dismissed the Spalding theory as a viable naturalistic explanation. Oddly, though, they seem to place the blame for neglect of the Spalding theory on Latter-day Saints. "Few are aware," they lament, "of a fascinating body of evidence that has continued to accumulate over the years and, despite efforts by pro-Mormon scholars to deny or dismiss it, has grown to such proportion that it now poses a significant challenge to history itself" (p. 17). According to the authors, these obstructionists include "Brodie and other pro-Mormon writers" (p. 49). This is an odd statement. Though nominally a Latter-day Saint at the time she wrote her book, Fawn Brodie had become an atheist several years before, it appeared. She was excommunicated shortly after the publication of her book, and it can by no means be described as "pro-Mormon." Such

6. There is, however, little in the way of quality control on "publications" on the Internet.

7. See 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); and Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, Hugh L. O'Neal, and Arthur Vanick, *The Spaulding Enigma: Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* (2000), CD-ROM.

statements raise the question of how well Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick know the playing field. While faithful Latter-day Saints have always defended the Book of Mormon and been critical of all naturalistic theories, it has been critics of Mormonism who have been primarily responsible for the acceptance (and then rejection) of the Spalding theory. The reason is that Latter-day Saints already have an explanation for the Book of Mormon, and so the quest for a plausible naturalistic alternative is an unbeliever's affair. Why, one must ask, have most recent critics of the Book of Mormon rejected the Spalding theory? In my view, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick have not dealt effectively with the most important objections to it.

I will first provide some historical background for the publication of E. D. Howe's *Mormonism Unveiled*, the book that made the Spalding theory famous. I will then examine evidence for and against the claim that "Manuscript Story" (the document once in Howe's possession) and "Manuscript Found" (the document described by Spalding's neighbors as being the source for the Book of Mormon) are, as Spalding proponents have often maintained, separate and distinct works. The facts, in my opinion, do not support Spalding advocates on this crucial point. I will also review other major difficulties in accepting the Spalding theory, including, among other concerns, the character of Philastus Hurlbut, who is at the very center of the case for it. I will cite, where appropriate, relevant criticisms of the theory from both Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints. Finally, I will examine what is offered as evidence that Sidney Rigdon and Oliver Cowdrey were part of a conspiracy in which Rigdon obtained and possibly altered a copy of Spalding's unpublished "Manuscript Found."

### ***Mormonism Unveiled***

Latter-day Saints began to gather in Kirtland, Ohio, during the first part of 1831. However, some residents of the nearby town of Painesville were not pleased by what they saw of the new religious movement. Notable among these was Eber D. Howe, editor of the local newspaper and, eventually, at least the nominal author of the very first

anti-Mormon book. On 28 November 1834, the *Painesville Telegraph* announced the publication of *Mormonism Unveiled*.<sup>8</sup> Although E. D. Howe took credit for the authorship of the book, it was known at the time that much of the material had been gathered by Philastus Hurlbut, who, following his expulsion from the Church of Jesus Christ, was employed by anti-Mormons in Ohio to gather negative information on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. Hurlbut's backers hoped that the publication of such information would "prove the '*Book of Mormon*' to be a work of *fiction* and *imagination*" and also "completely divest Joseph Smith of all claims to the character of an honest man, and place him at an immeasurable distance from the high station which he pretends to occupy."<sup>9</sup> In early 1834, Hurlbut turned his materials over to Howe, who then published them in *Mormonism Unveiled*. Since Howe listed himself as the author and made no mention of Hurlbut's name, Latter-day Saints jokingly referred to Hurlbut as the "legitimate" and Howe as the "illegitimate" author of the book.<sup>10</sup> Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick argue that this might have been incorrect, and on this point, they may be right. At least it appears to have been an overstatement. It is true that Hurlbut gathered the statements from the neighbors of the Spaldings in Ohio and Pennsylvania and also accumulated negative affidavits against Joseph Smith and his family from Palmyra and Manchester residents in New York. Another set of statements from Isaac Hale and other former Smith neighbors in northeastern Pennsylvania had previously been published in May 1834, and these were also included in the book.<sup>11</sup> However, the question of the extent of Howe's authorship may be irrelevant since it is the testimony gathered by Hurlbut and not Howe's negative and often contradictory treatment of the Book of Mormon that is chiefly remembered.

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8. "Mormonism Unveiled," *Painesville Telegraph*, 28 November 1834.

9. "To the Public," *Painesville Telegraph*, 31 January 1834; for an interesting biographical sketch of one of Hurlbut's financial backers, see Dale W Adams, "Grandison Newell's Obsession," *Journal of Mormon History* 30/1 (2004): 159–88.

10. Joseph Smith, "To the Elders of the Church of the Latter Day Saints," *Messenger and Advocate* 2/3 (December 1835): 228.

11. "Mormonism," *Susquehanna Register*, 1 May 1834; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 262–69.

Leaders of the church at that time reacted to *Mormonism Unveiled* in several ways. First, they published in the *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* a series of letters on the history of Joseph Smith and his early prophetic experiences. These materials were intended as a rebuttal to the negative testimony published by Howe.

Second, they pointed out that Hurlbut, who had a clear animus against Joseph Smith, had been employed by enemies of the church to solicit and collect this "testimony." One should not expect, they argued, that his efforts would yield a fair or accurate picture of Joseph Smith, his family, or the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. In an editorial, Oliver Cowdery warned readers that Hurlbut had been exploiting his given name "Doctor" in an effort to give his actions an air of authority: "We have not, till now, thought this man worthy a notice in our paper, neither would he at this time [have] been noticed by us were it not to undeceive those at a distance who are unacquainted with him and may be deceived in consequence of the above title, of Doctor."<sup>12</sup> Cowdery did not think that Hurlbut's investigations would do much damage to the church, but he hoped that those who sought to investigate the truth "will be as forward to expose *his* character, and hold *him* up to the view of the community, in the true light which his crimes merit, as they were first to employ him, and employ a *more respectable* agent, if they are calculating on success when they engage with the religion and characters of their neighbors."<sup>13</sup>

By some means, Howe had obtained Hurlbut's list of subscriptions for the book, which Howe immediately filled. When Hurlbut received his own allotted copies, he found that few wanted an additional copy. This forced him to sell his copies at a much reduced price.<sup>14</sup> Orson Hyde noted with some amusement that investigators were still will-

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12. "Considerable Excitement," *Evening and Morning Star* 2/19 (April 1834): 149. Even in recent years, questionable "doctorates" have been surprisingly common among critics of Mormonism (e.g., Dee Jay Nelson, Walter Martin, John Ankerberg, and John Weldon). In this, as in other respects, Hurlbut and Howe seem to have established a pattern.

13. "Considerable Excitement," 150, emphasis added.

14. "He traveled and sold them, hardly paying his expenses and sold the balance at auction in Buffalo in the spring of 1835." Maria S. Hurlbut statement, 15 April 1885, Arthur B. Deming File, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society.



ing to pay more than full price for the Book of Mormon and playfully suggested, “Tell every body to buy and read ‘Mormonism Unveiled’ if they wish, for we are convinced of Paul’s statement, where he says, ‘Ye can do nothing against the truth but for the truth.’”<sup>15</sup>

A third way in which Latter-day Saints responded to *Mormonism Unveiled* was by drawing attention to how the Spalding theory contradicted earlier explanations of the Book of Mormon, such as Alexander Campbell’s.<sup>16</sup> Church leaders focused on the discrepancy between Campbell’s explanation that Joseph Smith alone was the author and the notion that Spalding, a long-dead clergyman, was the principal writer of the book. When local newspapers reprinted an article published in the Illinois *Pioneer* that spoke of the Spalding theory, Oliver Cowdery observed:

The Pioneer’s “friend of truth” has certainly got ahead of Mr. [Alexander] Campbell: He says that the “true origin” of the writing composing the book of Mormon, is from the pen of an eccentric *Spaulding*, who carried the same to Pittsburgh, but died soon, and that since they have been altered a little, and now appear as the book of Mormon. Mr. Campbell says, that “[Joseph] Smith is its real author, and as ignorant and impudent a knave as ever wrote a book.” Will these two gentlemen settle this dispute; for it truly looks pitiful to see this wide disagreement, since they both express so much anxiety.<sup>17</sup>

Latter-day Saint writers also pointed out that not all the statements in *Mormonism Unveiled* were consistent with the Spalding theory. “Which, then, of these accounts, I would ask, is true?” asked John Taylor in 1840 when he reviewed two recent pamphlets published against the Book of Mormon.

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15. Orson Hyde and William E. McLellin to Oliver Cowdery, 12 May 1835, in *Messenger and Advocate* 1/8 (May 1835): 116.

16. Alexander Campbell, “Delusions,” *Millennial Harbinger* 2/2 (7 February 1831): 85–96.

17. “Trouble in the West,” *Messenger and Advocate* 1/7 (April 1835): 105. In this and all other quotations, original spelling, capitalization, and punctuation have been retained.

One says that Joseph Smith junr. is the author and publisher of the Book of Mormon. the other says that Solomon Spaulding is the author of it! One says that it was written by Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdry, from the mouth of Joseph Smith, junr., as he looked at a stone, with his face in a hat; the other, that it was written, and altered by Sidney Rigdon, from the “Manuscript Found”!! One makes it out that it was written in Harmony township, Susquehanah county, by Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery; the other, that it was written in Conneaut, Ohio, first by Solomon Spaulding, and afterwards altered by Sidney Rigdon, in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania!!! So much, then, for the agreement of the testimony which is brought forth as FACTS concerning the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; and yet these gentlemen are both of them good men; both of them accredited ministers of the Methodist connexion; and both of them have got what they call FACTS, diametrically opposed to each other as light is from darkness. But Mr. Heys has got good testimony to his account, so has Mr. Livesey; and I suppose that because both of the testimonies are good, they must both of them be true—although the one contradicts the other—especially as they were supported and held forth by such pious, holy men.

I shall leave Messrs. Heys and Livesey, then, to settle this difficulty between themselves.<sup>18</sup>

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18. John Taylor, *An Answer to Some False Statements and Misrepresentations Made by the Rev Robert Heys, Wesleyan Minister, in an Address . . . on the Subject of Mormonism* (Manchester: Thomas, 1840), 7–8. Taylor notes that Heys (or Hays), “having no better weapon, commenced propagating falsehood by publishing a statement purporting to be made by a Mr. Hale, Joseph Smith’s father-in-law, professing to give an account of the character of Joseph Smith, and of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon: but as he was not acquainted with a document containing some other lies published by Mr. Livesey, a Rev. brother of his, which also gave an account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon; it so happened that they did not agree in their statement in regard to its author, origin, or coming forth; so for the benefit of the public I published the counter statement of his Rev. brother, whose testimonies did no more agree than the testimony of the false witnesses that appeared against our Saviour.” “Communication,” *Millennial Star* 1/11 (March 1841): 277–78. “One man testifies that Mr. Joseph Smith repeated the contents of the Book of Mormon by looking at a white stone, and a scribe wrote them down, and this

The same lack of agreement among those who reject Joseph Smith's explanation of the Book of Mormon vexes critics today.<sup>19</sup> Although most critics today attribute its origins to Joseph Smith, *The Spalding Enigma* demonstrates that not all critics are convinced by that view. In fact, disagreements among critics over naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon are sometimes heated. An earlier version of this book, for example, received harsh criticism from both Latter-day Saints and anti-Mormons Jerald and Sandra Tanner.<sup>20</sup> In response to one of these rebuttals, Cowdrey, Davis, and Scales sent a cartoon of a jackass as an indication of their affection for the Tanners.<sup>21</sup> More recently, Dale Broadhurst, another Spalding researcher reviewing this same critique, insisted that "it appears all too likely that there is a certain segment of that church's 'middle management' which looks upon the couple with friendly eyes. The Tanners," he complained, "really do very little to rock the boat of Mormonism."<sup>22</sup> In a rebuttal to another publication, Broadhurst commented: "I am more convinced than ever that the Tanners effectively function as a mouthpiece for certain high-level parties within the LDS Church."<sup>23</sup> More recently, he

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in Harmony, Susquehanna Co., Pa. Another testifies that Mr Rigdon formed it out of Mr Spaulding's romance, in Pittsburgh or in Ohio, some two or three hundred miles from where Mr. Smith is said to have done it. 'So their witnesses agree not together.' 'Confusion among the Babel repairers.'" Orson Hyde to George J. Adams, 7 June 1841, in John E. Page, *The Spaulding Story, Concerning the Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Pittsburgh: n.p., 1843), 10–11.

19. See, for example, Daniel C. Peterson's editor's introduction, "In the Hope That Something Will Stick": Changing Explanations for the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): xi–xxxv.

20. Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1977). In addition to their own observations and criticisms, the Tanners cite criticisms from the late Wesley P. Walters.

21. Reproduced in Tanner and Tanner, *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?* 19.

22. Dale R. Broadhurst, "Tannerism—Reality or Illusion?" was once available at [Solomonspalding.com/tanrpg/TanrRev1.htm](http://Solomonspalding.com/tanrpg/TanrRev1.htm) (last revised on 10 November 1999); it is now available in a rewritten form at the same site but is titled "Tannerism—Reality or Shadow?" (accessed 9 January 2006).

23. Dale R. Broadhurst, "The Changing World of Tannerism," at [SidneyRigdon.com/whit/WhitRev1.htm](http://SidneyRigdon.com/whit/WhitRev1.htm). The statement is taken from a version of the article under the same name published in 2000. A hard copy of that earlier version, though now excised, is in my possession.

has lamented the influence of Fawn Brodie, the Tanners, and others in discouraging investigation of the Spalding theory.<sup>24</sup> Such sentiments reflect an emotional investment in the Spalding theory by certain critics of the Book of Mormon. At the present time, however, Spalding proponents clearly remain in the minority. Whether this state of affairs will change remains to be seen; the challenge of changing it can be illustrated by the introduction of a recent, rather well-received, five-volume collection of documents relating to early Mormon history by secular anti-Mormon critic Dan Vogel. He excludes documents supporting the Spalding theory, noting that “These documents shed no light on Mormon origins.”<sup>25</sup> Since they are essential to the theory itself, though, I will examine them rather carefully.

### The Two Spalding Manuscripts Theory

In 1834 E. D. Howe published statements gathered by Philastus Hurlbut from former neighbors of the deceased Solomon Spalding, a former Congregationalist minister who lived between 1809 and 1813 in Conneaut, Ohio, near the border of northeastern Ohio and northwestern Pennsylvania. These former neighbors included John and Martha Spalding, of Crawford County, Pennsylvania (John was one of Solomon Spalding’s brothers); Henry Lake, Aaron Wright, Oliver Smith, and Nahum Howard of Conneaut, Ohio; John N. Miller, from nearby Springfield, Pennsylvania; and Artemus Cunningham of Perry, Geauga County, Ohio. At the time they knew him, Spalding had fallen into debt and hoped to be able to pay it off through the publication of a manuscript on which he was then working. In their statements, each of the former neighbors described what they remembered of the manuscript they had encountered more than twenty years earlier.

In their 1833 statements, two witnesses said that Spalding had frequently read to them from his manuscript. John Spalding said that his brother had read to him “many passages.”<sup>26</sup> Henry Lake reported

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24. Broadhurst, “Changing World of Tannerism.”

25. Dan Vogel, ed., *Early Mormon Documents* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996), 1:xiv.

26. John Spalding statement, [August 1833], in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

that Spalding “very frequently” read to him. In fact, Lake spent “many hours in *hearing him read* said writings” and in that way, he asserted, “became well acquainted with its contents.”<sup>27</sup> Neither of the two indicated that they had read the manuscript themselves. Six others stated that they had either read the manuscript themselves or both read it and heard it read. All six of these said they had read from the manuscript at least once, but the statements are unclear as to whether they had read the *entire* manuscript or only parts of it. One witness, Oliver Smith, indicated that he had “read or heard read one hundred pages or more” at least once.<sup>28</sup> All eight indicated that Spalding’s manuscript had been brought to their recollection recently by their encounter with the Book of Mormon. Six of the witnesses said that they had “read” the Book of Mormon; however, the statements are unclear as to whether this meant that they had read the entire Book of Mormon or only parts of it. In addition to those who claimed to have read the Book of Mormon, John Miller affirmed that he had “examined” the Book of Mormon,<sup>29</sup> while another said he had only “partially examined” it.<sup>30</sup> Again, the nature and quality of the examination is unspecified.

Spalding’s former neighbors described some of the general features of his unpublished narrative as they said they remembered them. John Spalding said that his brother endeavored in his manuscript “to show that the American Indians are the descendants of the Jews, or the lost tribes.”<sup>31</sup> According to Martha Spalding, “He had for many years contended that the aborigines of America were descendants of some of the lost tribes of Israel, and this idea he carried out in the book in question.”<sup>32</sup> Henry Lake claimed that “this book represented the American Indians as the descendants of the lost tribes.”<sup>33</sup> Aaron Wright spoke of “a history he was writing, of the lost tribes of Israel, purporting that they were the first settlers of America, and that the Indians were their

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27. Henry Lake statement, September 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 281.

28. Oliver Smith statement, August 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 285.

29. John N. Miller statement, September 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

30. Artemus Cunningham statement, undated, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 287.

31. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

32. Martha Spalding statement, [August 1833], in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280.

33. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282.

descendants.”<sup>34</sup> They also remembered that the people in Spalding’s tale had traveled from the Old World to America. “It gave,” remembered John Spalding, “a detailed account of their journey from Jerusalem, by land and sea, till they arrived in America.”<sup>35</sup> According to Martha Spalding, “They were officers of the company which first came off from Jerusalem. He gave a particular account of their journey by land and sea, till they arrived in America.”<sup>36</sup> Henry Lake said that the story “gave an account of their leaving Jerusalem.”<sup>37</sup> “He brought them off from Jerusalem,” said John Miller, “under their leaders; detailing their travels by land and water.”<sup>38</sup> Aaron Wright recalled that Spalding “traced their journey from Jerusalem to America.”<sup>39</sup> Oliver Smith remembered that Spalding “said he intended to trace their journey from Jerusalem, by land and sea, till their arrival in America.”<sup>40</sup>

The neighbors recalled that Spalding’s novel purported to describe how its leading characters came to be established in the Americas after their journey. According to John Spalding, “It was an historical romance of the first settlers of America.”<sup>41</sup> Martha Spalding remembered the manuscript as “a historical novel founded upon the first settlers of America.”<sup>42</sup> John Miller said that “it purported to be the history of the first settlement of America.”<sup>43</sup> Aaron Wright claimed that the characters in Spalding’s novel “were the first settlers of America.”<sup>44</sup> It was “a historical novel, founded upon the first settlers of this country,” said Oliver Smith.<sup>45</sup> Artemus Cunningham remembered Spalding’s tale as a “romantic history of the first settlement of this country.”<sup>46</sup> Various customs and elements of their culture were also detailed and

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34. Aaron Wright statement, August 1833, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284.

35. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

36. Martha Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280.

37. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282.

38. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

39. Wright, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284.

40. Smith, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 285.

41. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

42. Martha Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280.

43. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

44. Wright, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284.

45. Smith, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284-85.

46. Cunningham, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 286.

described. One neighbor recalled that there were “humorous passages” in “Manuscript Found.”<sup>47</sup>

In Spalding’s tale the migrants divided into two groups. John Spalding said that, having arrived in the New World, “they afterwards had quarrels and contentions, and separated into two distinct nations, one of which he denominated Nephites and the other Lamanites.”<sup>48</sup> Martha Spalding explained that “disputes arose between the chiefs, which caused them to separate into different lands, one of which was called Lamanites and the other Nephites.”<sup>49</sup> John and Martha Spalding remembered that wars and contentions were also a significant part of the story. “Cruel and bloody wars ensued, in which great multitudes were slain.”<sup>50</sup> The New World people in Spalding’s tale were “enlightened and warlike.”<sup>51</sup> According to Henry Lake, “their contentions and wars . . . were many and great.”<sup>52</sup> Others reported that Spalding had told them that he intended, through his story, to provide an explanation for many of the ruins and mounds common to the region.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the general features of the Spalding narrative mentioned above, witnesses also said they remembered specific names and phrases from Spalding’s story, which they claimed, were identical to those found in the Book of Mormon. Of the eight former neighbors providing statements, five (John and Martha Spalding, John Miller, Oliver Smith, Artemus Cunningham) mention the name *Nephi*, and four (John and Martha Spalding, John Miller, Oliver Smith) the name *Lehi*.<sup>54</sup> Two of them (John and Martha Spalding) remembered that the terms *Nephites* and *Lamanites* had been used to designate the opposing groups.<sup>55</sup> One neighbor (Henry Lake) said he remembered the name *Laban*, and another (John Miller) said he remembered the

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47. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

48. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

49. Martha Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280.

50. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279.

51. Martha Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280.

52. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282.

53. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–80, 284–87.

54. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–80, 283, 285–86.

55. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–80.

names *Moroni* and *Zarahemla*.<sup>56</sup> Three of the witnesses said they remembered the phrase *And it came to pass* or *now it came to pass*.<sup>57</sup> One said that he remembered the phrase *I Nephi*.<sup>58</sup> Some also recalled that the tale was written in an “old” or “old obsolete style” and that the narrative of the story was the same as that found in the Book of Mormon except for the religious elements.<sup>59</sup>

After these eight statements were collected, an attempt was made to locate the “Manuscript Found.” According to Howe, “a messenger” (Hurlbut) was sent to Massachusetts, where Spalding’s widow then lived. Although she reportedly had “no distinct knowledge” of the contents of “Manuscript Found,” she gave permission for this messenger to retrieve the manuscript from a trunk at her former place of residence in New York.<sup>60</sup>

The trunk referred to by the widow, was subsequently examined, and found to contain only a single M.S. book, in Spalding’s hand-writing, containing about one quire of paper. This is a romance, purporting to have been translated from the Latin, found on 24 rolls of parchment in a cave, on the banks of Conneaut Creek, but written in a modern style, and giving a fabulous account of a ship’s being driven upon the American coast, while proceeding from Rome to Britain, a short time previous to the Christian era, this country then being inhabited by the Indians. This old M.S. has been shown to several of the foregoing witnesses, who recognise it as Spalding’s, he having told them that he had altered his first plan of writing, by going farther back with dates, and writing in the old scripture style, in order that it might appear more ancient. They say that it bears no resemblance to the “*Manuscript Found*.”<sup>61</sup>

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56. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282–83.

57. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280–82.

58. Cunningham, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 286.

59. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280–81, 286.

60. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 287.

61. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 287–88.



It is now generally acknowledged that, in the passage above, E. D. Howe described the document recovered by Lewis L. Rice in Hawaii in 1884 and now known as “Manuscript Story.”<sup>62</sup> Faced with the facts summarized above, Howe was forced to insist that the Book of Mormon’s historical narrative was derived from a supposed second Spalding manuscript on ancient America known as “Manuscript Found.” It was this second document, he claimed, rather than the one retrieved by Hurlbut, that his witnesses had described in their statements. However, critics of the Spalding theory, both Latter-day Saints and non-Latter-day Saints, have been understandably suspicious of this claim, suspecting that either Howe, Hurlbut, or former Spalding neighbors simply invented the theory of a second manuscript after finding that the actual Spalding manuscript did not match the neighbors’ descriptions. The first three chapters of *The Spalding Enigma* attempt to counter this suspicion (pp. 29–98).

“A considerable body of evidence exists,” according to *The Spalding Enigma*, “indicating that Solomon Spalding wrote a second novel entitled *A Manuscript Found*, which disappeared prior to 1833” (p. 32). Unfortunately for their position, much of that evidence comes from very late testimony solicited long after the fact, in which “witnesses” recalled, with ever-increasing detail, what Spalding had reportedly done or said through the years. Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick insist that early evidence for that claim can be found in the statements collected by Hurlbut in 1833. Out of eight statements about Spalding collected by Hurlbut between August and September 1833, however, six (John Spalding, Martha Spalding, Henry Lake, Oliver Smith, Nahum Howard, and

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62. This discovered manuscript bears the title “Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek,” which title was written in an unknown hand at an unknown time. The manuscript, however, appears to be in Spalding’s hand. Howe had sold the *Painesville Telegraph* with type, press, old books, manuscripts, and papers to Mr. L. L. Rice, who carried much of this material with him, unexamined, in an old trunk for many years. In 1884, President James H. Fairchild of Oberlin University visited Rice in Honolulu and discovered the long-lost Spalding romance (which is now housed at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio). See James H. Fairchild, “Manuscript of Solomon Spaulding and the Book of Mormon,” paper read before the Northern Ohio and Western Reserve Historical Society, 23 March 1886, Tract No. 77, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio, 193–94.

Artemus Cunningham) *mention only one work*.<sup>63</sup> Two former neighbors (John Miller and Aaron Wright) indicate that Spalding had several other papers or writings *in addition to his story on ancient America*.<sup>64</sup> Since these statements were solicited and obtained by Hurlbut before he retrieved “Manuscript Story” from the trunk of Spalding’s widow, they prove, says *The Spalding Enigma*, that Spalding wrote a second story that was a revision of his earlier tale “Manuscript Story.” This supposed second version, which was called “Manuscript Found” (p. 79), was allegedly closer to the Book of Mormon. In a statement made in September 1833, John Miller said that Spalding “had written two or three books or pamphlets on different subjects; but that which *more particularly drew my attention*, was one which he called the ‘Manuscript Found.’” It “purported to be the history of the first settlement of America, before [being] discovered by Columbus.”<sup>65</sup> Did any of these other books or pamphlets bear any relation to the Book of Mormon? Miller’s statement gives no indication that they did. In fact, while Miller mentions several “books or pamphlets on different subjects,” he seems to draw a distinction in his statement between “Manuscript Found” and Spalding’s other writings.<sup>66</sup> Howe claimed that Mrs. Spalding told Hurlbut that her husband “had a great variety of manuscripts”<sup>67</sup> but said nothing about their content. In a statement made in 1880, Spalding’s daughter Matilda Spalding McKinstry also referred to “little stories” her father would read to her as a child, one of which she says was called “‘The Frogs of Wyndham,’” in addition to “sermons and other papers.”<sup>68</sup> These might have been what Miller meant by “books or pamphlets on different subjects.” In contrast to these other papers, however, the manuscript that Miller described and that interested him was the one that dealt with an ancient settlement of America long before its discovery by Columbus.

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63. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–81, 285–86.

64. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283–84.

65. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283, emphasis added.

66. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

67. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 287.

68. Matilda Spalding (Spaulding) McKinstry statement, 3 April 1880, in Ellen E. Dickinson, “The Book of Mormon,” *Scribner’s Monthly* 20 (August 1880): 615.

In his August 1833 statement, Aaron Wright claimed that Spalding “showed and read to me a history he was writing, of the lost tribes of Israel, purporting that they were the first settlers of America, and that the Indians were their descendants. Upon *this* subject we had frequent conversations.”<sup>69</sup> Wright claimed that this manuscript was the source for the historical narrative of the Book of Mormon. He asserted that “Spalding had many other manuscripts, which I expect to see when Smith translates his other plate.” But Wright gave no hint as to their content and nature, nor did he give any indication that any of those other manuscripts was a revision or a history or had anything to do with an early settlement of America before Columbus, or that any of them was in any way comparable to the content of the Book of Mormon.

In 1834, Howe said that, after the Spalding manuscript was retrieved from New York, it was shown to some of Spalding’s former Conneaut associates. “This old M.S.,” wrote Howe, in a passage worth quoting again, “has been shown to several of the foregoing witnesses, who recognise it as Spalding’s, he having told them that he had altered his first plan of writing, by going farther back with dates, and writing in the old scripture style, in order that it might appear more ancient. They say that it bears no resemblance to the ‘*Manuscript Found*.’”<sup>70</sup> However, Howe did not name which neighbors made this claim, nor did he cite any additional firsthand testimony in support of this claim, leading some subsequent writers to suggest that he was dissembling.

In this connection, the authors describe a hitherto unpublished, unsigned statement (apparently gifted to the New York Library in 1914 but only recently discovered in the 1980s) attributed to Aaron Wright, who had submitted one of the original eight statements published in *Mormonism Unveiled*. In this second statement—dated 31 December 1833 and purportedly written in Conneaut—Wright, using language reminiscent of Howe—allegedly claims:

I have examined the writings which he [Hurlbut] has obtained from SD Spaldings widowe I recognize them to be the writings

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69. Wright, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284, emphasis added.

70. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 288.

handwriting of SD Spalding but not the Manuscript I had reference to in my statement before alluded to as he informed me he wrote in the first place ~~he wrote~~ for his own amusement and then altered his plan and commenced writing a history of the first Settlement of America the particulars you will find in my testimony dated ~~Sept 18~~ August 1833. (pp. 61–62)

Even assuming that this document is genuine, its usefulness as evidence for a second Spalding manuscript is nonetheless problematic on several counts. First, while the letter suggests that Howe did not invent the claim that, when confronted with the known Spalding manuscript, former neighbors said that “Manuscript Found” was a second one, it seems strange that Howe would not have published firsthand testimony if he had had a copy of such a letter.

Second, even though it was drafted eleven months before the publication of *Mormonism Unveiled*, the statement was still written only *after* Hurlbut’s disappointing failure to recover what he and others had hoped would prove to be the source of the Book of Mormon. This leaves open the suspicion that the statement was made after the fact in order to explain away the discrepancy between “Manuscript Story” and the earlier testimony. Even though it was made long before the discovery in the 1980s of Wright’s second statement, B. H. Roberts’s observation still applies: “Let it constantly be borne in mind that the existence of a second Spaulding manuscript, on the subject of ancient America and its inhabitants, and entirely different from the one at Oberlin, is not heard of until after the unearthing of the manuscript, (now at Oberlin) by Hurlburt,<sup>71</sup> and the consequent disappointment of the conspirators on finding it so utterly lacking in the features necessary to make it appear probable that it was the basis of the Book of Mormon.”<sup>72</sup>

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71. Hurlbut’s name is spelled various ways (e.g., Hurlburt, Hurlbert, Hulbert); I have retained the original spellings in quotations.

72. Brigham H. Roberts, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon (A Reply to Mr. Theodore Schroeder). II. The ‘Second’ Spaulding Manuscript,” *American Historical Magazine* 3/6 (1908): 551. For the exchange between Roberts and Schroeder in the early 1900s concerning the Spalding theory, see Theodore Schroeder, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *American Historical Magazine* 1/5 (1906): 380–96; 1/6 (1906): 518–33; 2/1

Third, while the statement denies that “Manuscript Story” was “Manuscript Found,” Wright provides no additional details about the content of “Manuscript Found” that were not already given in his earlier statement. This is odd since Wright had insisted that the details of “Manuscript Found” were still clear to him even after “more than twenty years ago.” Not only the history, but “the names more especially are the same without any alteration,” and “the names of, and most of the historical part of the Book of Mormon were as familiar to me before I read it, as most modern history.” Yet in neither this nor his earlier testimony does he produce so much as one Book of Mormon name from his remarkable memory. Instead, a significant portion of the statement simply repeats Wright’s earlier words verbatim. Instead of lending support to the accuracy of his recollections, the lack of detail raises questions about the reliability of his memory or about his probity. After being confronted with the genuine work of Spalding, so obviously inconsistent with his earlier description, was he trying to save face?

Finally, there is the fact, noted by the authors, that the statement is in the hand of *Hurlbut*, rather than that of Wright (pp. 60, 444 n. 11). Wright apparently did not draft his own statement. This supports the conclusion of many historians that, in collecting testimony, Hurlbut drafted many of the statements published by Howe and simply had people sign them.<sup>73</sup> This new evidence, if it is authentic, would appear to support that conclusion. It seems likely that the second Aaron Wright statement represents a sloppy and perhaps aborted effort by Hurlbut and Wright to salvage the earlier statements after the disappointing failure to obtain what they wrongly assumed was the source of the Book of Mormon.

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(1907): 57–76; 2/3 (1907): 213–30. The response by B. H. Roberts was published in “The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *American Historical Magazine* 3/5 (1908): 441–68; 3/6 (1908): 551–80; 4/1 (1909): 22–44; 4/2 (1909): 168–96.

73. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reappraised,” *BYU Studies* 10/3 (1970): 286–90; Richard Lloyd Anderson, review of *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined*, by Rodger I. Anderson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 59–62.

## An Unfinished Tale

In further support of their claim that “Manuscript Story” and “Manuscript Found” were two different manuscripts, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick argue that “Manuscript Story” was in no shape to submit to a publisher. Spalding’s widow and daughter had both indicated that Spalding had submitted the manuscript to a printer in Pittsburgh named Patterson. In the document recovered by Hurlbut from the widow’s trunk, however, words and names are frequently misspelled or spelled inconsistently. Lines, sentences, and sometimes full paragraphs are crossed out. The story itself goes from the first person to the third person without explanation and then goes on for more than forty pages describing a final war between the two rival factions in the tale, the Sciotons and the Kentucks. But it breaks off before the final battle, leaving the tale incomplete. In light of these and other elements, the authors argue that “it seems unlikely that Spalding actually submitted such a work” as this for publication (p. 90). “While *Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek* had been written mostly for personal enjoyment, *A Manuscript Found* had to be a more polished and professional effort” (p. 81). In fact it was a “masterpiece” and “a work both worthy of publication and capable of generating sufficient income to bail him out of financial difficulty” (p. 81). In contrast, “Manuscript Story” “is clearly unfinished and certainly in no condition to be presented to a publisher” (p. 90).

This argument advanced by Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick seems, however, to contradict the report of Spalding’s widow and daughter. In her 1839 statement, Spalding’s widow related that, in an attempt to get his manuscript published, Spalding submitted it to Patterson for evaluation. Patterson “informed Mr. S. that if he would make out a title page and preface, he would publish it and it might be a source of profit. This Mr. S refused to do for reasons which I cannot now state.”<sup>74</sup> According to Spalding’s daughter, “when he [Patterson] returned it to my father, he said: ‘*Polish it up, finish it, and you will make money*

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74. Matilda Spalding Davison, “Origin of the ‘Book of Mormon,’ or ‘Golden Bible,’” *Boston Recorder*, 19 April 1839.

out of it.”<sup>75</sup> Contrary to the claims of *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* this statement indicates that the manuscript in question was incomplete, not ready for publication, and in need of “polish,” a description consistent with the state of the document recovered in 1884 known as “Manuscript Story.”

The authors’ argument is also undermined by the statement of Redick McKee, one of Spalding’s neighbors in Amity, Pennsylvania, his last place of residence before his death. In 1882 McKee visited with Spalding’s daughter, Matilda Spalding McKinsty. McKee, who appears to have gotten the information from McKinsty, indicated that, when Patterson examined the manuscript, he suggested that Spalding “should write a brief preface, and perhaps *a chapter or two* in concluding the romance, giving a little more elaborate description of the Indian mounds in Ohio.”<sup>76</sup> This statement suggests that even at the time of his death in Amity, Spalding’s tale was still unfinished. Although it was supposedly “Manuscript Found” that was taken to the printer, McKee’s reference to a manuscript *still needing a chapter or two* fits “Manuscript Story,” which breaks off in the middle of the final war between the rival factions, supporting the conclusion that two such manuscripts never existed. There is still no firm evidence that a second Spalding manuscript resembling the Book of Mormon ever existed.

### Paper Dreams

In what the authors call their “strongest piece of evidence” that “Manuscript Story” and “Manuscript Found” were separate works, they cite testimony from two of Spalding’s neighbors in Amity, Pennsylvania, who knew Spalding before his death and who claim to have seen Spalding’s manuscript, which they described as having been written on foolscap paper (pp. 90–91). In 1999, Roland Baumann, an archivist for Oberlin College’s Mudd Library, was asked at the behest of the authors to examine the Oberlin Spalding manuscript in order to

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75. McKinsty statement, 3 April 1880, in Dickinson, “The Book of Mormon,” 615, emphasis added.

76. Redick McKee statement, in Pittsburgh *Presbyterian Banner*, 15 November 1882.

determine if the document had any watermarks indicative of foolscap. An examination of the manuscript revealed none. From this, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick conclude, based on the testimony of Miller and McKee, that “Manuscript Found” and “Manuscript Story” cannot have been identical but must have been different documents since one (the supposed “Manuscript Found”) was written on foolscap and the other (the extant “Manuscript Story”) was not (p. 92). They note that the paper for “Manuscript Story” measures approximately  $7\frac{3}{4} \times 6$  inches for the first twelve pages and  $8 \times 6\frac{3}{8}$  inches for the remaining leaves (p. 455 n. 38). “This suggests Spalding’s pages were created by cutting a full-sized sheet both vertically and horizontally into four sections, one sheet of  $16 \times 12\frac{3}{4}$  making four sheets of  $8 \times 6\frac{3}{8}$ ” (p. 456 n. 38). Unfortunately for this theory, though, the term *foolscap* in the nineteenth century had a much broader meaning than it did originally. “Foolscap paper originally referred to a watermark showing a fool’s cap, but by the 1700s this term was universally used to refer to a paper size. Published accounts (given in the Oxford English Dictionary under *fool’s-cap*) indicate that foolscap paper varied from 12 to 13.5 inches in width and from 15 to 17 inches in length (that is, from 30 to 34 cm in width and 38 to 43 cm in length).”<sup>77</sup> This would be consistent with the above description of the pages for “Manuscript Story,” indicating that Miller and McKee were merely describing the known Spalding manuscript and not a hypothetical second document.

### Malleable Memory

I believe that the 1833 testimony about Spalding’s manuscript is best explained as a compound of several factors. These include genuine but vague memories of “Manuscript Story,” recalled after twenty

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77. Royal Skousen, ed., *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2001), 38, emphasis added. In a late statement Benjamin Winchester states that the manuscript in Hurlbut’s possession was written on “foolscap,” although he does not say if he saw the manuscript himself or heard this from Hurlbut (Testimony of Benjamin Winchester, 27 November 1900, Council Bluffs, Iowa, typescript in Library-Archives, Community of Christ). Rather than indicating a water mark, this probably reflects a broader usage of the term than the authors have considered.



years. Encrusted upon these memories, however, are popular and somewhat inaccurate ideas that some of Spalding's former neighbors had come to associate with the Book of Mormon, but that are not found in the Book of Mormon itself. Additional elements such as the names *Nephi* or *Lehi* and the structure of the statements themselves are largely due to coaching by Philastus Hurlbut and can be explained by Hurlbut's manner of questioning witnesses and by his subsequent drafting of the statements prior to their being signed.

*Howe's suspicious behavior.* On 19 April 1839, a letter appeared in the *Boston Recorder* over the name of Matilda Spalding Davison, widow of Solomon Spalding. Davison recounted memories of her late husband, his deteriorating health, and his work on a story called "Manuscript Found." She said that while they lived in Pittsburgh, her husband had taken the manuscript to the office of a Mr. Patterson, a printer, who suggested that if Spalding made revisions and polished the tale, he might consider it for publication. Davison claimed that Sidney Rigdon, who she thought was associated with the printer, must have made a copy of the manuscript. However, "At length the manuscript was returned to its author, and soon after we removed to Amity, Washington county, Pa., where Mr. S. deceased in 1816. The manuscript then fell into my hands and was carefully preserved."<sup>78</sup> Later, she said, when a Mormon preacher visited the Spaldings' former neighborhood in Pennsylvania and read from the Book of Mormon, residents of the town, including Spalding's brother John, recognized her husband's writings in the Book of Mormon and suspected fraud.

The excitement in New Salem became so great, that the inhabitants had a meeting and deputed Dr. Philastus Hurlbut, one of their number to repair to this place and to obtain from me the original manuscript of Mr. Spaulding, for the purpose of comparing it with the Mormon Bible, to satisfy their own minds and to prevent their friends from embracing an error so delusive. This was in the year 1834. Dr. Hurlbut brought with him an introduction and request for the manuscript, signed

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78. Davison, "Origin of the 'Book of Mormon.'"

by Messrs. Henry Lake, Aaron Wright and others, with all whom I was acquainted, as they were my neighbors, when I resided in New Salem.<sup>79</sup>

Since 1839 Latter-day Saint critics of the Spalding theory have noted irregularities in how the Davison statement was prepared and presented to the press, sometimes attempting to show that enemies of the church falsified the widow's testimony. However, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick correctly observe that while she did not draft the statement, the elderly widow had apparently given tacit approval for the statement. More significant, in my view, is the information the widow's statement reveals about Hurlbut, Howe, and the Spalding manuscript itself. Davison identified the manuscript entrusted to Hurlbut as "Manuscript Found." It was the same manuscript that Spalding took to the printer in Pittsburgh and that ended up in the widow's trunk in New York, from which it was retrieved by Hurlbut. This information seems to contradict the earlier claim of Howe and of Spalding's Conneaut neighbors that "Manuscript Story" was not the same as "Manuscript Found." Upon reading the Davison statement, one non-Mormon observer noted that the statement stopped short of providing a most important piece of information:

The writer does not tell us, whether the manuscript was sent to New Salem—whether it was compared with the Mormon Bible, what was the result of that comparison, or *where it may now be found*, and in what manner these facts can be proved, other than by her attested statements! . . . And again, *what became of the manuscript?* It had just been proved to be an important document, and it surely could not have been wantonly destroyed? if still in existence can it not be produced to corroborate the statements of Mrs Davison?<sup>80</sup>

Parley P. Pratt pointed out that

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79. Davison, "Origin of the 'Book of Mormon.'"

80. C., "For the Register and Observer," *Christian Register and Boston Observer* (11 May 1839), emphasis added.

the statement does not say whether he [Hurlbut] obtained the manuscript ["Manuscript Found"], but still leaves the impression that he did, and that it was compared with the Book of Mormon. Now whoever will read the work got up by said Hurlburt, entitled "Mormonism Unveiled," will find that he there states that the said manuscript of Spaulding's romance was lost and could no where be found. But the widow is here made to say that it is carefully preserved. Here seems to be some knavery or crooked work. . . . Now *if there is such a manuscript in existence, let it come forward at once, and not be kept in the dark.*<sup>81</sup>

Jesse Haven, a Latter-day Saint, interviewed Spaulding's widow shortly after the publication of her letter and obtained additional details concerning the manuscript and her interaction with Hurlbut. When asked if "Manuscript Found" dealt with a religious people or an idolatrous people, both she and her daughter indicated that it told of an idolatrous people. When asked where the manuscript was, Davison explained, "Dr. P. Hurlburt came here and took it, said he would get it printed, and let me have one-half the profits." Hurlbut, however, never got the manuscript printed, she said. "I received a letter stating it did not read as they expected, and they should not print it."<sup>82</sup> These additional details cast suspicion on Howe's earlier claims about "Manuscript Found." Howe insisted that there was more than one Spaulding manuscript and that the one recovered from his widow was not "Manuscript Found." However, Spaulding's widow states that it was "Manuscript Found" that was carefully preserved in a trunk until entrusted to the care of Hurlbut. The manuscript was never published nor returned, leading some to suspect that it was knowingly suppressed. Charles Thompson speculated that, after Hurlbut's supporters sent him to Spaulding's widow to retrieve the manuscript,

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81. Parley P. Pratt, letter to the editor of the *New Era*, 27 November 1839, in *Weekly Democratic Republican New Era and American Courier* (between 27 November and early December 1839), emphasis added; reprinted in the *Times and Seasons* 1/3 (January 1840): 46.

82. Jesse Haven interview with Mrs. Davison (identified as Mrs. Davidson in this source), in A. Badlam, "A Cunning Device Detected," *Quincy Whig*, 16 November 1839.

He starts for Massachusetts after the “Manuscript Found,” gets it by promising to publish it and give the owner one half the profits—returns—compares it with the “Book of Mormon”—finds it does not agree. Now what is to be done? If this manuscript should fall into the hands of the Mormons, his scheme which he had devised to enhance his speculation and to more successfully prejudice the minds of the people against the Book of Mormon, would be counteracted and destroyed. Therefore to carry out the scheme the “Manuscript Found” was either destroyed or carefully concealed.<sup>83</sup>

The recovery of “Manuscript Story” in 1884 proved that it was not destroyed. However, suspicions about Hurlbut and Howe’s actions in relation to the manuscript remain, and *The Spalding Enigma* does little to alleviate these suspicions. “Thus,” it says, “for purposes of brevity and personally regarding it as being largely insignificant to the matter at hand, Howe made only passing reference to Spalding’s *Manuscript Story*—*Conneaut Creek* and to Hurlbut’s having returned to Conneaut to show it to his witnesses for their identification” (p. 60). “Because it was not *A Manuscript Found*, [Howe] placed little value upon it and soon lost it amidst the clutter of his printing business” (p. 77). These statements raise the question of whether it was relevant or not, since the hypothetical second Spalding manuscript on ancient America has never been found nor, even, demonstrated ever to have existed. Unable to obtain the kind of document that would have provided source material for the Book of Mormon, Howe was forced either to argue for a second Spalding tale or to abandon the Spalding argument altogether. In light of this problem, “Manuscript Story” was of little use and in fact an embarrassment.

After providing his brief 1834 description of “Manuscript Story,” Howe gave no intimation as to the fate of this recovered manuscript, which he then had in his possession. While arguing for a lost Spalding story, the anti-Mormon editor omitted significant details about the recovered novel that parallel elements attributed by Spalding witnesses

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83. Charles Thompson, *Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon* (Batavia, NY: Waite, 1841), 177.

to the hypothetical “Manuscript Found.” While the authors skirt over these problems, the omissions suggest that Howe was driven by animosity against the Saints and wanted his readers to believe that what Spalding’s former associates had described as “Manuscript Found” was something different from “Manuscript Story.” Was it possible that Spalding’s Conneaut neighbors mistakenly confounded their twenty-year old memories of “Manuscript Story” with their muddled ideas about the Book of Mormon? Since it was Howe (and not the Saints) who possessed the manuscript, the likelihood is that those omissions may have been deliberate.

Was Howe afraid that “Manuscript Story” would undermine the argument for a possible second Spalding manuscript on ancient America? The fact that the borrowed manuscript was never returned to Spalding’s widow, was never published by Howe, and was subsequently “lost” by him seems a little too convenient to be mere coincidence. In a statement made in 1879, Hurlbut said he brought the manuscript home with him and gave it to Howe. “Mr. Howe received it under the condition on which I took it from Mrs. Davison—to compare it with the ‘Book of Mormon,’ and then return it to her.” Hurlbut denied that he promised to give Davison any portion of the profits if the manuscript was published.<sup>84</sup> In another statement made two years later, Hurlbut said, “This manuscript I left with E. D. Howe, of Painesville, Geauga Co., Ohio, now Lake Co., Ohio, with the understanding that when he had examined it he should return it to the widow. Said Howe says the manuscript was destroyed by fire, and further the deponent saith not.”<sup>85</sup> For his part, Howe claimed that Hurlbut “never said a word to me about returning the MS. that he brought me, as it was of no earthly importance as far as the Mormon Bible was concerned.” He also said that he never had any correspondence with Mrs. Davison.<sup>86</sup> When Ellen Dickenson interviewed Howe in 1880, she reported that

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84. D. P. Hurlbut statement, 19 August 1879, Gibsonburg, Ohio, in Ellen E. Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885), 260.

85. D. P. Hurlbut statement, 10 January 1881, Gibsonburg, Ohio, in Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 245.

86. E. D. Howe to Robert Patterson Jr., 24 September 1879, Painesville, Ohio, from transcript of Arthur D. Vanick, Wayne L. Cowdrey, Howard A. Davis, and Hugh L. O’Neal, *The Spalding Enigma: Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* CD © 2000.

Howe said that he “considered it [the manuscript] of no account, and did not know what became of it.” When asked if he had not agreed to return it to Mrs. Davison, he replied: “Perhaps I did; but it wasn’t of no account, so I did not think of it.”<sup>87</sup>

There is some evidence that Howe was not entirely happy with the rediscovery of “Manuscript Story” in 1884. Arthur B. Deming, an anti-Mormon collector of negative statements about Joseph Smith and early Mormonism, visited and obtained testimony from early residents of northeastern Ohio in 1884 and 1885. After learning of the rediscovery of the Spalding manuscript in Hawaii, Deming reported that he visited E. D. Howe in Painesville.

I told Mr. E. D. Howe that word had been received from the Sandwich Islands that Spaulding’s manuscript from which the “Book of Mormon” was made, had been found there, without mentioning Rice’s name. Mr. Howe trembled and become greatly excited. I told a clergyman in the town that he could not have been much more so if the Sheriff had read his death warrant. A few days later he said he was failing and wanted to die. I finally read to him Mr. W. H. Rice’s letter and that relieved his fears, for he said Rice used to edit the *Telegraph* and he probably had Conneaut story, which proved to be correct.<sup>88</sup>

The bottom line is that, whether deliberate or not, Howe’s faulty 1834 description and subsequent suppression of “Manuscript Story” prevented early investigators from comparing the only evidence of Spalding’s much vaunted literary skill and the manuscript’s style with the Book of Mormon.<sup>89</sup> It also allowed some anti-Mormon

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87. Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 72.

88. Arthur B. Deming, “About Spalding,” *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1/1 (January 1888): 2.

89. Years later, when interviewed in 1881 in his elderly years, Howe let slip that the recovered manuscript was “a common-place story of some Indian wars along the borders of our great Lakes, between the Chicagoes and Eries, as I now recollect—not in Bible style—but purely modern.” E. D. Howe to Thomas W. Smith, 26 July 1881, in Charles A. Shook, *The True Origin of the Book of Mormon* (Cincinnati, OH: Standard, 1914), 75–76. In another interview two years later (August 1883), he remembered that “it only told

writers to claim that the Mormons had somehow obtained or purchased the real “Manuscript Found” from Hurlbut and subsequently destroyed it. (To their credit, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick reject this theory [p. 59].)

*Genuine but vague memories of “Manuscript Story.”* The 1884 re-discovery of “Manuscript Story” supported the theory that Spaulding’s neighbors had mistakenly conflated “Manuscript Story” with popular ideas and perceptions they had about the Book of Mormon. In 1886 James Fairchild could grant that “the discovery of this manuscript does not prove that there may not have been another, which became the basis of the Book of Mormon, but it seems clearly to furnish a presumption against the existence of another; and it is doubtful whether the evidence on the subject, thus far published, can set aside this presumption.”<sup>90</sup> “It would not be surprising,” wrote George Gibson, “if the shadowy resemblance of a few names and incidents common to both, such as the finding of ancient records relating to aboriginal life, should after this long lapse of time persuade them that one was based upon the other. . . . The writer believes that

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about some tribes of Indians and their wars along the lakes here and pretended to be the writing of some shipwrecked crew. It was the wars of the Winnebagoes, Chicagoes or Niagaries, I believe.” E. L. Kelley interview with E. D. Howe, August 1883, in 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, MO: Christian and Smart, 1884), 83. In 1834, Howe had not mentioned that the retrieved manuscript dealt with wars among the Indians. Upon learning of these additional details some observers understandably wondered how many other details had been omitted by Howe from his 1834 description. After learning of Howe’s statement, Joseph Smith III, president of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, suggested, “The statement of Mr. Howe in regard to the manuscript which he received from Mr. Hurlbut, that it was a history of war between hostile tribes of Indians ‘along the borders of our great lakes,’ opens ground for the presumption that this was the production read to the family and neighbors of Rev. Spaulding, and accounts for the recollection of the destructive battles fought in the regions of western New York and northern Ohio, of which so much is made as to their similarity to the Book of Mormon.” Joseph Smith III to R. Patterson, 20 January 1883, in *The Spaulding Story Re-examined* (Lamoni, IO: Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, 1883), 9.

90. James H. Fairchild, “Mormonism and the Spaulding Manuscript,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 43 (January 1886): 171.

any other Spaulding manuscript than this is a myth, and that the story is due to imagination, allied to defective memory.”<sup>91</sup> German historian Eduard Meyer suggested that Spaulding’s former neighbors “unconsciously projected” the contents of the Book of Mormon into their recollections of the “Manuscript Story.”<sup>92</sup>

Howe reported that, after examining the manuscript retrieved by Hurlbut, some of Spaulding’s former neighbors claimed that it bore “no resemblance to the *Manuscript Found*.”<sup>93</sup> A comparison between their statements and “Manuscript Story,” however, shows otherwise. While the resemblances do not account for the entire content of those statements, they suggest that the signers of the eight statements had in fact recalled elements in “Manuscript Story,” even if they later denied having done so. Artemus Cunningham claimed that the Book of Mormon derived its outlines from Spaulding’s manuscript, even though he had only “partially examined” the Book of Mormon and admitted that “the general features of the story have passed from my memory through the lapse of 22 years.” One feature he did recall was Spaulding’s fictitious description of finding his manuscript “buried in the earth, or in a cave.”<sup>94</sup> That statement matches Spaulding’s description in the introduction to “Manuscript Story” of uncovering a stone, which proved to be the opening to “an artificial cave,” and his claim that at the bottom of the cave he discovered the manuscripts from which he took his story.<sup>95</sup>

In another statement, John Miller affirmed that Spaulding often shared his manuscript with him. “From this he would frequently read some humorous passages to the company present.”<sup>96</sup> Any reference to “humorous passages” in the Book of Mormon is untenable, though, as anyone who has read it can attest. However, obvious attempts at

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91. George R. Gibson, “The Origin of a Great Delusion,” *New Princeton Review* 61/5 (September 1886): 214–15.

92. Eduard Meyer, *The Origin and History of the Mormons*, trans. Heinz F. Rahde and Eugene Seach (Salt Lake City: University of Utah, 1961), 29.

93. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 288, emphasis added (*no resemblance*).

94. Cunningham, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 287.

95. MS, 1, in Spaulding, *Manuscript Found* (Jackson ed.), 1.

96. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.



lowbrow humor *are* found in the Spalding manuscript.<sup>97</sup> Moreover, Miller's reference to the "manners [and] customs"<sup>98</sup> of the people in Spalding's manuscripts may recall the concern of Spalding's fictional narrator Fabius about "preserving our customs, manners" and his wondering if the posterity of their colony would "preserve our customs & manners."<sup>99</sup>

Henry Lake was the only individual among the eight former neighbors who said that he remembered the name *Laban*. "One time, when he was reading to me the tragic account of Laban, I pointed out to him what I considered an inconsistency, which he promised to correct; but by referring to the Book of Mormon, I find to my surprise that it stands there just as he read it to me then."<sup>100</sup> Lake never specified what the inconsistency was, nor did he describe the details of a Laban story in either the Book of Mormon or Spalding's manuscript. There is, though, nothing particularly tragic about the death of Laban in the Book of Mormon; he was a wicked and greedy individual who tried several times to murder Nephi and Nephi's brothers (see 1 Nephi 3–4). The description fits quite well, however, with Spalding's narrative of honorable *Labanko*, whose death at the hands of the villain Sambal led to further hostilities and bloodshed among the opposing groups in Spalding's story. One might argue that Lake is remembering another manuscript, but a more plausible interpretation is that he had a vague recollection of the Labanko episode and, in 1833, after hearing of the Book of Mormon, confused the two somewhat similar names. The comparison is shown below.

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97. For example, one of the Roman sailors in the Spalding story mused on the possibility of choosing a native wife: "I could pick out a healthy plum Lass from the copper coloured tribe that washing & scrubbing her fore & aft & upon the labbord & stabbord sides she would become a wholesome bedfellow." MS, 20, in Spaulding, *Manuscript Found* (Jackson ed.), 12. This is, to put it mildly, a rather different style of writing than that found in the Book of Mormon.

98. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

99. MS, 19, 30, in Spaulding, *Manuscript Found* (Jackson ed.), 12, 21.

100. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282.

Henry Lake Statement (Sept. 1833)	<i>Manuscript Story</i> , Jackson edition
One time, when he was reading to me the tragic account of <i>Laban</i> , I pointed out to him what I considered an inconsistency, which he promised to correct; but by referring to the Book of Mormon, I find to my surprise that it stands there just as he read it to me then. <sup>101</sup>	While <i>Labanko</i> was engaged in combat with another chief, Sambal th<r>ust his sword into his side—Thus <i>Labanko</i> fell lamented & beloved by all the subjects of the empire of Kentuck. His learning wisdom & penetration of mind—his integrity, firmness & courage had gained him universal respect & given him a commanding influence over the Emperor & his other Councillors—He was viewed with such respect & reverance, that the death of no man could have produced more grief & lamentation—& excited in the minds of the Kentucks a more ardent thirst for revenge.—The officers of his phalanx exclaimed revenge the death of <i>Labanko</i> ( <i>MS</i> , 148). <sup>102</sup>

In addition to the examples above, the two statements by John and Martha Spalding also have many elements that correspond well to the language and themes found in “*Manuscript Story*.” In order to highlight these elements, representative parallels are given in the columns below.

John and Martha Spalding Statements <sup>103</sup>	<i>Manuscript Story</i> , Jackson edition
They afterwards had quarrels and <i>contentions</i> (John Spalding) disputes arose <i>between the chiefs</i> (Martha Spalding)	Frequent bickerings, <i>contentions</i> & wars took place <i>among these Chiefs</i> , which were often attended with pernicious consequences ( <i>MS</i> , 85).

101. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282, emphasis added.  
102. These excerpts are facsimile transcriptions that reflect the writing on the original manuscript, including original spelling and punctuation, deletions (cross-outs), and insertions in angle brackets. Italics are not in the original but are added for emphasis.  
103. For the statements by John Spalding and Martha Spalding, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–80.

John and Martha Spalding Statements	<i>Manuscript Story</i> , Jackson edition
and separated into <i>two distinct nations</i> (John Spalding) which caused them to separate into different lands (Martha Spalding)	Lobaska had formed a system of Government, with a design of establishing <i>two great empires</i> —one on each side of the River Ohio (MS, 86).
<i>Their arts, sciences</i> and civilization were brought into view (John Spalding)	religion & <i>arts and sciences</i> (MS, 19) the <i>arts and sciences</i> (MS, 29)
He represented them as an enlightened and warlike people (Martha Spalding)	<del>Thou must know that this Country was once. Inhabited by great and powerful nations. C]onsiderably civilized &amp; skilled in the arts [ ]ts of war</del> (MS, 3).
Cruel and <i>bloody wars</i> ensued, in which great multitudes were slain (John Spalding) Between these were recounted tremendous <i>battles</i> (Martha Spalding)	<del>On the ground wher thou [ ] treadest many an hard fou a bloody Battle hath been faught &amp; heroes by thousand have been made to bite the dust</del> (MS, 3–4). An emence slaughter was made. Near One hundred thousand were extended breathless on the field (MS, 151–52).
Between these were recounted tremendous battles, which frequently covered the ground with the slain (Martha Spalding)	The field was wid<e>ly strewed, & in many places thickly <i>covered</i> with human bodies—extended in various positions—on their sides the backs & faces— <del>some with their arms &amp; legs widely spread some with their mouths open &amp; eyes stairing</del> mangled with swords spears & arrows & besmeared with blood & dirt—Most hedious forms & dreadful to behold! Such objects excited horror & all the sympathetic & compassionate feelings of the human heart (MS, 153).

John and Martha Spalding Statements	<i>Manuscript Story</i> , Jackson edition
<p>They <i>buried</i> their dead in <i>large</i> heaps, which caused the <i>mounds</i> so common in this country (John Spalding) and their being buried in <i>large</i> <i>heaps</i> was the cause of the numerous <i>mounds</i> in the country (Martha Spalding)</p>	<p>They dug holes about three feet deep &amp; in a circular form &amp; of about twenty or thirty feet diamiter. In these they deposited the bodies of their deceased heroes &amp; then raised over them <i>large</i> <i>mounds</i> of earth. The bodies of the Chiefs who had fallen were carried to their respective armies &amp; <i>buried</i> with all the solemnities of woe—over them they raised prodigious <i>mounds</i> of earth—which will remain for ages, as monuments to commemorate the valiant feats of these heroes &amp; the great battle of Geheno (MS, 153). Many hundreds of their Enimies they perced with their deadly weapons &amp; caused <i>heaps</i> of them to lie prostrate (MS, 157).</p>
<p>Their arts, sciences and civilization were brought into view, in order to account for all the curious antiquities, found in various parts of North and South America (John Spalding)</p>	<p><del>In the history given of these nations by my Author you will find nothing but what will correspond with the natural sentiments we should form on viewing the innumerable remains of Antiquity which are scattered over an extensive Country.</del> (MS, 4).</p>
<p>Some of these people he represented as being very <i>large</i> (Martha Spalding)</p>	<p>As to their persons, they were taller on an avarage than I hade ever seen in any nation—their bones wer <i>large</i>, limbs strait &amp; shoulders broad (MS, 40).</p>

Additional evidence suggests that another of Spalding's former neighbors may also have remembered elements from Spalding's romance. Joseph Miller Sr., who lived near Spalding after his move from Conneaut, Ohio, to Amity, Pennsylvania, provided statements in 1869 and 1879 that seem to point to Spalding's manuscript. In the Book

of Mormon, “the heads of the Lamanites were shorn” (Alma 3:5), while the Amlicites had not shaved their heads but “had marked themselves with red in their foreheads after the manner of the Lamanites” (Alma 3:4). In 1869 and in 1879 Miller said that after having his son read to him portions of the Book of Mormon he thought that he recalled an element that he believed paralleled the account of the Amlicites marking themselves before their battle with the Nephites. As the comparison below suggests, however, it is more likely that Miller actually recalled what he considered similarities from “Manuscript Story.”

Joseph Miller Statements	<i>Manuscript Story</i> , Jackson edition
He speaks of a battle, and says the Amelikites had <i>marked themselves with red</i> on their <i>foreheads</i> to distinguish them from the Nephites. The thought of being marked on the forehead with red was so strange, it fixed itself in my memory. <sup>104</sup> Then on hearing read the account from the book of the battle between the Amalekites and the Nephites, in which the soldiers of one army, had placed a <i>red mark</i> on their <i>foreheads</i> to distinguish them from their enemies, it seemed to reproduce in my mind not only the narrative, but the very words as they had been impressed on my mind by the reading of Spaulding’s manuscript. <sup>105</sup>	The one half of the <i>head</i> <of the men> was shaved & <i>painted with red</i> —& the one half of the face was painted with black (MS, 21).

The above examples suggest a clear relationship between the statements purportedly describing “Manuscript Found” and the contents of “Manuscript Story.” Spalding proponents may reason that if “Manuscript Story” was an early version of Spalding’s novel, later abandoned and revised for “Manuscript Found,” one could expect such similarities in

104. Joseph Miller Sr. statement, 26 March 1869, in the *Washington Reporter*, 8 April 1869; reprinted in *Historical Magazine* (August 1869): 68.  
105. Joseph Miller Sr. statement, in *Pittsburgh Telegraph*, 6 February 1879.

an earlier version. But why, then, does Howe represent the Conneaut neighbors as claiming that there *were* no such similarities? That Howe and these witnesses would suggest that the recovered manuscript bore “no resemblance” to what they described in their statements to Hurlbut raises questions about the reliability of their testimony since there *are* obvious resemblances upon which their later perceptions and ideas about the Book of Mormon may have been grafted.

*Remembering things that were never there.* While the 1833 Spalding testimonies reflect memories of “Manuscript Story,” this does not account for the entire content of those statements. *The Spalding Enigma* argues that these additional unique elements not found in “Manuscript Story” show that some Conneaut residents recalled content from a now missing “Manuscript Found.” These individuals outlined the main elements of the Spalding narrative as they said they remembered it; they indicated that it exactly or nearly exactly resembled the historical part of the Book of Mormon. They claimed that they first made the connection between Spalding’s unpublished novel and the Mormon scripture only after having read the Book of Mormon. But what they describe in their testimony is a rather vague, general, popularized perception of the Book of Mormon rather than a careful description of the text itself. Significant details about the Book of Mormon narrative are utterly lacking from these statements. Spalding’s “Manuscript Found,” they said, was a story of the first settlers of America, in which the Indians were shown to be descendants of the lost ten tribes of Israel, who came from Jerusalem under Lehi and Nephi, journeyed by land and sea to America, divided into two rival groups, and had bloody and destructive wars. The mounds, fortifications, and other American antiquities proved the ancient existence of their civilization.

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick believe that, since some of these elements are not found in “Manuscript Story” but are mentioned in the 1833 affidavits, they could only have come from a second manuscript that contained the additional material and was also close to the Book of Mormon story. It is likely, however, that the Spalding witnesses were influenced by popular characterizations then current about the Book

of Mormon, which they came to associate with Spalding's unfinished tale. General outlines of the Book of Mormon narrative were published in the American press between 1830 and 1834. In addition to newspapers, many New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio residents would have heard similar descriptions in discussions and town meetings held by missionaries or their opponents without ever having read the Book of Mormon. What the 1833 Spalding testimony contains are general descriptions that might have been gathered from popular sources and that lack the details that would be gleaned from reading the book itself. In addition to these vague generalities, Spalding's former Conneaut neighbors also associate ideas with the Book of Mormon account that are not actually contained *in* it but were commonplace in discussions *about* it. This, in my view, is a strong indicator that they were influenced by popular perceptions rather than a careful reading of the Book of Mormon text (even if they had read it at all). It also lends support to the suspicion that they confused these popular non-textual themes with their memories of "Manuscript Story."

The Spalding statements describe that manuscript as an account of the "first settlers of America," an idea they also attribute to the Book of Mormon. That this was a common public perception of the Book of Mormon can be seen in various newspaper accounts of the time. For example, as one writer observed, the Book of Mormon addresses important questions such as "Who were the discoverers of America?" and "How [did] this continent originally become peopled?"<sup>106</sup> This, in fact, was the interpretation of many early Latter-day Saints as well. After attending several church meetings in Missouri, a non-Latter-day Saint reported: "They contended that in this way alone could we rationally account for the fact that the New World and all the South Sea Islands were inhabited by human beings when first discovered by Columbus, Cook, and other navigators."<sup>107</sup> While this was a common assumption, it was not one based on the Book of Mormon text, which

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106. *Vermont Patriot and State Gazette*, 19 September 1831, found at [sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NE/miscne01.htm#091931](http://sidneyrigdon.com/dbroadhu/NE/miscne01.htm#091931) (accessed 27 February 2006).

107. P. H. B., "The Mormonites," *Ohio Eagle*, 20 April 1833.

never claims that its peoples were the first or the only peoples in pre-Columbian America.<sup>108</sup>

In 1833, John Spalding recalled that, in “Manuscript Found,” his brother endeavored “to show that the American Indians are the descendants of the Jews, or the *lost tribes*.”<sup>109</sup> In another statement, published in 1851, John Spalding remembered that “Nephi, of the tribe of Joseph, emigrated to America with a large portion of the ten tribes whom Shalmanezzer led away from Palestine, and scattered among the Midian cities.”<sup>110</sup> Solomon Spalding “had for many years,” according to Martha Spalding, “contended that the aborigines of America were descendants of some of the *lost tribes of Israel*, and this idea he carried out in the book in question.”<sup>111</sup> “This book,” according to Henry Lake, “represented the American Indians as the descendants of the *lost tribes*.”<sup>112</sup> Aaron Wright claims he saw “a history he [Spalding] was writing, of the *lost tribes of Israel*, purporting that they were the first settlers of America, and that the Indians were their descendants.”<sup>113</sup> The idea that the Book of Mormon was about the fate of the lost ten tribes was an inaccurate but common early perception. Just months after the publication of the Book of Mormon, one article reported that “the book purports to give an account of the ‘Ten Tribes.’”<sup>114</sup> “On these plates,” agreed Baptist David Marks, “was engraved the history of the ten lost tribes of Israel.”<sup>115</sup>

As Latter-day Saints and other critics of the Spalding theory have observed, though, this is not an accurate description of the Book of Mormon, which actually concerns only a small remnant of the tribe

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108. Matthew Roper, “Nephi’s Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 91–128; and John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, “Before DNA,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 6–23.

109. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279, emphasis added.

110. John Spalding statement, 1851, in “The Yankee Mahomet,” *American Whig Review* 13/78 (June 1851): 554.

111. Martha Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280, emphasis added.

112. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282, emphasis added.

113. Wright, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284, emphasis added.

114. *Wayne County Inquirer*, circa May 1830, reprinted in the *Cincinnati Advertiser and Ohio Phoenix*, 2 June 1830.

115. *Morning Star*, 7 March 1833.



of Joseph. The Book of Mormon is a record of that group and not of the lost tribes of Israel, whose history falls entirely outside the knowledge of Nephite writers. “And behold, there are many who are already lost from the knowledge of those who are at Jerusalem. Yea, the more part of all the tribes have been led away; and they are scattered to and fro upon the isles of the sea; and *whither they are none of us knoweth*, save that we know that they have been led away” (1 Nephi 22:4). The account in 3 Nephi indicates that Jesus visited them after he appeared to the Nephites in America, but the Book of Mormon is silent regarding their location and history (3 Nephi 17:4).

The claim that Spalding’s work was a “history” of the lost ten tribes raises other significant problems for the theory as well, since Spalding’s story was said to be identical or nearly so with the Book of Mormon narrative (p. 28). The ten tribes were a numerous host, while Lehi’s party in the Book of Mormon was only a small group of several families. Key events described in the text about Lehi’s family make sense only in the context of a small group traveling through the wilderness. The episode with Laban, the quest for wives for Lehi’s sons, the problem of supplying food encountered when Nephi’s bow broke, and the building of Nephi’s single ship are not consistent with the idea of a numerous host of Israelites, yet the historical parts of the Book of Mormon are supposed to be the same as those attributed to Spalding.<sup>116</sup> The attribution of this mistaken history of the lost ten tribes to the Book of Mormon again manifests the influence of rumor or hearsay about it rather than of a meaningful perusal.

In describing the people portrayed in his brother’s manuscript, John Spalding indicated that “they buried their dead in large heaps, which caused the *mounds so common in this country*. Their *arts, sciences* and *civilization* were brought into view, in order to account for all the curious *antiquities*, found in various parts of North and South America.”<sup>117</sup> In similar language, Martha Spalding says that “their being buried in large heaps was the cause of the numerous *mounds* in

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116. George Reynolds, *The Myth of the “Manuscript Found,” or the Absurdities of the “Spaulding Story”* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1888), 47–51.

117. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–80, emphasis added.

the *country*.”<sup>118</sup> “He told me,” reported Aaron Wright, “his object was to account for all the *fortifications*, &c. to be found in *this country*, and said that in time it would be fully believed by all.”<sup>119</sup> By producing his manuscript, Spalding, according to Oliver Smith, “would give a satisfactory account of all the old *mounds*, *so common to this country*.”<sup>120</sup> “I once in conversation with him,” remembered Nahum Howard, “expressed a surprise at not having any account of the inhabitants once in *this country*, who erected the old *forts*, *mounds*, &c.”<sup>121</sup> According to Artemus Cunningham, Spalding, in his work, “attempted to account for the numerous antiquities which are found upon *this continent*.”<sup>122</sup>

The Book of Mormon appeals to revelation from God, not to archaeological evidence, for verification of its truthfulness (Moroni 10:3–7). But Latter-day Saint writers and missionaries have often appealed to such evidence in presentations of the Book of Mormon and have sometimes used the subject of archaeological remains as a means of generating and promoting interest in the book. Moreover, in the early 1830s (before Stephens and Catherwood made the spectacular ruins in Mesoamerica famous), their thinking about American antiquities was primarily focused, just as Solomon Spalding’s had been two decades earlier, *but in a manner extraneous to the Book of Mormon text itself*, on North American Indian mounds and fortifications. In June 1833, using language similar to that of the 1833 Spalding testimony, William W. Phelps wrote, “No people that have lived on *this continent*, since the flood, understood many of the *arts and sciences*, better than the Jaredites and Nephites, whose brief history is sketched in the Book of Mormon.” Phelps described an ancient structure found in North Carolina as a “relic of *antiquity*” that “showed the *arts of civilized life* were well understood by *the inhabitants* of this antique dwelling place of human beings.”<sup>123</sup> The history of Book of Mormon peoples and their wars “is manifest from the existing remains of *mounds* and

118. Martha Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280, emphasis added.

119. Wright, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284, emphasis added.

120. Smith, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 285, emphasis added.

121. Nahum Howard, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 285–86, emphasis added.

122. Cunningham, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 287, emphasis added.

123. “Good Proof,” *Evening and Morning Star*, June 1833, 99, emphasis added.

*fortifications* [that] have formerly been on *this continent*.”<sup>124</sup> One visitor to the early Latter-day Saints noted that “they referred to the relics of *ancient structures* which are to be found in many parts of *our contry* to prove the fact that *this continent* was long since inhabited by a race of men acquainted with many of the *arts of civilized life*.”<sup>125</sup> As noted above already, Spalding’s former neighbors seem to have retained some recollections of “Manuscript Story,” but their attempt to connect Spalding’s theories about American antiquities to something in the Book of Mormon narrative manifests the influence of popular perceptions and theories about the Book of Mormon in their minds, rather than a reading of the Book of Mormon text itself.

In his 1833 statement, John Miller claimed that Spalding, in explaining his unpublished novel, “landed his people near the Straits of Darien, which I am very confident he called *Zarahemla*, they were marched about the country for a length of time, in which wars and great blood shed ensued, he brought them across North America in a north east direction.”<sup>126</sup> *The Spalding Enigma* presents this statement as compelling evidence that, in his writings, Spalding “had his immigrants land in Central America, and not in the area of the Chesapeake Bay as is found in *Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek*” (p. 87). “Because Miller could not have gotten the name ‘Darien’ from *The Book of Mormon*, it becomes difficult to explain where he did get it, unless it was from Spalding himself—which means that the literary creation recalled by Miller could not have been *Manuscript Story—Conneaut Creek*, but rather had to have been some other Spalding work” (p. 87).

It is true, of course, that the word *Darien* never occurs in the Book of Mormon. A more plausible explanation for John Miller’s apparent memory, however, is that Miller gleaned these ideas from public descriptions of the Book of Mormon by missionaries who visited Erie County, Pennsylvania, where he lived, and that he then attributed these later ideas to Spalding. In fact, Miller’s statement sounds like the early geographical view advanced by Orson Pratt. A young convert in 1830, Pratt

124. *Morning Star*, 7 March 1833, emphasis added.

125. P. H. B., “The Mormonites,” emphasis added.

126. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283.

was ordained an apostle in 1835 after having served many missions for the church. In 1832 and 1833 these took him through various parts of northwestern Pennsylvania. During his long and distinguished service as a defender of the Book of Mormon, Pratt's arguments were highly influential, as were his geographical views. In his first published work on the Book of Mormon, Pratt placed the narrow neck of land on the Isthmus of Darien and suggested that the "people of Zarahemla" eventually settled south of that location in the northern regions of South America, where they ultimately united with the Nephites.<sup>127</sup> Although he first published this view in 1840, he and others publicly discussed those ideas much earlier. Howe seemed to be aware of this Book of Mormon theory when he called Lehi "the founder of the vast settlements which were situated on the isthmus of Darien."<sup>128</sup>

In early 1832, a year before Hurlbut joined the church, Orson Pratt and Lyman Johnson served a mission to the eastern states during which they passed through northwestern Pennsylvania. A newspaper correspondent in Mercer County, Pennsylvania, described a cottage meeting in which Johnson and Pratt preached and gave a brief description of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and the Nephite narrative. According to this report, the missionaries said that "the last battle that was fought among these parties was on the *very ground* where the plates were found, but it had been a running battle, for they commenced at the Isthmus of Darien and ended at Manchester,"<sup>129</sup> which would, obviously, have them moving in a northeast direction, just as in John Miller's statement. When we compare Pratt's popularized narrative of the Book of Mormon with 1833 descriptions of the Spalding manuscript, each comparison suggests the borrowing of themes and language from the former for the latter, as shown in the columns below. In the left column are selections from Orson Pratt's first published account on the Book of Mormon in 1840 and the secondhand description of the earlier Pennsylvania correspondent's

127. Orson Pratt, *A Interesting Account of Several Remarkable Visions, and of the Late Discovery of Ancient American Records* (Edinburgh: Ballantyne and Hughes, 1840), 18, 21.

128. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 23.

129. "The Orators of Mormon," Cincinnati, Ohio, *Catholic Telegraph*, 14 April 1832, emphasis in original.

report from 1832. On the right are parallels from the Hurlbut statements, which clearly reflect similar ideas and phraseology.

Orson Pratt	Hurlbut statements <sup>130</sup>
A certain prophet called <i>Lehi</i> went out to declare and promulgate the prophecies to come (1832). <sup>131</sup>	[People in ms were led] under the command of Nephi and <i>Lehi</i> (John Spalding) the names of Nephi and <i>Lehi</i> are yet fresh in my memory (Martha Spalding)
He came across the <i>water</i> into <i>South America</i> (1832).  They came to the great waters, where, by the commandment of God, they built a vessel, in which they were safely brought across the great Pacific ocean, and landed on the western coast of <i>South America</i> (1840). <sup>132</sup>	It gave a detailed account of their journey from Jerusalem, by land and <i>sea</i> , till they arrived in <i>America</i> (John Spalding) He gave a particular account of their journey by land and <i>sea</i> , till they arrived in America (Martha Spalding) Spalding's story accounts "for all the curious antiquities, found in various parts of North and <i>South America</i> " (John Spalding)
Who with others went to <i>Jerusalem</i> (1832). This remnant of Joseph were also led in a miraculous manner <i>from Jerusalem</i> (1840).	It gave a detailed account of their journey <i>from Jerusalem</i> (John Spalding) which first came off <i>from Jerusalem</i> (Martha Spalding)
They were divided into <i>two parties</i> ; one wise, the other foolish (1832). From these ancient records, we learn, that this remnant of Joseph, soon after they landed, <i>separated</i> themselves into <i>two distinct nations</i> (1840).	They afterwards had quarrels and contentions, and <i>separated into two distinct nations</i> , one of which he denominated Nephites and the other Lamanites (John Spalding)

130. For these statements from John Spalding, Martha Spalding, and Miller, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–80, 283.

131. For these 1832 citations, see "The Orators of Mormon."

132. For these 1840 citations, see O. Pratt, *Interesting Account*, 16, 7, 18, 21.

Orson Pratt	Hurlbut statements
The former were called <i>Nephites</i> , being led by a prophet whose name was Nephi. The latter were called <i>Lamanites</i> , being led by a very wicked man whose name was Laman (1840).	one of which he denominated <i>Nephites</i> and the other <i>Lamanites</i> (John Spalding)
[The Lamanites are] the <i>Indians</i> of the Rocky Mountains (1832). It was also made manifest to him, that the “ <i>American Indians</i> ” were a remnant of Israel (1840).	endeavoring to show that the <i>American Indians</i> are the descendants of the Jews, or the lost tribes (John Spalding)
<i>Tens of thousands</i> were very frequently slain, after which they were <i>piled together in great heaps</i> upon the face of the ground, and covered with a shallow covering of earth, which will satisfactorily account for those ancient <i>mounds</i> , filled with human bones, so <i>numerous</i> at the present day, both in <i>North and South America</i> (1840).	Cruel and bloody wars ensued, in which <i>great multitudes</i> were <i>slain</i> . They <i>buried their dead in large heaps</i> , which caused the <i>mounds so common</i> in this country. Their arts, sciences and civilization were brought into view, in order to account for all the curious antiquities, found in various parts of <i>North and South America</i> (John Spalding) Between these were recounted <i>tremendous battles</i> , which frequently covered the ground with the <i>slain</i> ; and their being <i>buried in large heaps</i> was the cause of the <i>numerous mounds in the country</i> (Martha Spalding)
The <i>last battle</i> was fought among these parties was on the very ground where the plates were found, but it had been a running battle, for they <i>commenced at the Isthmus of Darien</i> and ended at Manchester (1832). This <i>war commenced at the Isthmus of Darien</i> , and was very destructive to both nations for many years. At length the Nephites were driven before their enemies, a great distance to the north, and <i>north-east</i> (1840).	he landed his people near the <i>Straits of Darien</i> , which I am very confident he called Zarahemla, they were marched about that country for a length of time, in which <i>wars</i> and great blood shed ensued, he brought them across North America in a <i>north east</i> direction (John Miller)

The secondhand report shows that Pratt (and probably others) were expressing similar views in their missionary presentations of the Book of Mormon in northwestern Pennsylvania as early as the winter of 1832. The comparison also shows that the Spalding statements share specific words and phrases used by Orson Pratt. Instead of evidence for a second Spalding manuscript, Miller's statement more likely reflects early Latter-day Saint interpretations of Book of Mormon geography as expressed by early missionaries. Significantly, Pratt visited Springfield, Erie County, Pennsylvania, a year later, in 1833, and preached to a congregation there on 4 April 1833.<sup>133</sup> Hurlbut, then a recent convert serving a mission, was also in attendance at that meeting, although there is no record of him preaching.<sup>134</sup> Springfield is the very place where John Miller lived when he provided Hurlbut with a statement in September of that year. Did he hear Orson Pratt in Springfield or at least rumors of Pratt's preaching? While we cannot be certain, the similarity in language suggests that, later that year, in his statement to Hurlbut, Miller attributed these popularized missionary views to Spalding's "Manuscript Story." It is also highly probable that Hurlbut as a missionary would have been familiar with these ideas and themes—we know that he heard Orson Pratt speak in person at least once, and Pratt's geographical speculations would probably have been circulating in the small Mormon community of the time—and it may well be that Hurlbut himself prompted Miller to think of Darien and related matters. Either possibility could account for the geographical reference without the need to see it as evidence for a second manuscript. More important, attribution of this geographic view to the Book of Mormon suggests that Miller's statement is not based on careful examination of the Book of Mormon text but is, instead, based on extemporized missionary discussions, local rumor, newspaper accounts, or some combination of the three. Since Hurlbut was responsible for gathering the Spalding statements, we have to wonder about Hurlbut's possible influence on the structure, language, and content of those 1833 testimonies concerning Spalding. Before addressing

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133. Zebedee Coltrin journal, 4 April 1833, typescript on New Mormon Studies CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

134. Zebedee Coltrin journal, 4 April 1833.

the question of such influences, I will first review the background of Philastus Hurlbut himself.

### Hurlbut: A Man, a Legend, a Way of Life

The basic tale of Doctor Philastus Hurlbut is well known to scholars of early Mormon history.<sup>135</sup> However, in view of his pivotal role in developing both the Spalding theory and much of its alleged supporting evidence, it seems advisable to summarize his career here.

*Early background of Hurlbut.* Scant sources on his early life suggest that he, prior to joining the church, had previously been a Methodist preacher in New York but had been excluded from that society for immoral conduct.<sup>136</sup> By early March 1833, he had joined the Latter-day Saints and visited with the Prophet in Kirtland. In an account of this visit, written about a year afterward, Joseph Smith recalled that "Doctor P. Hurlbut came to my house; I conversed with him considerably about the Book of Mormon. . . . According to my best recollection, I heard him say, in the course of conversing with him, that if he ever became convinced that the Book of Mormon was false, he would be the cause of my destruction."<sup>137</sup> Shortly thereafter, Hurlbut was ordained an elder and sent on a mission to western Pennsylvania.<sup>138</sup> While a missionary, however, he was accused of immoral behavior. Benjamin Winchester, a young convert at the time of Hurlbut's odyssey in and out of the church, provided an unflattering portrait of him:

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135. Dale W. Adams, "Doctor Philastus Hurlbut: Originator of Derogatory Statements about Joseph Smith, Jr.," *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 20 (2000): 76–93; Max H. Parkin, "The Nature and Cause of Internal and External Conflict of the Mormons in Ohio between 1830 and 1838" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1966), 88–92. On Hurlbut's 1834 trial involving Joseph Smith, see David W. Grua, "Joseph Smith and the 1834 D. P. Hurlbut Case," *BYU Studies* 44/1 (2005): 33–54.

136. Benjamin Winchester, *The Origin of the Spaulding Story: Concerning the Manuscript Found* (Philadelphia: Brown, Bicking, and Guilpert, 1840), 5; Hiram Rathbun, to Joseph Smith III, 17 July 1884, in *Saints Herald* (2 August 1884).

137. Joseph Smith journal, 13 March 1833, in *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 2:20.

138. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 18–19 March 1833, in *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, ed. Fred C. Collier and William S. Harwell (Salt Lake City: Collier's, 1996), 11–12; Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 6.



While in this region of country, he made several converts in Crawford county, Pa. He frequently called, and stayed over night, at my father's; which afforded me an opportunity of forming a correct estimate of the man. The church ultimately lost their confidence in him, in consequence of the discovery, that the organ of amateness, philoprogenitiveness, or some other organ, not of a moral mould, was unduly developed, and that the gratification of these propensities manifested itself in numerous peccadillos, disgraceful to the man, and calculated to bring upon him the reproach of every lover of virtue and correct morals.<sup>139</sup>

Orson Hyde, who was Hurlbut's missionary companion at the time, related that, "while the said Mr. Hurlbert was a member of our church, and an elder also, it fell to my lot to travel with him to preach the gospel; and it was at my instance that a charge was preferred against him before the Council of the church for an attempt at seduction and crime."<sup>140</sup> Hyde and Hyrum Smith then returned to Kirtland, where they filed charges against Hurlbut. According to the minutes of the council, the

first case before the conference was that of Doctor Hurlbert who was accused of unchristian conduct with the female sex while on a mission to the East. It was decided that his commission be taken from him and that he be no longer a member of the Church of Christ.<sup>141</sup>

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139. Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 6. In later years an older, religiously disaffected Winchester, no longer a member, recalled that he "was deputed by them to hunt up the Hurlbert case. It was Hurlbert (A relative of mine) that got up the Spaulding story. Hurlbert was a sharp, tonguey fellow. He joined the Mormons and became an elder. He seduced a girl named Barns. We as the church, to cover up the matter, urged him to marry her. He refused and then we expelled him" (Testimony of Benjamin Winchester, 27 November 1900). For background on Winchester, see David J. Whittaker, "East of Nauvoo: Benjamin Winchester and the Early Mormon Church," *Journal of Mormon History* 21/2 (1995): 31–83; Stephen J. Fleming, "Discord in the City of Brotherly Love: The Story of Early Mormonism in Philadelphia," *Mormon Historical Studies* 5/1 (2004): 3–28.

140. Hyde to Adams, in Page, *Spaulding Story*, 10.

141. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 3 June 1833, in *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, ed. Collier and Harwell, 14.

Shortly afterward, Hurlbut petitioned the council for a rehearing because he had not been present, and on 21 June 1833, the council reviewed the matter:

Bro Hurlburt's case was laid before the court & the testimony against him given by Orson Hyde & Hyrum Smith and duly investigated. It was decided that Bro H should be forgiven because of the liberal confession which he made. The council decided that the Bishop's council decided correctly before, and that Bro H's crime was sufficient to cut him off from the Church, but on his confession, he was restored.<sup>142</sup>

George A. Smith, who was present at this meeting later recalled:

He confessed his wickedness to the Council. I was present, and heard him. He promised before God, angels, and men that he would from that time forth live his religion and preserve his integrity, if they would only forgive him. He wept like a child, and prayed and begged to be forgiven. The Council forgave him; but Joseph told him, "You are not honest in this confession."<sup>143</sup>

"In returning into Pennsylvania," according to Winchester, "he stopped at Thompson, Geauga county, Ohio, and immediately commenced his old practices, in attempting to seduce a young female, but Providence interposing, frustrated his diabolical designs. For this crime he was immediately expelled from the church, and his license [to preach] called for, but he refused to give it up."<sup>144</sup> Benjamin F. Johnson

142. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 21 June 1833, in *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, ed. Collier and Harwell, 16.

143. *Journal of Discourses*, 7:113 (10 January 1858). George A. Smith said at a later date: "Hurlburt did not deny the charge, but begged to be forgiven, made every promise that a man could make that he would from that day live a virtuous life. Finally the Council accepted of his confession, and agreed that he might on public confession be restored to the Church again. . . . As soon as the Council had made this decision upon Hurlburt, Joseph arose, and said to the Council, he is not honest, and what he has promised he will not fulfil; what he has confessed are not the thoughts and intents of his heart, and time will prove it." George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:8 (15 November 1864).

144. Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 6.

indicates that, after his reinstatement, Hurlbut “became enamored or greatly in love with Electra, sister of L[yman] R. Sherman; and because she dispised him for his immorality and rejected his suit he swore revenge upon the whole community, and boastfully declared he would destroy the church.”<sup>145</sup> It was apparently this episode to which Sidney Rigdon had reference in 1839 when he claimed that Hurlbut “was excluded for using obscene language to a young lady, a member of said Church, who resented his insult with indignation, which became both her character and profession.”<sup>146</sup> At the time, Hurlbut apparently boasted that he had deceived Joseph Smith with a false confession. Two days after his reinstatement on 23 June, the council met again to review Hurlbut’s case.

Bro D. P. Hurlburt’s case was called in question this day before a general council and upon the testimony of Bro Gee of Thompson, who testified that Bro D. P. H. said that he had deceived Joseph Smith, God, or the Spirit by which he is actuated &c&c. The council proceeded to cut him off from the Church. There was also corroborating testimony brought against him by Bro Hodges.<sup>147</sup>

Following his excommunication, Hurlbut began to lecture against Mormonism. Having heard rumors that Solomon Spalding, a former resident of Conneaut, Ohio, had written a manuscript about a pre-Columbian migration to the Americas, he was hired by local anti-Mormons to go to Pennsylvania and New York to gather testimony against the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith. During late August and September 1833, he obtained testimony from some of Spalding’s former neighbors in western Pennsylvania and then went to New York, where in November and December he solicited and obtained a set of negative affidavits from some of Joseph Smith’s former neighbors in

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145. Benjamin F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review: Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin Johnson* (Provo, UT: Grandin Book, 1997), 18.

146. Sidney Rigdon, “Communications,” *Quincy Whig*, 8 June 1839 (penned 27 May 1839).

147. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 23 June 1833, in Collier and Harwell, *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, 16.

Palmyra and Manchester. He also retrieved the “Manuscript Story” from a trunk belonging to Spalding’s widow, after which he returned to Kirtland to continue his lectures.

It was in late December 1833, apparently during one of his lectures, that Hurlbut reportedly threatened the life of Joseph Smith. No contemporary accounts of the event are known; however, later accounts indicate that Hurlbut had actually threatened to kill Joseph. George A. Smith, the Prophet’s cousin, recounted in Utah that Hurlbut “had said he would wash his hands in Joseph Smith’s blood.”<sup>148</sup> Other sources less critical of Hurlbut claim that the apostate only meant that he would kill Mormonism, not Joseph Smith.<sup>149</sup> After lengthy testimony, however, the judge ruled that Joseph Smith *did* have reason to fear physical harm from Hurlbut, who was fined and ordered to keep the peace for six months.<sup>150</sup> Hurlbut turned over his materials to E. D. Howe, soon left town and got married, and moved to Girard, Pennsylvania.

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick accuse early Latter-day Saints of exaggerating the reasons for Hurlbut’s excommunication and suggest that they maliciously smeared Hurlbut with unfair charges of immoral and adulterous behavior for what may have been a mere verbal indiscretion. “It was not until considerably later—some time after a strongly anti-Mormon book (in which Doctor Hurlbut had a hand) was published in November 1834—that Mormons began to actively circulate more lurid stories about Hurlbut and adultery in what appears to have been an active smear campaign” (p. 35). Some of the confusion over the reasons for Hurlbut’s excommunication arises from a letter Rigdon wrote to the *Quincy Whig* in 1839.<sup>151</sup> There he says that Hurlbut “imposed himself on the Church of the ‘Latter-day Saints,’ and was excluded for using obscene language to a young lady, a member of said Church, who resented his insult with indignation, which became both her character and profession.” This has led some

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148. *Journal of Discourses*, 11:8.

149. J. C. Dowen statement, 20 January 1885, Arthur B. Deming File, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society.

150. For a detailed discussion of this legal proceeding, see Grua, “Joseph Smith and the 1834 D. P. Hurlbut Case,” 33–54.

151. Rigdon, “Communications,” 8 June 1839.

writers to conclude that Hurlbut's offense was merely verbal in nature. Picking up on this, the authors suggest that the Saints had expelled poor Hurlbut simply because "something he said had allegedly outraged a young lady" (p. 167). They also note that obscene language "is a far cry from the 'attempt at seduction and crime'" that was attributed to him by other Latter-day Saints (p. 167). Rigdon, however, also associates Hurlbut with lying and adultery in the same letter, so his reference to Hurlbut's profanity more likely has reference to his activities in Thompson before his final exclusion, rather than to his earlier behavior in Pennsylvania or New York. Most other sources speak of Hurlbut's "adultery" or "adulterous" behavior, which suggests that more than offensive language was involved.<sup>152</sup>

According to Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, "The earliest direct claim that Hurlbut was 'excluded from the Church for adultery'" did not appear until 1838 (p. 436 n. 49). This is incorrect. The reasons for Hurlbut's excommunication were discussed by Joseph Smith shortly after the apostate's final excommunication. On 18 August 1833, Joseph Smith wrote to W. W. Phelps in Missouri:

We are suffering great persicution on account of one man by the name of Docter Hurlburt who has been expeled from the chirch for lude and adulterous conduct and to spite us he is lieing in a wonderful manner and the peopl are running after him and giveing him mony to brake down mormanism which much endangers <our lives> at pre=asnt but god will put a stop to his carear soon and all will be well<sup>153</sup>

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152. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828) defined *adultery* as "1. Violation of the marriage bed; a crime, or a civil injury" and also "2. In a scriptural sense, all manner of lewdness or unchastity, as in the seventh commandment," emphasis added. Marriage is not a prerequisite for adulterous behavior in this latter sense; consequently, *adultery* or *adulterous* under early nineteenth-century usage could include a variety of immoral behaviors from fornication to other unspecified actions.

153. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps and others, 18 August 1833, in *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, ed. and comp. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 287. Joseph Smith's description is consistent with the later recollection of anti-Mormon S. F. Whitney, who stated in 1885 that, in Hurlbut's 1834 trial, Joseph Smith said that Hurlbut had been "expelled for base conduct with lude women." S. F. Whitney statement, March 1885, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1/1 (January 1888): 3.

Those sources that mention Hurlbut's excommunication, some of them written by persons who were present at his disciplinary proceedings, give a generally consistent picture of Hurlbut's moral problem. Joseph Smith, who presided at the proceeding, described "lute and adulterous conduct"<sup>154</sup> or "adultery,"<sup>155</sup> a description that agrees with that offered by Parley P. Pratt.<sup>156</sup> Orson Hyde, Hurlbut's missionary companion during the Pennsylvania transgressions, characterized Hurlbut's behavior as "an attempt at seduction and crime."<sup>157</sup> Benjamin Winchester spoke of "numerous peccadillos" and immoral tendencies, which included seduction of a girl in Pennsylvania<sup>158</sup> and later an "attempt to seduce a young female" at Thompson, Ohio.<sup>159</sup> The official church record spoke of "unchristian conduct with the female sex."<sup>160</sup> George A. Smith, another witness of the proceedings, mentioned "improper conduct among females,"<sup>161</sup> Benjamin F. Johnson mentioned "illicit association,"<sup>162</sup> and Joel Johnson "illicit intercourse [interaction] with the sex."<sup>163</sup> Even Rigdon's 1839 reference links Hurlbut with adultery. Whatever the specifics of Hurlbut's behavior, these descriptions are fairly consistent and do not support the charge that Latter-day Saints had misrepresented the facts of Hurlbut's case. The statements above indicate that Joseph Smith and others consistently characterized Hurlbut's behavior as adulterous.

*Hurlbut's later difficulties.* In a footnote, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick briefly mention evidence that Hurlbut, who joined the United Brethren in Christ in the 1840s, was excluded from that denomina-

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154. Joseph Smith to W. W. Phelps and others, 18 August 1833, in *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 287.

155. "Argument to Argument Where I Find It; Ridicule to Ridicule; and Scorn to Scorn," *Elders Journal* 1/4 (August 1838): 59.

156. Parley P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled: Zion's Watchman Unmasked, and Its Editor, Mr. L. R. Sunderland Exposed . . .* (New York: Pratt, 1838), 37.

157. Hyde to Adams, in Page, *Spaulding Story*, 10.

158. Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 6.

159. Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 6.

160. Kirtland Council Minute Book, 3 June 1833, in *Kirtland Council Minute Book*, ed. Collier and Harwell, 14.

161. George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:113.

162. B. F. Johnson, *My Life's Review*, 18.

163. J. E. Johnson, *Deseret Evening News*, 3 January 1881.

tion for charges similar to those for which he had earlier been excommunicated by the Latter-day Saints (as well as to those for which he may have been expelled, even earlier, from the Methodists). Although not quoted by the authors, they allude to a statement made by Hiram Rathbun in 1884. Rathbun had been a member of the United Brethren and a minister in that church at the time of Hurlbut's exclusion and was personally familiar with the events surrounding that action. Speaking of Hurlbut, Rathbun remembered "a constantly growing uneasiness about his improprieties; until the fall of 1851, when he was held before the Sandusky Annual Conference of said church, for a trial on charges of gross improprieties toward the opposite sex, lying, and intemperance." Rathbun claimed that "each charge; to wit, First improprieties toward the opposite sex; Second, lying; Third, intemperance, was clearly and fully sustained; and he was suspended from the ministry one year; and as that year he grew from bad to worse, he was entirely excommunicated at the next session of the conference which was held in the fall of 1852."<sup>164</sup> The authors discount this evidence as coming from "pro-Mormon" sources (p. 450 n. 42). Support for Rathbun's account, however, can be found in the minutes of the Sandusky Annual Conference, extracts of which were published in the *Ohio Religious Telescope*. According to these minutes, the deliberations over Hurlbut's case began on Friday, 19 September 1851, but the conference did not vote until Monday morning, 22 September, giving the members of the conference time to evaluate and ponder their decision over the weekend. In his later account, Rathbun asserted that he

was one of that honorable, august body of Elders, who for over two days before Bishop Edwards; patiently heard his trial, and thoroughly and faithfully investigated all the testimony in his case. And we all came to the same conclusion, that he was a very bad man, and guilty of each charge made against him. We all voted yes. I, *Hiram Rathbun*, voted on the case to suspend him from the ministry for one year, and by so doing

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164. Hiram Rathbun to Joseph Smith III, Lansing, Michigan, 17 July 1884, in *Saints Herald* 31/31 (2 August 1884): 492.

give him a chance to redeem himself, but he went on from bad to worse, and at the next Annual Conference of 1852, by vote we excommunicated him from the church for improprieties with the opposite sex, for lying, and for intemperance.<sup>165</sup>

The official minutes for 1851 list Hurlbut as present, and in 1852 as present, but under suspension. The minutes also list Rathbun among the ministers present at the 1852 conference, showing that he was there, but do not list him as a minister, either present or absent in 1851. This is probably because Rathbun did not receive approval from the committee on examination to receive a license to preach until the Saturday morning session, the day after the Hurlbut deliberations began. Since his recommendation for the ministry was pending midconference, he may have been allowed to attend the Friday deliberations on Hurlbut. If not, he could still have learned of them over the weekend before the Monday morning decision.

The 1851 minutes relevant to the Hurlbut case appear as follows:

In the progress of the examination the name of D P Hurlbut being called, and it appearing that he had been suspended from the office of the ministry until the session of this body, conference resolved itself into committee of the whole to try the case.

The charges on which he had been tried and suspended, were as follows:

1st. For trying to take advantage of his fellow-men.

2d. For making assertions which he afterwards contradicted.

3d. For making use of light and unchristian conversation, and thereby lessening his usefulness as a minister of the Gospel.

. . . . After a hearing of the testimony and the remarks of the plaintiff and defendant, it was

*Resolved*, That the case be deferred for decision until Monday morning—at which time the following action was taken.

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165. Rathbun to Joseph Smith III, 17 July 1884, 492.



*Resolved*, 1st. That in the case of Br. D. P. Hurlbut, we believe there is dishonesty in the land case.

2d. That the third charge is sustained by testimony.

3d. That he be suspended from the office of the ministry until the setting of the next Sandusky Annual Conference, where the case may come up for final decision.

*Resolved*, That this conference feels deeply wounded by the reflections cast by way of imputation by D. P. Hurlbut and others, on those whom duty called to inquire into the moral deportment of said D. P. H. for the last year.<sup>166</sup>

Although given a chance to reform, Hurlbut apparently did not; such was the judgment of the 1852 conference one year later:

The name of D P Hurlbut being called, the journal relating to the action of last conference in his case, was read, and his case taken up for final decision. After considerable deliberation it was moved, that D P Hurlbut be entirely suspended from the ministerial office. This resolution was adopted.

Reasons for this suspension,—

1st. For having failed to render that satisfaction to conference and others, (by repentance and otherwise,) which they had a just cause to expect of him, in consequence of charges detrimental to the sacred office of the ministry sustained against him, for which he was suspended for one year.

2nd. Upon reliable testimony given to this conference, his deportment during suspension, has been unworthy of the sacred office of a minister of the gospel.<sup>167</sup>

The description of charges in the minutes is general and, as is frequently the case in church records, there is no mention of the specifics of the actions in question. Rathbun, who states he attended both the 1851 and 1852 proceedings, remembered the charges more specifically as “lying,” “intemperance,” and “gross improprieties with the

166. “Conference Minutes,” *Religious Telescope*, 8 October 1851, emphasis in original.

167. “Conference Minutes,” *Religious Telescope*, 6 October 1852.

opposite sex.” Does Rathbun’s account contradict the official minutes? Although, at first glance, this description may not seem to agree with the church record, a more careful examination shows that Rathbun’s account, though more specific, is consistent with that description. This can be shown if we look at each of the three charges in turn.

The 1851 minutes call the first charge against Hurlbut “trying to take advantage of his fellow men” and reports that, after examination of testimony, Hurlbut’s dishonesty, apparently in relation to a land deal, was sustained. This is consistent with Rathbun’s charge of lying. The second charge noted in the minutes was “making assertions which he afterwards contradicted,” without stating what specific assertions were made. One clue to the nature of the charge, however, appears in the notation in the minutes for 1851: “The question was asked whether a preacher may be tried after an acquittal on the same charge before a similar tribunal. The chair decided in the affirmative.” Where had Hurlbut been “acquitted on the same charge before a similar tribunal”? In 1848, Hurlbut had been charged before this same religious body with “imprudent conduct towards women,” but the charge at that time was not sustained. Additionally, he was accused in 1848 of “clubbing [i.e., abusing] other denominations when preaching” (also not sustained for want of evidence), and also for “trifling conversation when out of pulpit.” The 1848 minutes say that Hurlbut confessed to the third charge but promised to improve, “though improvement is claimed by defendant, and promise of future amendment.”<sup>168</sup>

Today the word *conversation* usually refers to “speaking”; however, in nineteenth-century usage the term *conversation* was not confined to this but, as Webster’s 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* indicates, referred more broadly to “general course of manners; behavior; deportment; especially as it respects morals.”<sup>169</sup> The word *trifling* denotes a lack of seriousness as in the word *trifle*, mean-

168. “Minutes of the Sandusky Annual Conference,” *Religious Telescope*, 8 March 1848.

169. Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828), s.v. “conversation.” Apparently unaware of this distinction, Dale Adams mistakenly describes the 1848 charge as participating in “trifling conversations,” implying only verbal activity. Adams, “Doctor Philastus Hurlbut,” 86. In the 1848 minutes, the word is in the singular (“conversation”). “Conference Minutes,” *Religious Telescope*, 8 March 1848.

ing “to act or talk without seriousness or gravity, weight or dignity; to act or talk with levity.” The 1848 charge to which Hurlbut confessed, though not specifically described, would have been behavior of some kind that was inconsistent with the solemnity or seriousness becoming a minister. Hurlbut apparently saw the 1851 charges as related or similar to one or more of these earlier ones. So to what did the language of the official second charge in 1851—“making assertions which he afterwards contradicted”—refer? Rathbun’s firsthand testimony suggests that the second charge was related to intemperance. If so, the reference in the minutes to assertions later contradicted likely refers to earlier pledges to either give up drinking or to avoid drunkenness. Although temperance is not stated in the language of the official charge, circumstantial evidence appears in the minutes for the 1852 conference, where, following the account of Hurlbut’s final suspension, a resolution to support temperance legislation was adopted, “so as effectually to stay the immolation of the innumerable sacrifices daily made to the Moloch of intemperance, of the interests, bodies and souls of men.”<sup>170</sup>

The third charge in the 1851 minutes, of “making use of light and unchristian conversation,” was also sustained by testimony. While the term *light* can denote the practice of giving something little weight or concern, it can also mean “wanton” or “unchaste.” Rathbun remembered Hurlbut using foul language: “The obscene language I heard him use to an old minister in abusing him when all alone, and as he supposed, no one hearing him, was so disgraceful and black that I would not tell it under any consideration, except under oath.” Here one is reminded of Rigdon’s reference to Hurlbut. Rathbun, however, claimed that the third charge of “gross improprieties with the opposite sex” was sustained. Based on these considerations, the question before the ministers of the United Brethren in 1851 and 1852 was not simply one of foul language, but apparently of unchaste or immoral behavior with the opposite sex. Whatever the specific details of that behavior, by 1852, the conference decided that Hurlbut had not repented, and he was “entirely suspended from the ministerial office.”

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170. “Conference Minutes,” *Religious Telescope*, 6 October 1852.

Although these activities occurred a number of years after Philastus Hurlbut's encounter with Joseph Smith, one cannot help but be struck by the similarities between the reasons for his 1850s exclusion from the United Brethren, his earlier excommunication from the Latter-day Saints for immoral behavior and making false professions of repentance, and even his reported pre-Mormon expulsion from the Methodists. The record is clear and regrettably consistent, suggestive of a pattern of behavior. An indication of possible marital difficulties between Hurlbut and his wife after his ejection by the United Brethren may also be relevant in this context: Citing census data, Dale Adams has shown that Hurlbut was not living with his wife Maria in 1860 but with another woman, two years his junior, and three of her children. Whatever the nature of that relationship, he was living with his wife again by 1870.<sup>171</sup>

*The Clapp trap.* In his 1839 letter to the *Quincy Whig*, Sidney Rigdon alluded to a strange episode that, he claimed, had occurred between Hurlbut and the Campbellite deacon Onis Clapp in Ohio some time after Hurlbut's excommunication from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

While Hulburt was busily employed in the service of the company, old deacon Clapp was employed in taking care of his wife. How many others of the company aided in this business must be left to futurity to disclose. At a certain time, Hulburt being out till a late hour in the night, returned to his house, and in going to his bed-room where his wife was, behold and lo! there was the pious old deacon, either in the bed with his wife, or at the side of it. He had a five dollar banknote in his hand, and his dress was rather light to suit the Doctor's taste; for he was not quite as well off as was Aaron, when he offered sacrifice; not even having on a pair of "linen breaches." Hulburt laid hold of him and called for help, which soon came to his assistance. The pious old deacon was arraigned before a justice of the peace, and was on the eve of being bound over for his appearance to the county court,

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171. Adams, "Doctor Philastus Hurlbut," 87.

when to put an end to the evils which might result from his pious care of Mrs. Hurlburt, he kindly offered a yoke of oxen and a hundred dollars; this was accepted. Hurlburt took his wife and left the county forthwith.<sup>172</sup>

According to Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, Rigdon's story is an example of "outrageous falsehood," and they see this as evidence of deliberate lying on Rigdon's part. "The truth is, Mrs. Hurlbut could not possibly have been seeing Deacon Clapp as Rigdon accused because Doctor Hurlbut was a bachelor at the time, and there simply was not any Mrs. Hurlbut." Hurlbut married Maria Sheldon Woodbury on 29 April 1834. "Several weeks after that, he and his new bride moved to Girard settlement, Elk Creek Township, Erie County, Pennsylvania." Consequently, "Rigdon's scurrilous allegation quickly evaporates into nothing more than the vitriolic hot air from whence it came" (p. 168).

But while Rigdon may have enjoyed relating the story and may perhaps be accused of a lack of charity toward an enemy, the accusation of willful deception on this point seems unfounded. Rigdon may even have gotten the chronology wrong in relating the episode, mistakenly assuming that it occurred while Hurlbut was still employed as an anti-Mormon researcher, but the authors present no evidence to indicate that Rigdon knew that Hurlbut's anti-Mormon activities had ceased after Hurlbut left Kirtland. Based on the undeniably zealous

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172. Rigdon, "Communications," 8 June 1839. Sidney Rigdon apparently alluded to the episode in 1836 when he suggested that Campbellite opponents of the church such as Darwin Atwater, who were circulating copies of *Mormonism Unveiled*, might do well to get "the history of old Clapp, his wife's father, to carry with him; so that he can shew the people Campbellism unveiled also." Sidney Rigdon to Oliver Cowdery, *Messenger and Advocate* 2/9 (June 1836): 385. In a lengthy editorial on persecution, and apparently interpreting the affair in the worst light possible, Rigdon referred to "The shameful and disgraceful house kept by old Clapp, of Mentor, where all men and women were at liberty to come and slander the saints, not even prostitutes excepted, *as late revelations have shown*: Let it be remembered, that this old Clapp is a Campbellite deacon, whose house was devoted to defamation, slander, and to crown the whole, ADULTERY! How far the priests, who frequented his house, have criminated themselves in this last act of impropriety, remains yet to be disclosed; but people have a just right to draw their own conclusion, respecting the character of the priests, from the company they keep, and the character of the house they frequent." Sidney Rigdon, "Persecution," *Messenger and Advocate* 3/4 (January 1837): 436–37.

anti-Mormonism of both men, Rigdon may simply have wrongly but understandably interpreted any additional association between Hurlbut and Clapp as likewise anti-Mormon. But being mistaken on a detail is not the same as being deliberately deceitful nor even the same as being altogether wrong. As we shall see, although it obviously could not have occurred before Hurlbut's marriage, reports of the incident cannot be summarily brushed aside.

The evidence suggests that, after residing for a year in Pennsylvania from June 1834 to June 1835, the Hurlbuts spent several months back in Mentor, Ohio, perhaps trying to pick up the pieces after their unsuccessful farming venture in Pennsylvania, and that after several months they left there in the fall of 1835. Maria Hurlbut informs us that "in June we settled in Elk Creek Township Erie Co Pa and made improvements one year and [then] found our title to the land was not good. We moved to Mentor O and left there in the fall and moved to Bedford St. Laurence Co Mich."<sup>173</sup>

The first reference in print to the incident of Deacon Clapp and Mrs. Hurlbut appeared in a December 1835 editorial in the *Messenger and Advocate*, which noted that Hurlbut "is also an associate of the celebrated Mr. Clapp, who has of late immortalised his name by swearing that he would not believe a Mormon under oath; and by his polite introduction to said Hurlburt's wife, which cost him (as we have been informed) a round sum."<sup>174</sup> This would place the incident no later than December 1835. There was, thus, plenty of time between the Hurlbuts' move to Mentor, Ohio, in June of 1835 and the reference to the episode of Deacon Clapp at the end of that year for the event to have occurred—and, if so, it would have occurred well after the April 1834 marriage of Philastus Hurlbut to Maria Woodbury. Accordingly, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick's chronological objection does not appear to be sustained by the facts.

In an editorial in 1838, Joseph Smith indicated that "old deacon Clapp of Mentor ran and took him [Hurlbut] and his family into the house with himself, and so exceedingly was he pleased with him, that

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173. Maria S. Hurlbut statement, 15 April 1885, Deming File, emphasis in original.

174. Smith, "To the Elders of the Church of the Latter Day Saints," 228.

purely out of respect to him, he went to bed to his wife. This great kindness and respect, Hurlbut did not feel just so well about but the pious old deacon gave him a hundred dollars and a yoke of oxen, and all was well again.”<sup>175</sup> In 1838, Parley P. Pratt reported that, for a time, Hurlbut “was assisted by one Deacon Clapp, who, by and by, became so familiar with Hurlbut’s wife, that he had some hundred dollars to pay; besides endangering his *Deaconship*.”<sup>176</sup>

Other descriptions of the incident give it a different twist. In later years Benjamin F. Johnson indicated that, after Hurlbut was married, the apostate and his wife stayed for a time with a wealthy citizen who had previously supported his anti-Mormon activities. Johnson says that his non-Mormon father, Ezekiel Johnson, related to him that Hurlbut, “in connection with his wife, put up a job on the old man, and drew him into a woman snare, from which they would not release him until after payment of \$500.00. With this money, despised and hated by all parties, he left that vicinity.”<sup>177</sup> Calvin Ingersoll, a non-Mormon who lived in Mentor, Ohio, said that Hurlbut worked for him for a time. “He [Hurlbut] lived at the time in Judge Clapp’s house. Hurlbut’s wife inticed a wealth[y] citizen to go to bed with her. When this party was in the act of getting into bed, Hurlbut, who was secreted under the bed, caught him by the legs. Hurlbut began a lawsuit for damages, which was settled by the defendant without trial.”<sup>178</sup>

*The usual suspect.* As if these sordid rumors about him were not enough, *The Spalding Enigma* makes passing mention of a more disturbing possibility noted by others that Philastus Hurlbut may have been involved in the robbery and murder of an elderly man in Mentor, Ohio, in 1837 (p. 363).<sup>179</sup> On 30 November 1837, the *Painesville Republican*

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175. “Argument to Argument,” 59.

176. P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 37.

177. B. F. Johnson, *My Life’s Review*, 18–19. Johnson’s identification of the wealthy citizen as a man named Randall is probably mistaken, given that all other sources indicate that it was Deacon Clapp.

178. Calvin Ingersoll statement, [1885], Arthur B. Deming File, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society.

179. See also Dale Broadhurst, “D. P. Hurlbut and the 1837 Death of Garrit Brass in Mentor, Ohio,” at [home1.gte.net/dbroadhu/RESTOR/Lib/Dmg1885b.htm](http://home1.gte.net/dbroadhu/RESTOR/Lib/Dmg1885b.htm) (accessed 9 December 2005).

reported the death of a “Mr. Brass,” of Mentor, Ohio, an old war veteran, who was receiving a pension for his Revolutionary War services and who had been living alone. His partially burned body was found in the ruins of his log cabin, which had burned to the ground.<sup>180</sup> In a statement made in 1885, published by A. B. Deming, Mrs. H. W. Wilson said, “I was well acquainted with Garrit Brass and his family. It was generally believed by the citizens of Mentor that Mr. Brass was murdered, his house robbed and then burned to conceal the crime. The ruins were searched for specie [coins] Mr. Brass was known to have, but none was found.”<sup>181</sup>

In December 1947, Dale Morgan wrote to Fawn Brodie describing a set of affidavits in the Chicago Historical Society that had been collected by A. B. Deming in 1885 but that had never been published. “Deming also had half a dozen statements bearing on Hurlbut in 1836–37, which he may have kept unpublished because they weren’t especially helpful to his anti-Mormon crusade—they had to do with accusations of theft made against Hurlbut at that time.”<sup>182</sup> These include four statements by Esther Brass Scott, Calvin Ingersoll, Mrs. J. D. Barber, and Mrs. Alvors, residents of Mentor, Ohio, which after Rigdon’s conversion to Mormonism in late 1830 became a center of anti-Mormon activity. The unpublished Deming statements indicate that Hurlbut returned to Mentor in late 1837, at least briefly working odd jobs for local residents such as Calvin Ingersoll, with whom he often took meals.<sup>183</sup> During this time, Ingersoll claimed, “Hurlbut, who lived in Henry Munson’s house, moved west the night Mr. Bras was burned with his cabin. He was pursued by citizens of Mentor who recovered from him various articles which he had stolen.”<sup>184</sup> In her statement, Mrs. Barber declared, “D. P. Hurlbut, who lived in my cousin’s Harry [Henry?] Munson’s house, in Mentor, moved west the

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180. “Shocking Calamity,” *Painesville Republican*, 30 November 1837.

181. Mrs. H. W. Wilson statement, 23 April 1885, in *Naked Truths about Mormonism* 1/2 (April 1888): 3.

182. Dale Morgan to Fawn Brodie, 24 December 1947, in *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence & A New History*, ed. John Phillip Walker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 142–43. I would like to thank Dale Broadhurst for bringing these documents to my attention.

183. There is no indication that his wife, Maria, was living with him at the time.

184. Ingersoll statement, 1885, Deming File.



night of the fire. He was pursued and overtaken by citizens who recovered from him carpets, chains, farming tools, and other things which he had stolen from them.”<sup>185</sup> In another statement, Esther Brass Scott, a daughter of Garrit Brass, noted that when the ruins of the cabin were examined, “No trace of feathers from his bedding being found, and no money of which he was known to have, several hundred dollars in gold and silver, part of which was paid to him a few days before by a neighbor, and his pension money received the day before.”<sup>186</sup>

Some Mentor neighbors reported that Hurlbut had been spending a lot of time with Brass before his sudden departure the night of the fire and suspected that he was responsible and that he had robbed the old man of his money and set the fire to hide the crime. Esther Scott said that her sister, a Mrs. Bronson, was living in Michigan at the time. Bronson reported that, shortly after the death of her father, a man matching Hurlbut’s description stopped at her house for a meal. Learning from where he came, she asked if he knew Mr. Brass and that he had been murdered. She said “he seemed uneasy, acted strangely and soon left. It so impressed her that he knew something about it, she wrote back with a description of him which satisfied my brother that it was the same Hurlbut that left Mentor, and it helped to strengthen and confirm them in their previous suspicions. I think that a warrant was issued, but in those early times the roads were bad, settlements sparse, and so much uncertainty and expense attending the pursuit of criminals they were unable to make the arrest, and pursue it as it could be done now should anything occur.”<sup>187</sup> This information is consistent with Winchester’s 1840 claim that, after his unsuccessful farming venture in Girard, Pennsylvania, Hurlbut “was reduced to beggary, took to stealing for a livelihood, was detected in stealing a log chain, fled the country, to escape justice, and that is the last of him, so far as I know.”<sup>188</sup> If Hurlbut was responsible for the death of Brass, Joseph Smith’s earlier fears that

185. Mrs. J. D. Barber statement, 1885, Arthur B. Deming File, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society.

186. Esther Brass Scott statement, May 1885, Arthur B. Deming File, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society.

187. Scott statement, May 1885, Deming File.

188. Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 11.

Hurlbut was capable of physical violence were well founded. The evidence available so far, however, does not allow us to establish Hurlbut's culpability beyond dispute. What we can say is that Latter-day Saints were scarcely the only people who held Hurlbut in low esteem.

While the evidence above paints an unflattering picture of Hurlbut, it does not prove that he invented the Spalding theory itself. As already noted, it appears that at least some of Spalding's former neighbors had already come to associate his unpublished tale with the Book of Mormon before Hurlbut arrived on the scene. Given his animosity toward Joseph Smith and potential financial motivations for exposing Mormonism, I suspect that Hurlbut dearly wanted to prove a Spalding connection and pursued that goal with zeal and enthusiasm. Given his background and incentive, however, one must wonder what impact or influence—intentional or unintentional—Hurlbut had on the testimony published by Howe.

*Hurlbut's likely influence on the Spalding testimonies.* When evaluating the Spalding statements gathered by Philastus Hurlbut and published by E. D. Howe, one must remember that these statements were not solicited in a vacuum but were solicited and obtained in a region where the church was already known and vilified. Historians have noted the almost universally negative image of Mormonism in the early press accounts of the day. Just a few months after the publication of the Book of Mormon, missionaries were making their message known as they traveled through New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Many of the earliest converts joined the church as a result of these activities. After the Saints established themselves in Kirtland, missionaries continued to labor in northeastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania, where they continued to encounter success. Such missionary activity was alarming to rival religionists and troubling to those who saw many of their former friends and neighbors joining the movement. This concern often manifested itself in opposition to the missionaries and the Saints.

In 1832, Samuel Smith and Orson Hyde traveled through northeastern Ohio and western Pennsylvania. On 2 February, Hyde and the Prophet's brother preached in Perry, Ohio, to "a large congregation, principally Campbellites; much prejudiced and hard against the work

and they were much stirred up to oppose and to contend.”<sup>189</sup> Nine days later they passed through Salem, Ohio: “Found some friendly and some enemies.”<sup>190</sup> The next day, according to Samuel Smith, they preached to a congregation: “They paid good attention; were much disappointed in the things we declared unto them for they had heard much evil concerning this sect. They [the congregation] requested us to tarry and preach again, accordingly the next evening.”<sup>191</sup> A year later, while trying to hold a meeting at Elk Creek, Pennsylvania, missionary Evan M. Greene reported that he “had some persecution. None came in to oppose, but were around the house firing guns and covering up the chimney.”<sup>192</sup> On 17 March, at the same place, Greene wrote: “Had a meeting at school house. Baptist man arose and began throwing clubs but put the cudgel in our hands and we used it. After meeting had the privilege of baptizing three.”<sup>193</sup> “By mid 1833, the Church of Christ (Mormonism’s official title in the early 1830s) was well established in Erie County, having well over a hundred local members.”<sup>194</sup> Some of Spalding’s former neighbors who did not accept the message of the restoration would not have been happy about that.

So when Hurlbut visited Erie County, Pennsylvania, in early 1833, first as a missionary and then later that same year, after his excommunication, to lecture and solicit testimony against the Book of Mormon, he was in a place where some were already vehemently opposed to Mormonism. Those in such a position would gain a certain amount of notoriety by having their statements and opinions published in a book exposing what they already considered to be a delusion. This has

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189. Samuel H. Smith journal, 2 February 1832, in Cheryl Harmon Bean and Pamela Call Johnson, *Rediscovering History: Mormons in Erie County, Pennsylvania 1832–1833* (St. Anthony, ID: Cheryl’s Creations and Publications, 1995), 14.

190. Orson Hyde journal, 11 February 1832, in Bean and Johnson, *Rediscovering History*, 20.

191. Samuel H. Smith journal, 12 February 1832, in Bean and Johnson, *Rediscovering History*, 15.

192. Evan M. Greene missionary journal, 2 February 1833, in Bean and Johnson, *Rediscovering History*, 26.

193. Greene missionary journal, 17 March 1833, in Bean and Johnson, *Rediscovering History*, 32.

194. Steven C. Harper, “The Restoration of Mormonism to Erie County, Pennsylvania,” *Mormon Historical Studies* 1/1 (1999): 8.

led critics of the Spalding theory to believe that, either deliberately or inadvertently, Hurlbut put thoughts into the minds of his respondents, and words into their mouths.

Undoubtedly some of the former neighbors and associates of Mr. Spaulding must have remembered that he had written a romance of ancient America, and the suggestion would have been natural that his book, never printed, “might have been the same” as this new “revelation.” The lapse from the subjunctive mood to the indicative is easy in the case of rumors in rural communities. Consequently, within a short time, numerous persons might be found willing to state that the two books were certainly the same. But, as frequently remarked, rumor travels almost as fast as it grows in bulk. The professed identification of the writings of Spaulding coming to the ears of such men as Hurlburt and Howe, would have been eagerly followed up by them, and worked to the limit.<sup>195</sup>

As for Spalding’s former neighbors,

The *Book of Mormon* was fresh in their minds, while their memories of Spaulding’s reading from his manuscript reached decades into the past. . . . We must suspect that [Hurlbut] was not without his own manipulative abilities as he pursued what he was after. He was grinding an important ax, and his respondents were certainly also motivated: The manuscript of their brother, relative, and friend had been plagiarized—in what they considered to be a blasphemous cause—and they would have vengeance. So they remembered what Hurlbut suggested, thus giving birth to the Spaulding-Rigdon theory.<sup>196</sup>

According to *The Spalding Enigma*, Hurlbut probably visited John and Martha Spalding first and “then used what they had told him

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195. Robert C. Webb (pseudonym for James E. Homans), *The Case against Mormonism* (New York: Walton, 1915), 51.

196. Ernest H. Taves, *Trouble Enough: Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon* (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1984), 54–55, emphasis in original.

to prepare a list of written questions for use as a guideline in interviewing subsequent witnesses” (pp. 49–50). One problem is that this method would, perhaps even inadvertently, narrow the range of questions asked and information given by respondents as Hurlbut zealously sought confirmation for what John and Martha told him from subsequent witnesses. Hurlbut’s method was one of “first interviewing or questioning his witnesses at length, then preparing a written statement for signature summarizing the results” (p. 51). The explanation in *The Spalding Enigma* tacitly concedes the contention of Brodie and others that the voice in the Spalding affidavits is Philastus Hurlbut’s rather than that of Spalding’s neighbors. This explains the similar language in the eight statements. If Hurlbut was asking the questions and then writing the statements himself based on those answers, the odd references to similar names also make sense. That they had already come to believe that the Book of Mormon was based on Spalding’s manuscript and were willing to assist Hurlbut in his quest to debunk Mormonism is obvious. The problem for historians, however, is that since these eight individuals did not write the statements themselves, we cannot know what their testimony might have been in the absence of Hurlbut. Put another way, how much of Hurlbut is in the Spalding testimonies? Does his involvement enhance or diminish their credibility? Hurlbut’s influence is apparent in his selection of testimony, in the structure and language of the statements themselves, and in the choice of names and phrases attributed to “Manuscript Found.”

One area in which Hurlbut’s influence is unavoidable is in his *selection* of testimony. In 1834 Howe stated: “We *might* therefore introduce a great number of witnesses all testifying to the same general facts; but we have not taken the trouble to *procure* the statements of *but few*, all of whom are the most respectable men, and highly esteemed for their moral worth, and their characters for truth and veracity, are unimpeachable.”<sup>197</sup> This was the face that Howe put on the statements, but he may have been trying to justify why he had only eight. While it is certainly possible that Howe “might” have been able to find others willing to offer similar testimony, the fact remains that, by his own

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197. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 281, emphasis added.

admission in 1834, he did not “procure” any more. He insisted that additional statements were unnecessary, yet that claim, though possible, rings hollow. Would not Howe have printed all the statements he could find supporting the Spalding theory if he considered them reliable? After all, he published over twenty-two affidavits from residents of Palmyra and Manchester, New York, and Harmony, Pennsylvania, without any concern for space, redundancy, or overkill.<sup>198</sup> If there really was additional testimony available, why did Howe publish only eight in support of the Spalding hypothesis? Not entirely trustful of Hurlbut’s reliability as an investigator, Howe did some investigative work on his own, previous to the publication of his book. In a later statement he noted, “Before publishing my Book I went to Conneaut and saw most of the witnesses who had seen Spauldings Manuscript Found and had testified to its identity with the Book of Mormon as published in my book and was satisfied that they were men of intelligence and respectability and were not mistaken in their statements.”<sup>199</sup> Howe says he visited “most” but not all of those who had provided testimony about Spalding and his manuscript. When questioned again in 1881 he stated, “I never saw or heard read the ‘Manuscript Found,’ but have seen *five or six persons* who had, and from their testimony, concluded it was very much like the Mormon Bible.”<sup>200</sup> Howe published testimony from eight people, but only visited or was able to visit and check up on the statements of five or six. Perhaps he was unable to visit John and Martha Spalding, who apparently lived in Crawford County and not in Conneaut. Following the recovery of “Manuscript Story” in 1884, Howe asserted, “I published only a small part of the statements Hurlbut let me have.” Again, however, this sounds like bravado. Perhaps some Hurlbut statements were too unreliable even for Howe. I suspect, given his earlier statements and the fact that he published so few in 1834, that by 1885 he was exaggerating. In 1881 Howe maintained,

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198. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 231–69.

199. E. D. Howe statement, 8 April 1885, Arthur B. Deming File, Mormon Collection, Chicago Historical Society.

200. Howe to Smith, 26 July 1881, in Shook, *True Origin of the Book of Mormon*, 76, emphasis added.

I think there has been much mist thrown around the whole subject of the origin of the Mormon Bible and the “Manuscript Found,” by the several statements that have been made by those who have been endeavoring to solve the problem after sleeping quietly for half a century. Every effort was made to unravel the mystery at the time, when nearly all the parties were on earth, and the result published at the time, and I think it all folly to try to dig out anything more.<sup>201</sup>

In his 1840 rebuttal of the Spalding theory, Benjamin Winchester referred to a former neighbor, a non-Mormon by the name of Jackson, who remembered Spalding’s manuscript but thought it quite different from the Book of Mormon.

Here, while in conversation with them, Mr. H[ur]lbut learned that Mr. S., while alive, wrote a work called the Manuscript Found. Not that any of these persons had the most distant idea that this novel had ever been converted into the Book of Mormon; or that there was any connexion between them. Indeed, Mr. Jackson, who had read both the Book of Mormon, and Spaulding’s manuscript, told Mr. H. when he came to get his signature to a writing, testifying to the probability that Mr. S.’s manuscript had been converted into the Book of Mormon; that there was no agreement between them; for, said he, Mr. S.’s manuscript was a very small work, in the form of a novel, saying not one word about the children of Israel, but professed to give an account of a race of people who originated from the Romans, which Mr. S said he had translated from a Latin parchment that he had found. The Book of Mormon, he added, purports to be written by a branch of the house of Israel; is written in a different style, and altogether different; for this reason Mr. Jackson refused to lend his name to the lie, and expressed his indignation and contempt at the base and wicked project to deceive the public.

Mr. Jackson was a disinterested man, and a good citizen.<sup>202</sup>

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201. Howe to Smith, 26 July 1881, in Shook, *True Origin of the Book of Mormon*, 76.

202. Winchester, *Origin of the Spaulding Story*, 8–9.

*The Spalding Enigma* suggests that such testimony may reflect earlier encounters with Spalding in Conneaut before he commenced work on a hypothetical “Manuscript Found” or even that Winchester fabricated Jackson’s testimony. More likely, it could suggest what testimony unmolded by Hurlbut might show—that “Manuscript Story” and “Manuscript Found” were in fact identical. In a letter written in 1841, Orson Hyde reported,

In the spring of 1832 I preached in New Salem, Ohio, the place where Rev. Mr. Spaulding resided at the time he wrote his romance. I raised up a branch of the church at that place, and baptized many of Mr. Spaulding’s old neighbors, but they never intimated to me that there was any similarity between the Book of Mormon and Mr. Spaulding’s romance; neither did I hear such an intimation from any quarter, until the immoral Hurlbert, a long time after . . . brought forth the idea. I then went to these neighbors of Mr. Spaulding, and enquired of them if they knew any thing about his writing a romance; and if so, whether the romance was any thing like the Book of Mormon. They said that Mr. Spaulding wrote a book, and that they frequently heard him read the manuscript: but that any one should say that it was like the Book of Mormon, was most surprising, and must be the last pitiful resort that the devil had.<sup>203</sup>

The authors may be inclined to believe that Hyde, too, was simply fabricating evidence, but there is no compelling reason to make such an assumption. Hurlbut, who was employed by other enemies of Joseph Smith to collect negative information against the Prophet and the Book of Mormon, would not likely have tried to obtain testimony from former Spalding neighbors who had joined a church with whom he was now out of favor. Early Mormon convert Daniel Tyler noted that in 1832, before his own baptism, several others in his neighborhood joined the church, including “Erastus Rudd, in whose house much of the romance was formerly written.”<sup>204</sup> Unfortunately, Rudd

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203. Hyde to Adams, in Page, *Spaulding Story*, 10.

204. Daniel Tyler statement, in *Deseret Evening News*, 16 January 1878.



died on the Zion's Camp expedition to Missouri in 1834. Today we can lament that Latter-day Saints did not record and preserve more of such testimony, but what little we have suggests that Hurlbut was selective in his gathering of statements.

Another area in which Hurlbut's influence is apparent is in the language of the statements themselves. This has often been noticed by those critical of the Spalding theory. That each of these eight persons "profess[es] to describe Spaulding's manuscript, not seen or heard read by any one of them for over twenty years, constitutes a very suspiciously vivid suggestion that their 'testimonies' are not in the form in which they originated them, or, at the least, were not volunteered by any of them, apart from suggestions and questionings by an interested party."<sup>205</sup> That the Spalding neighbors remembered that Spaulding had written a manuscript describing a group who came from the Old World to the New, likely "constituted a temptation far too strong to be resisted that the story should be elaborated and given definite shape, as a real weapon for opposing, and, if possible, destroying Mormonism. Thus, although they could find many who could remember Spaulding and his book, they undoubtedly put into their mouths many things that had nothing to do with either the *Manuscript Found*, or the Book of Mormon."<sup>206</sup> "It can clearly be seen," Fawn Brodie acknowledges, "that the affidavits were written by Hurlbut, since the style is the same throughout."<sup>207</sup> Essentially agreeing with Brodie's assessment, another secular critic noted that "the affidavits have the tone of common authorship."<sup>208</sup> My own examination of the Spalding statements is consistent with these observations. The similarity in language, noted above, can be seen by comparing statements by John and Martha Spalding, who were possibly the first to be interviewed by Spalding, and those of the other Spalding witnesses.

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205. Webb, *Case against Mormonism*, 49.

206. Robert C. Webb (pseudonym for James E. Homans), *The Real Mormonism: A Candid Analysis of an Interesting but Much Misunderstood Subject in History, Life and Thought* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1916), 406, emphasis in original.

207. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 446.

208. Taves, *Trouble Enough*, 54.

Statements by John and Martha Spalding <sup>209</sup>	Statements by Other Spalding Witnesses
It was an historical romance of the <i>first settlers of America</i> (John Spalding) a historical novel founded upon the <i>first settlers of America</i> (Martha Spalding)	It purported to be the history of the <i>first settlement of America</i> (John Miller) they were the <i>first settlers of America</i> (Aaron Wright) a historical novel, founded upon the <i>first settlers of this country</i> (Oliver Smith) the history of the <i>first settlement of America</i> (Oliver Smith) [a] romantic history of the <i>first settlement of this country</i> (Artemus Cunningham) <sup>210</sup>
endeavoring to show that the <i>American Indians are the descendants</i> of the Jews, or the <i>lost tribes</i> (John Spalding) He had for many years contended that the aborigines of America were the <i>descendants</i> of some of the <i>lost tribes</i> of Israel, and this idea he carried out in the book in question (Martha Spalding)	This book represented the <i>American Indians</i> as the <i>descendants of the lost tribes</i> (Henry Lake) a history he was writing, of the <i>lost tribes</i> of Israel, purporting that they were the first settlers of America, and that the <i>Indians</i> were their <i>descendants</i> (Aaron Wright) <sup>211</sup>
It gave a detailed account of <i>their journey from Jerusalem, by land and sea</i> , till they arrived in <i>America</i> (John Spalding) He gave a particular account of <i>their journey by land and sea</i> , till they arrived in <i>America</i> (Martha Spalding)	He <i>traced their journey from Jerusalem to America</i> , as it is given in the Book of Mormon (Aaron Wright) He said he intended to <i>trace their journey from Jerusalem, by land and sea</i> , till their arrival in <i>America</i> (Oliver Smith) <sup>212</sup>

209. For statements by John Spalding and Martha Spalding, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 279–81.

210. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283–86.

211. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282, 284.

212. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284–85.

Statements by John and Martha Spalding	Statements by Other Spalding Witnesses
Cruel and bloody <i>wars</i> ensued, in which great multitudes were slain (John Spalding) He represented them as an enlightened and warlike people (Martha Spalding)	their contentions and <i>wars</i> , which were many and great (Henry Lake) detailing their . . . <i>wars</i> (John Miller) give an account of their . . . <i>wars</i> and contentions (Oliver Smith) <sup>213</sup>
<i>Their arts, sciences and civilization</i> were brought into view (John Spalding)	give an account of <i>their arts, sciences, civilization</i> , wars and contentions (Oliver Smith) <sup>214</sup>
They buried their dead in large heaps, which caused the <i>mounds so common in this country</i> . Their arts, sciences and civilization were brought into view, in order to <i>account for</i> all the curious <i>antiquities</i> , found <i>in various parts of North and South America</i> (John Spalding) and their being buried in large heaps was the cause of the <i>numerous mounds in the country</i> (Martha Spalding)	He told me his object was to <i>account for</i> all the fortifications, &c. to be <i>found in this country</i> , and said that in time it would be fully believed by all (Aaron Wright) In this way, he would give a satisfactory <i>account of</i> all the old <i>mounds, so common to this country</i> (Oliver Smith) I once in conversation with him expressed a surprise at not having any <i>account of</i> the inhabitants once <i>in this country</i> , who erected the old forts, <i>mounds</i> , &c. (Nahum Howard) He attempted to <i>account for</i> the <i>numerous antiquities</i> which are found <i>upon this continent</i> (Artemus Cunningham) <sup>215</sup>
“and it came to pass,” or “now it came to pass” (John Spalding) “and it came to pass” (Martha Spalding)	“And it came to pass,” “Now it came to pass” (Henry Lake) <sup>216</sup>

213. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282–83, 285.

214. O. Smith, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 285.

215. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284–87.

216. Lake, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282.

Statements by John and Martha Spalding	Statements by Other Spalding Witnesses
NEPHI and LEHI . . . Nephites and . . . Lamanites (John Spalding) Nephi and Lehi, . . . Lamanites and . . . Nephites (Martha Spalding)	Nephi, Lehi, Moroni, . . . Zarahemla (John Miller) Nephi and Lehi (Oliver Smith) Nephi (Artemus Cunningham) <sup>217</sup>
I have recently read the Book of Mormon, and to my great surprize I find nearly the same <i>historical matter</i> , names, &c. as they were in my brother's writings. . . . and according to the best of my recollection and belief, it is the same as my brother Solomon wrote, with the exception of the religious matter (John Spalding) I have read the Book of Mormon, which has brought fresh to my recollection the writings of Solomon Spalding; and I have no manner of doubt that <i>the historical part</i> of it, is the same that I read and heard read (Martha Spalding)	Since that, I have more fully examined the said Golden Bible, and have no hesitation in saying that <i>the historical part</i> of it is principally, if not wholly taken from the "Manuscript Found" (Henry Lake) I have recently examined the Book of Mormon, and find in it the writings of Solomon Spalding, from beginning to end, but mixed up with scripture and other religious matter, which I did not meet with in the "Manuscript Found" (John Miller) as it is given in the Book of Mormon, excepting the religious matter. <i>The historical part</i> of the Book of Mormon, I know to be the same as I read and heard read from the writings of Spalding, . . . the names more especially are the same without any alteration (Aaron Wright) When I heard <i>the historical part</i> of it related, I at once said it was the writings of old Solomon Spalding (Oliver Smith) <sup>218</sup>

The evidence above suggests that Philastus Hurlbut, a man of dubious character, whose passionate hostility to Joseph Smith and Mormonism is beyond dispute, was intimately involved with both the

217. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283, 285–86.

218. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 282–85.

selection of the Spalding testimonials that we have today and the language in which they were formulated.

A third manner in which Hurlbut likely influenced the 1833 Spalding testimony is in the references to names and phrases supposedly shared by “Manuscript Found” and the Book of Mormon. Of the eight former neighbors of the Spaldings, five (John and Martha Spalding, John Miller, Oliver Smith, Artemus Cunningham) mention the name *Nephi*, and four (John and Martha Spalding, John Miller, Oliver Smith) the name *Lehi*. Two of them (John and Martha Spalding) remembered the terms *Nephites* and *Lamanites*. One neighbor (Henry Lake) said he remembered the name *Laban*, and another (John Miller) said he remembered the names *Moroni* and *Zarahemla*. Out of a potential two hundred and forty Book of Mormon personal or place-names, the combined memories of eight of Spalding’s former neighbors recalled only seven. So why did they remember so few names, and why only these?

It is strange, for example, that none of these “deponents,” all so familiar, as represented, with Spaulding’s works, should have remembered to mention Coriantumr, or Jared, or his unnamed brother; or to have remarked that Nephi had a brother named Sam, which moves a certain critic to animadvert sarcastically on this “Yankee nickname”; or to have remembered that their “curiosity had been excited by the mention of the ‘cumoms’ and ‘cureloms,’” supposed to have been some kind of domestic animals.<sup>219</sup>

John Spalding stated that the names in the Book of Mormon were “nearly the same” as those in his brother’s manuscript, and Martha Spalding claimed that the names “Nephi and Lehi” were “yet fresh” in her memory. “The names of Nephi, Lehi, Moroni, and in fact *all* the principal names,” remembered John Miller, “are bro’t fresh to my recollection, by the Gold Bible.” According to Aaron Wright, “the names more especially are the same without any alteration” and the names in the Book of Mormon “were as familiar to me before I read it, as most

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219. Webb, *Case against Mormonism*, 48–49.

modern history.”<sup>220</sup> Yet, significantly, Wright fails to mention so much as one. Since “*all* the principal names” were “the same without any alteration” and as familiar to these witnesses as most modern history, why do they mention only these? How much did they really remember of Spalding’s old tale, and how much was or was not suggested by Hurlbut or others? “It is a conclusion almost obvious that the names of Nephi, Lehi, etc., were given affirmatively as answers to direct questions, asked by persons having a very meagre knowledge of the ‘Book of Mormon.’”<sup>221</sup>

Later Spalding statements suffer from a similar problem. In her 1839 statement, Spalding’s widow presumably said that her husband “was enabled from his acquaintance with the classics and ancient history, to introduce *many singular names*, which were particularly noticed by the people and could be easily recognized by them.”<sup>222</sup> At that time, however, neither she nor her daughter offered as much as one Book of Mormon name from their recollection. In a subsequent interview with Jesse Haven shortly thereafter, the former Mrs. Spalding (then Mrs. Davison) was asked:

Ques. Have you read the book of Mormon?

Ans: I have read some in it;

Ques. Does Mr. Spauldings manuscript, and the Book of Mormon agree?

[Ans:] *I think some few of the names are alike. . . .*

The daughter, Mrs. Matilda Spalding McKinstry was also questioned as follows:

Ques.—Does the manuscript and the Book of Mormon agree?

Ans: I think some of the names agree.

Ques. *Are you certain that some of the names agree?*

Ans: *I am not.*

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220. For the statements in this section, see Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280, 283–84.

221. Webb, *Case against Mormonism*, 49.

222. Davison, “Origin of the ‘Book of Mormon.’”

Ques. Have you ever read any in the Book of Mormon?

Ans: I have not.<sup>223</sup>

In 1880, however, McKinstry displayed a remarkable enlargement of memory: “Some of the names that he mentioned while reading to these people I have never forgotten. They are as fresh to me to-day as though I heard them yesterday. They were ‘Mormon,’ ‘Maroni,’ ‘Lamenite,’ ‘Nephi.’”<sup>224</sup> When interviewed by Edmund Kelley some time afterwards, McKinstry was asked, “When did you first think about the names in the Book of Mormon and the manuscript agreeing?” To this she responded: “My attention was first called to it by some parties who asked me if I did not remember it, and then I remembered that they were.”<sup>225</sup> “It is to be regretted,” noted one wry observer, “that the ‘parties’ questioning this lady—and others—did not have a larger supply of ‘Book of Mormon’ names to ‘recall to her mind.’”<sup>226</sup>

As noted above, some of Spalding’s former neighbors claimed that his story mentioned the division of the American inhabitants into two rival groups and their recollection generally matches that of “Manuscript Story,” in which, under Lobaska, the people are divided into “two great empires,” the kingdoms of Sciota and Kentuck on opposite sides of the Ohio River. Though not impossible, after twenty years or more, it would be difficult to remember Spalding’s original names for these tribes. As with the other names, it is likely that the names *Nephites* and *Lamanites* were volunteered by Hurlbut or those sympathetic to his cause. Howe himself incorrectly described the names of the rival tribes in Spalding’s romance on at least three separate occasions, even though he had once had the manuscript in his personal possession for several years. “It was a common-place story of some Indian wars along the borders of our Great Lakes, between

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223. Jesse Haven interview with Mrs. Davison (identified as Mrs. Davidson in this source) and her daughter Matilda Spalding McKinstry (McKenestry), 1839, in A. Badlam, “A Cunning Device Detected,” *Times and Seasons* 1/3 (January 1840): 47, emphasis added (lines separated for ease of reading); originally in the *Quincy Whig*, 16 November 1839, 615.

224. McKinstry statement, 3 April 1880, in Dickinson, “The Book of Mormon,” 615.

225. E. L. Kelley interview with McKinstry, 4 April 1882, in *Public Discussion*, 82.

226. Webb, *Case against Mormonism*, 56.

the Chicagoes and Eries as I now recollect.”<sup>227</sup> “It was the wars of the Winnebagoes, Chicagoes or Niagaries, I believe.”<sup>228</sup> It was “a Romance of Indian wars along the shore of Lake Erie between various Tribes one of which he called Erie another Chicago.”<sup>229</sup> The last statement was made even after the rediscovery of the manuscript in question, where the rival factions are identified as the Sciotons and the Kentucks.

It seems likely that Philastus Hurlbut influenced the selection, the language, and the content of the 1833 Spalding testimonials. This fact should trouble believers in the Spalding theory of Book of Mormon authorship.

### Spalding Family Testimony

When Solomon Spalding lived in Conneaut, Ohio, John and Martha Spalding were not his only relatives who lived there. His brother, Josiah Spalding, lived with Solomon at the time he began writing his manuscript. In 1855, Josiah authored a short sketch of his brother’s life.<sup>230</sup> Although written twenty-two years after the Hurlbut statements and over forty years after the events he describes, it is significant for several reasons. First, it represents testimony from another member of the Spalding family. Second, Josiah had heard rumors that the manuscript might have been a source for the Book of Mormon and seems to have believed them, but his actual acquaintance with Mormonism was minimal. “I never saw the Mormon Bible but once, and then only for a minute, no time to examine it. I have but little knowledge of ‘Mormonism.’” Third, in his sketch, he describes his brother’s novel “Manuscript Found” in terms that clearly refer to “Manuscript Story,” even describing elements in the story not mentioned by Howe. Other elements, such as the words *Lehi*, *Nephi*, *Nephite*, *Lamanite*, *Moroni*,

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227. Howe to Smith, 26 July 1881, in Shook, *True Origin of the Book of Mormon*, 75–76.

228. E. L. Kelley interview with Howe, August 1883, in *Public Discussion*, 83.

229. Howe statement, 8 April 1885, Deming File.

230. Josiah Spalding statement, 6 January 1855, Eastford [Connecticut], in Samuel J. Spalding, *Spalding Memorial: A Genealogical History of Edward Spalding of Massachusetts Bay, and His Descendants* (Boston: Mudge & Son, 1872), 160–62.



and *Zarahemla* and the phrases *I Nephi* and *and it came to pass* are not mentioned.

The Josiah Spalding statement thus provides a good check against the Hurlbut statements since it gives a picture of what descriptions of Spalding's work might have looked like without Hurlbut's coloring. The following is an extract from Josiah Spalding's letter:

In the town where he lived, which I expect is now called Salem, Ohio, there is the appearance of an ancient fort, and near by a large mound, which, when opened, was found to contain human bones. These things give it the appearance of its being inhabited by a civilized people. These appearances furnished a topic of conversation among the people. My brother told me that a young man told him that he had a wonderful dream. He dreamed that he himself (if I recollect right) opened a great mound, where there were human bones. There he found a written history that would answer the inquiry respecting the civilized people that once inhabited that country until they were destroyed by the savages. This story suggested the idea of writing a novel merely for amusement. The title of this novel, I think, was "Historical Novel," or "Manuscript Found." This novel is the history contained in the manuscript found. The author of it he brings from the Old World, but from what nation I do not recollect, I think not a Jew; nor do I recollect how long since, but I think before the Christian Era. He was a man of superior learning suited to that day. He went to sea, lost his point of compass, and finally landed on the American shore, I think near the mouth of the Mississippi River. There he reflects most feelingly on what he suffered, his present condition and future prospects; he likewise makes some lengthy remarks on astronomy and philosophy, which I should think would agree in sentiment and style with very ancient writings. He then started and travelled a great distance through a wilderness country inhabited by savages, until he came to a country where the inhabitants were civilized, cultivated their land, and had a regular form of government which was

at war with the savages. There I left him and never saw him nor his writings any more. He soon after moved to Pittsburg, in Pennsylvania, where he lived awhile and then moved farther, to a place where he died. His widow then returned to the State of New York, and lived there awhile and then came to Connecticut. She informed me, if I recollect right, that my brother continued his history of the civilized nation and the progress of the war until the triumph of the savages to the destruction of the civilized government.<sup>231</sup>

John and Martha Spalding described one manuscript, which they called “Manuscript Found.” Matilda Davison likewise described only one manuscript and claims that it was this same manuscript that was taken to the printer in Pittsburgh for possible consideration and then returned to the trunk in New York until it was entrusted to Hurlbut. She identified it as “Manuscript Found.” Josiah Spalding also speaks only of one manuscript, which matches the content of “Manuscript Story.” He also called it “Manuscript Found.”

Although they advanced the claim that “Manuscript Found” was not “Manuscript Story,” why did Hurlbut or Howe never solicit or obtain additional testimony from the Spalding family in support of that claim? In fact, with the exception of the very late testimony of Matilda Spalding McKinstry following the rediscovery of “Manuscript Story,” *all* Spalding family members who left firsthand testimony—John, Martha, Matilda, and Josiah—mention *only one* Spalding manuscript on ancient America and they all refer to it as “Manuscript Found.” This supports the conclusion that “Manuscript Found” and “Manuscript Story” were in fact one and the same.

### Religious Material and the Book of Mormon

In their statements published by E. D. Howe, former Spalding neighbors claimed that Spalding’s manuscript was identical or nearly identical to the historical parts of the Book of Mormon but that the Book of Mormon contained religious material that was not found in

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231. Josiah Spalding statement, 6 January 1855, in Spalding, *Spalding Memorial*, 161.

Spalding's novel. John Spalding asserted that the Book of Mormon "is the same as my brother Solomon wrote, *with the exception of the religious matter*."<sup>232</sup> John Miller claimed that he found in the Book of Mormon "the writings of Solomon Spalding, from beginning to end, but *mixed up with scripture and other religious matter*, which I did not meet with in the 'Manuscript Found.'"<sup>233</sup> Aaron Wright claimed that Spalding's story read just "as it is given in the Book of Mormon, *excepting the religious matter*."<sup>234</sup> An 1839 statement attributed to Spalding's widow claimed that the Book of Mormon was "an historical romance," plagiarized from her late husband, "with the addition of *a few pious expressions and extracts from the sacred Scriptures*."<sup>235</sup>

For those familiar with the Book of Mormon, however, such descriptions are extremely problematic. Attempting to explain these statements, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick claim that "the witnesses probably meant that *A Manuscript Found* did not repeat the lengthy portions of Isaiah or the larger part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which can be found in *The Book of Mormon*" (p. 88). But it is not merely a question of the citation of a few biblical passages or the words found in Jesus's sermon at the temple. Biblical language and themes *permeate* the Book of Mormon text even in its so-called "historical" sections. And where does one draw the line between religious and nonreligious material in the Book of Mormon? Not only do Book of Mormon prophets quote from Isaiah, Jesus, and Malachi, but there are also many allusions to biblical prophets and their teachings that are not explicitly stated. What about dreams, visions and revelations, prayers, sermons and doctrinal teachings, descriptions of ordinances?

Both Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint critics of the Spalding theory have discussed the problematic nature of this claim. In an 1883 rebuttal to the Spalding theory, Latter-day Saint George Reynolds set out the nature of the problem:

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232. John Spalding, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 280, emphasis added.

233. Miller, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 283, emphasis added.

234. Wright, in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 284, emphasis added.

235. Davison, "Origin of the 'Book of Mormon,'" emphasis added.

Persons unacquainted with the contents of the Book of Mormon . . . have suggested that Solomon Spaulding wrote the historical portion . . . and that Joseph Smith or somebody else added the religious portion. To those who have read the Book of Mormon, this hypothesis is supremely ridiculous.

An objector to the Bible might, with equal consistency, assert that somebody wrote the historical portion of the Old and New Testaments, and somebody else, after the historical portion was all written, introduced the religious teachings. One is as impossible as the other. Every one who knows anything of the Book of Mormon knows that the narrative of events grows out of and is inseparably connected with the religious idea. The book opens with the statement that Lehi was a prophet, bearing Jehovah's unwelcome message of destruction to the inhabitants of the sin-seared city of Jerusalem. They rejected and persecuted him. By divine command he fled with his family into the wilderness and was led by that same inspiration to the American continent. The reason why the Lord thus delivered him was, that he might raise up to Himself a people that would serve Him. He covenanted to give Lehi and his posterity this most precious land as their inheritance if they kept His commandments. How they fulfilled His law, how they prospered when obedient, how they suffered when disobedient, is the burden of the story of the writers of the Book of Mormon. It is the main idea to which all others are incidental, the controlling thought around which all others concentrate; it is the life of the whole record, the golden thread running through all its pages, which gives consistency to all its parts. A man might just as well attempt to write the gospel of St. Matthew and leave out all references to the Lord Jesus Christ, as write the Book of Mormon without its religious theory and teachings.

The creature who invented the idea of the dual authorship of this book must have imagined that the doctrinal portion was dropped in by lumps or clumsily inserted between differ-

ent historical epochs. It is true there are places where liberal extracts from the Bible are quoted, and if these were all, there might be some semblance of consistency in the supposition. But it is not so, the doctrinal and historical portions are, as a general thing, so intermingled and blended that neither could be withdrawn without destroying the sense of the other. If it were possible to conceive of the amalgamation of two separate documents—one religious and the other historical—it would be much easier to believe that the doctrinal portions were written first and that the historical ideas were afterwards filled in; for, as before mentioned, the historical narrative is but secondary and tributary to the religious idea. But this would not support the theory of the Spauldingites; it would, in fact, entirely upset all their arguments for the reason that they claim that the “Manuscript Found,” a historical romance of an idolatrous people, be it remembered, was written by Spaulding not later than 1812, while the Book of Mormon was not published by Joseph Smith until 1830, consequently such an arrangement would be fatal to their hypothesis.<sup>236</sup>

Following the recovery of “Manuscript Story,” James Fairchild, president of Oberlin College, observed:

The “Book of Mormon” is permeated in every page and paragraph with religious and Scriptural ideas. It is first and foremost a religious book, and the contrast between it and the supposed manuscript must have been very striking to have led five of these witnesses to call this difference to mind and mention it, after the lapse of twenty years and more. . . . Now it is difficult—almost impossible, to believe that the religious sentiments of the “Book of Mormon” were wrought into interpolation. They are of the original tissue and substance of the document, and a man as self-reliant and smart as Sidney Rigdon, with a superabundant gift of tongue and every form of utterance, would never have accepted this servile task. . . .

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236. Reynolds, *Myth of the “Manuscript Found,”* 95–96.

He had a gift of speech which would have made the style distasteful and impossible to him.<sup>237</sup>

George Gibson, a critic of the Latter-day Saints, noted of the Spaulding manuscript in 1886:

The Oberlin manuscript has no moral or religious purpose or matter, and the original *Manuscript Found*, according to almost uniform testimony, was devoid of the religious element. From a literary point of view, it would be hard to conceive of the sterility of the *Book of Mormon*, if divested of its religious purpose. Its purpose, its literary garb, the very warp and woof of the entire work are, essentially and intrinsically, religious. The events all hang on moral and religious conduct, and to say, as the affidavits in 1833–4 do, that the *Book of Mormon* resembles the original Spaulding story as remembered by witnesses, except in its religious part, is obviously a fatal admission.<sup>238</sup>

According to German historian Eduard Meyer,

The significant fact is that all the witnesses said Spaulding's work had no religious content. The Book of Mormon is nothing but religion; if one were to remove the religious content, the whole would collapse. Even the framework of the action is filled with religious tendencies and is connected with the religious problems which the book would answer. In other words: if we discount the part of the work which is certainly Joseph Smith's, practically nothing else remains.<sup>239</sup>

Fawn Brodie wrote in 1945:

It is significant that five of Hurlbut's witnesses were careful to except the "religious" matter of the Book of Mormon as not contained in the Spaulding manuscript, and the oth-

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237. Fairchild, "Manuscript of Solomon Spaulding and the Book of Mormon," 197–98.

238. Gibson, "The Origin of a Great Delusion," 214.

239. Meyer, *Origin and History of the Mormons*, 29, emphasis in original.

ers stated that “the historical parts” were derived from the Spaulding story. The narrative Hurlbut found had no religious matter whatever, but the Book of Mormon was permeated with religious ideas. It was first and foremost a religious book. The theology could not have been wrought by interpolation, since practically every historical event was motivated either by Satan or the Lord.<sup>240</sup>

The late anti-Mormon researcher Wesley Walters, to whom the authors dedicate this most recent book, observed:

According to the older Spalding theory, based on the extant testimony, while Spalding’s novel may have had some religious content, it is Rigdon who is credited with adding most of the religious material. If one looks at the content of the alleged Spalding portion [of the Book of Mormon], however, he notices that nearly the entire material is religious in nature. It speaks of there being a “church” at Jerusalem about 600 B.C., writes approving of being a “visionary man,” portrays New Testament Christianity as being well known in the Old Testament period, and even depicts Christianity as being established in America before the arrival of the Europeans. These are some of the main features of early Mormonism, and if regarded as Spalding’s work it would make Spalding rather than Smith or Rigdon the originator of the religious aspects of Mormonism. This is not the impression one gets from reading the early descriptions by witnesses who claimed to have heard Spalding’s alleged manuscript read.<sup>241</sup>

The notion that the Book of Mormon was produced by simply grafting a few religious elements onto an essentially secular story is implausible.

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240. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 449.

241. Wesley P. Walters, review of *Who Really Wrote the Book of Mormon?* by Davis, Scales, and Cowdrey, *Contemporary Christianity* (Winter 1977–78), cited in Tanner and Tanner, *Did Spalding Write the Book of Mormon?* 32.

## Questions of Style and Ability

### The Joseph Smith Enigma

It is also highly unlikely that Joseph Smith, let alone Solomon Spalding, was capable of writing anything like the Book of Mormon. In 1948, James Black wrote:

The historiographer's admission that Smith was "but poorly educated" introduces us to what must be considered as the only real problem in Mormonism, viz. how an ill-educated man like Joseph Smith could have invented such an elaborate system of rules and ideas, with many interesting historical references, ingenious speculations, and imaginative flights, and moreover how he could have expounded them in a style of writing apparently foreign to his ordinary speech and range of culture. His own followers regard this interesting fact as the best proof that his work was indeed a "revelation" in a real sense; for they freely admit, even boast, that his usual level of knowledge and speech was low and mean. On the other hand the charge of his enemies, that the whole system is merely a clever invention and fraud, does not touch the problem; for this charge does not explain, and cannot explain, how such an ill-educated man could produce so elaborate a system. This is a bigger problem than most people imagine. It requires an exceedingly able scholar to foist a highly wrought-out fraud that lasts for over a century upon the public, however credulous. The mere credulity of the people in any case does not explain the matter; for the elaborate system, expressed in fairly dignified language, and with some interesting historical speculations, still remains unexplained. . . .

Mere "fraud" and clever "invention" only aggravate the problem, for this makes Smith to be much more accomplished than either friends or foes believed.<sup>242</sup>

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242. James Black, *New Forms of the Old Faith* (London: Nelson and Sons, 1948), 247–48.



Sixty years later, the problem described by Black has become not less but more of an enigma since subsequent research on the Book of Mormon has revealed a book not less but far more sophisticated than either critics or Latter-day Saints ever imagined.<sup>243</sup> Unless one is willing to accept the Spalding explanation or some similar theory, one has to explain not only *if* he could have, but *how* Joseph Smith could have written such a book, a point upon which critics have never agreed. The believing Latter-day Saint, of course, has an explanation that nicely circumvents that puzzle. “The Book of Mormon,” wrote B. H. Roberts nearly a hundred years ago, “so long as the truth respecting it is unbelieved, will remain to the world an enigma, a veritable literary Sphinx, challenging the inquiry and speculations of the learned. But to those who in simple faith will accept it for what it is, a revelation from God, it will minister spiritual consolation, and by its plainness and truth draw men into closer communion with God.”<sup>244</sup>

“That there has been, from the beginning of the imposture,” wrote Howe, “a more talented knave behind the curtain, is evident to our mind, at least; but whether he will ever be clearly, fully and positively *unveiled* and brought into open day-light, may of course be doubted.”<sup>245</sup> The whole rationale behind the Spalding theory originally was to account for the complexities in the Book of Mormon text. Joseph Smith, it was argued, lacked the ability to produce such a work; therefore, there must have been someone with greater ability and sophistication who was responsible. In 1836 a writer explained: “Not believing that it was discovered in the earth by the help of an angel,

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243. For a few representative examples, see Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997); Noel B. Reynolds, “Nephite Kingship Reconsidered,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 153–89; Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002); Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*, 191–243; 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): 40–51; and Thomas A. Wayment, “The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 98–103.

244. B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 3:406.

245. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 278, emphasis in original.

as its friends pretended, I presumed it was written by some person of more literature and mental improvement, than Jo Smith, the professed finder, and prophet of the deluded sect, is said to be even by his dupes.”<sup>246</sup> “It is agreed on all hands,” said another in 1837, “that Smith is too ignorant and stupid to have originated such a book. This his followers readily admit and glory in it as an evidence that he must have been divinely inspired. But others regard it as a proof of nothing more than that the book was indited by some other man.”<sup>247</sup>

In 1839, a writer for the Boston *Christian Register* wrote approvingly of the Spalding theory because

it accounts most satisfactorily for the existence of the book, a fact which heretofore it has been *difficult to explain*. It was difficult to imagine how a work containing so many indications of being the production of a cultivated mind, should be connected with a knavery so impudent, and a superstition so gross as that which must have characterized the founders of this pretended religious sect.<sup>248</sup>

In 1840, Reverend John Clark wrote: “The origin of this volume—how it came into being—is a grave question. It is quite certain that neither Jo Smith nor Martin Harris had intelligence or literary qualification adequate to the production of a work of this sort. Who then was its author?” Like many other residents of Palmyra who believed the Book of Mormon a fraud, Clark had difficulty seeing Joseph Smith as responsible for its contents:

The people of Palmyra, at the commencement of the printing of this book, only laughed at the ridiculousness of the thing, and wondered at the credulity of Harris. As the publication progressed, and the contents of the book began to be known, the conviction became general that there was an actor behind

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246. “Mormonism,” *Christian Register*, 24 December 1836.

247. “Author of the Book of Mormon,” *Zion’s Advocate*, 20 December 1837.

248. “The Mormon Bible,” *Christian Register*, 4 May 1839, emphasis added.

the scene, moving the machinery, of far higher intellectual qualifications than Smith or Harris.<sup>249</sup>

Theodore Schroeder, one of the most staunch advocates of the Spalding theory, insisted that “Joseph Smith, the nominal founder and first prophet of Mormonism, was probably too ignorant to have produced the volume unaided.”<sup>250</sup> This is why it was important for Spalding proponents to emphasize from the beginning the learning of Spalding, who must be made to appear capable of the kind of sophistication found in the Book of Mormon. The strength of the theory, however, lay in the fact that the unbeliever did not have to prove it and the believer had no way to refute it. In 1901, according to William Linn:

The most careful student of the career of Joseph Smith, Jr., and of his family and his associates, up to the year 1827, will fail to find any ground for the belief that he alone, or simply with their assistance, was capable of composing the Book of Mormon, crude in every sense as that work is. We must therefore accept, as do the Mormons, the statement that the text was divinely revealed to Smith, or must look for some directing hand behind the scene, which supplied the historical part and applied the theological. The “Spaulding manuscript” is believed to have furnished the basis of the historical part of the work.<sup>251</sup>

The question-begging at the heart of the various versions of the Spalding theory is captured in the following conversation, conducted in 1881 by William H. Kelley, an RLDS leader. In that interview Kelley asked Palmyra resident John Stafford, “If young Smith was as illiterate as you say, Doctor, how do you account for the Book of Mormon? ‘Well, I can’t; except that Sidney Rigdon was connected with them.’

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249. John A. Clark, “Gleanings by the Way,” *Episcopal Recorder*, 12 September 1840.

250. Theodore Schroeder, “The Origin of the Book of Mormon,” *American Historical Magazine* 1/5 (September 1906): 380.

251. William A. Linn, *The Story of the Mormons: From the Date of Their Origin to the Year 1901* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 50.

What makes you think he was connected with them? ‘Because I can’t account for the Book of Mormon any other way.’”<sup>252</sup>

### Spalding’s Literary Abilities

Although Spalding proponents have argued that “Manuscript Story” was not “Manuscript Found,” its recovery in 1884 (and its subsequent publication) made this proposal, at least for many critics, no longer plausible. Spalding theorists such as Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick now must demonstrate that “Manuscript Story” was only a crude first effort at producing fiction and that Spalding wrote another, much different book. Yet, as many critics of the revised Spalding theory have observed, the existence of a lengthy sample of Spalding’s actual writing provides a clear picture of Spalding’s literary abilities. “Whatever may be said of Mr. Spaulding’s spelling, diction, and sentential structure, his invention is even worse. His plot—if plot it may be called—lacks prospectiveness. Not once does he excite suspense as to the outcome of any situation. Indeed, his characters are so wooden that the reader can feel no interest in them whatever.” The hero and heroine Elseon and Lamesa are “poor saw dust figures.”<sup>253</sup>

It is not possible for the author of the crude story . . . to have changed his style to one so totally unlike it as that of the Book of Mormon. On this point no bolstering by false affidavits will count: there are the two styles side by side. The transition from one to the other would not have been possible, even to the versatility of a Shakespeare, without leaving some trace of similarity in name, geographical allusion, diction, phraseology, or imagery. Yet this very miracle of transformation, which, as every scholar will admit, would not be possible even to a master of style, [Spalding theorists] would have us believe possible to a mind all but fossilized in its sterile rigidity,—a

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252. John Stafford interview with William H. Kelley, March 1881, in *Saints Herald* 28/11 (1 June 1881): 167.

253. Nels Lars Nelson, “The Dictionary of Slander,” *Mormon Point of View* 1/1 (1 January 1904): 99.

style whose very sentential structure proclaims almost an entire absence of versatility!<sup>254</sup>

We have a sufficient arc of Mr. Spaulding's authorship to determine accurately his literary orbit; and as before suggested, ten thousand affidavits could not bring that orbit within the circle of the Book of Mormon. The proof of this, for any sane man, is the unbiased reading of both books. As no scintilla of reliable evidence exists that Spaulding ever wrote another book, and as the proof is overwhelming that he could not, from sheer want of literary power, have written the Book of Mormon,—as, in short, there was no Spaulding's story for Rigdon to steal and doctor up.<sup>255</sup>

"Manuscript Story" is certainly his "first effort"—one would dislike reading anything earlier and worse from his pen—and gives very poor promise of improvement as a storyteller, or originator of readable narrations, since at this time, Spaulding was certainly between 48 and 49 years of age; quite too old "to learn a new trade." The construction of his plot, indeed, shows very unhopeful signs of ability to do more extended work, or to produce any writing as elaborate as the "Book of Mormon." He was evidently, also, a slow and laborious writer, constantly erasing and rewriting: which facts show that this Oberlin manuscript was his "first draft."<sup>256</sup>

The author of this story is not a trained writer, nor even one of experience in producing "copy." But, if this work was produced after 1809, when Spaulding was 48 years of age, there is very small chance that his talents so improved in the remaining seven years of his life that he would have developed ability to produce so highly elaborated a work as the Book of Mormon. His first book shows no traces of such talents, and it was rather late in life to develop them; also, there was very

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254. Nelson, "Dictionary of Slander," 165–66.

255. Nelson, "Dictionary of Slander," 167–68.

256. Webb, *Case against Mormonism*, 52–53.

little time left to him. He must have worked night and day. Small wonder he “failed in business,” also that he died at the comparatively early age of fifty-five!<sup>257</sup>

Such has been the conclusion of many critics of the Spaulding theory, both Latter-day Saints as well as non-Latter-day Saints. “If there was another manuscript,” wrote Fawn Brodie,

one might reasonably expect stylistic similarities between the Book of Mormon and the extant manuscript, since the latter was full of unmistakable literary mannerisms of the kind that are more easily acquired than shed. Spaulding was heir to all the florid sentiment and grandiose rhetoric of the English Gothic romance. He used all the stereotyped patterns—villainy versus innocent maidenhood, thwarted love, and heroic valor—thickly encrusted with the tradition of the noble savage. The Book of Mormon had but one scant reference to a love affair, and its rhythmical, monotonous style bore no resemblance to the cheap clichés and purple metaphors abounding in the Spaulding story.<sup>258</sup>

Secular critic Ernest Taves wrote in 1984:

It has been suggested that there was another Spaulding work, that the manuscript Hurlbut unearthed was not what everyone was referring to as *Manuscript Found*. This is, of course, a possibility, but the question might seem, at first glance, irrelevant. If there was another Spaulding manuscript would it not be stylistically similar to the one Hurlbut found, and thus have little in common with the *Book of Mormon*? Only a skillful writer indeed—a gifted parodist, for example—can significantly alter his way of writing. The signature is there, as with a thumbprint. Whatever else can be said of Joseph Smith and Solomon Spaulding, neither was a skillful writer. It suf-

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257. Webb, *Real Mormonism*, 426.

258. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 449–50; see John Gee, “The Wrong Type of Book,” in *Echoes and Evidences*, 307–29.

fices to read a page or two of Joseph Smith and of Spaulding to understand that those pages were written by different writers. The same would probably apply to any other manuscript written by Spaulding.

Hurlbut must have understood, and with great disappointment, that the manuscript he found was, in respect of supporting his thesis, worthless.<sup>259</sup>

There is some indication that even Hurlbut, for all his work, was not entirely satisfied with the Spaulding theory. After his death in 1884, his wife, Maria, said her husband “spent about six months time and a good deal of money looking up the Spaulding manuscript and other evidence, but he was disappointed in not finding what he wanted. This was the reason he turned the whole thing over to Howe. He never was satisfied with what he found, and while on his death-bed he would have given everything he had in the world could he have been certain there was ever a ‘Manuscript Found,’ as claimed, similar to the Book of Mormon.”<sup>260</sup>

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259. Taves, *Trouble Enough*, 54, emphasis in original. Empirical support for this view is found in wordprint studies of the Book of Mormon. The pioneering work in this area was done by 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. A careful and important critique of this article was offered by D. James Croft, “Book of Mormon ‘Wordprints’ Re-examined,” *Sunstone*, March–April 1981, 15–21. Mindful of the criticisms, and initially skeptical whether objective measurement could show who did or did not write a religious document like the Book of Mormon, John Hilton and the so-called “Berkeley Group,” which included a Jew and an agnostic, developed and refined a more reliable model for wordprint analysis. “By using a new wordprint measuring methodology which has been verified,” they show that “it is statistically indefensible to propose Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery or Solomon Spaulding as the author of the 30,000 words from the Book of Mormon manuscript texts attributed to Nephi and Alma. Additionally these two Book of Mormon writers have wordprints unique to themselves and measure statistically independent from each other in the same fashion that other uncontested authors do.” John L. Hilton, “On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 241; see also 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.

260. Maria S. Hurlbut statement, 5 February 1884, in *Public Discussion*, 135.

## Early Conspiracy Theories Implicating Sidney Rigdon

The earliest newspaper accounts attributed the Book of Mormon entirely to Joseph Smith. They often also picture it as part of Joseph's moneymaking scheme. That Smith alone was responsible for the contents of the Book of Mormon was emphatically stated by Alexander Campbell in 1831: "There never was a book more evidently written by *one set of fingers*, nor more certainly conceived in *one cranium* since the first book appeared in the human language, than this same book. If I could swear to any man's voice, face, or person, assuming different names, I could swear that this book was written by *one man*. And as *Joseph Smith* is a very ignorant man and is called the author on the title page, I cannot doubt for a single moment but that he is the sole author and proprietor of it."<sup>261</sup>

Fawn Brodie adopted Campbell's 1831 position. The tendency of most late twentieth-century critics of the Book of Mormon has been to advance some version of this explanation. But months before Campbell made his 1831 statement, other critics of the Book of Mormon began to express doubts that Smith alone could have been responsible for its production. Oliver Cowdery and other missionaries passed through Ohio and testified of the Book of Mormon; some wondered if Oliver might possess the requisite abilities: "The only opinion we have of the origin of this Golden Bible is, that Mr. Cowdry and Mr. Smith, the reputed author, have taken the old Bible to keep up a train of circumstances, and by altering names and language have produced the string of jargon called the 'Book of Mormon,' with the intention of making money by the sale of their Books; and being aware that they would not sell unless an excitement and curiosity could be raised in the public mind."<sup>262</sup> In early January 1831, gossipmonger Abner Cole, who edited the *Palmyra Reflector*, expressed impatience with the quality of information available on the origin of the Book of Mormon. Unable to accept the Prophet's account of its coming forth, he was anxious to provide another. "We have long been waiting, with *considerable anxiety*, to see some of our

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261. Campbell, "Delusions," 93, emphasis added and deleted.

262. "The Golden Bible," *Cleveland Herald*, 25 November 1830; reprinted in the *Ashtabula Journal*, 4 December 1830.



contemporaries attempt to explain the immediate causes, which produced that anomaly in religion and literature, which has most strikingly excited the curiosity of our friends at a distance, generally known under the cognomen of the Book of Mormon, or the Gold Bible. The few notices heretofore given in the public prints," Cole lamented, "are quite vague and uncertain, and throw but a faint light on the subject."<sup>263</sup> In order to satisfy the demand of his readership, Cole wrote a series of articles placing Joseph Smith in the mold of a "juggler," "false prophet," and "money digger." Cole also claimed that a locally notorious "vagabond fortune-teller by the name of Walters" had once been an associate of Joseph Smith and others in money-digging. He further noted that some local residents were of the opinion that it was Walters who "first suggested to Smith the idea of finding a book."<sup>264</sup>

Cole did not claim that Walters wrote the Book of Mormon or supplied any of its contents, but rather that some of the locals believed that Walters might have "suggested" the idea to Joseph Smith. In an article published in March 1831, David Burnett suggested that there must have been "some person behind the curtain" for whom Joseph Smith was merely a suitable "tool," but he gave no indication as to who he thought that might be.<sup>265</sup> In another article, A. W. Benton thought Joseph Smith could only have produced a work like the Book of Mormon "by the help of others more skilled in the ways of iniquity than himself."<sup>266</sup> Fortunately for those anxiously seeking an alternative explanation for the Book of Mormon, a seemingly suitable candidate soon arrived on the scene. By late 1830, after the publication of the Book of Mormon, Sidney Rigdon, then a prominent Campbellite preacher from western Ohio, learned of the book and was baptized in Ohio. He then traveled to New York to meet Joseph Smith before returning to Kirtland, Ohio, where he would quickly become an important church leader.

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263. "Gold Bible," *The Reflector*, Palmyra, New York, 6 January 1831.

264. "Gold Bible, No. 5," *The Reflector*, Palmyra, New York, 28 February 1831.

265. David S. Burnett, "Something New.—The Golden Bible," *Evangelical Inquirer*, Dayton, Ohio, March 1831, 218.

266. A. W. Benton, "Mormonites," *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate* (Utica, NY), 9 April 1831.

In what appears to have been a mixture of fact, rumor, and speculation, James Gordon Bennett proposed that a preacher named “Henry Rangdon” may have been the chief conspirator in the Book of Mormon enterprise.<sup>267</sup> “Henry Rangdon” might have been a badly garbled reference to Sidney Rigdon. If so, Bennett’s remark is the first setting out of a theory that has received wide circulation. It shows that some early critics wanted to link some more learned person to Book of Mormon origins and that Rigdon seemed a good candidate. In *Mormonism Unveiled*, Howe indicated that “an opinion has prevailed, to a considerable extent, that Rigdon has been the *Iago*, the prime mover, of the whole conspiracy. Of this, however, we have no positive proof; but many circumstances have carried a *suspicious* appearance; and further developments may establish the fact.”<sup>268</sup> This was, of course, simply an opinion. There was little evidence to support it, but it is obvious in his writing that Howe and his supporters and those who backed Hurlbut desperately wanted to show that Rigdon was in some way responsible for the Book of Mormon. So when Hurlbut was employed in 1833 by Grandison Newell and other Ohio anti-Mormons to collect testimony on Spalding’s manuscript, there was also the necessity of finding or forcing a connection to Rigdon. Whether or not Hurlbut found one is a key question.

In chapters 4–6 (pp. 99–193) of *The Spalding Enigma*, an attempt is made to outline Sidney Rigdon’s supposed role as chief villain in the Spalding conspiracy. In this section the authors marshal what they consider evidence for Rigdon’s presence in Pittsburgh in the years previous to his becoming a Campbellite minister. It was during this period that, they believe, Rigdon somehow must have learned of Spalding’s “Manuscript Found” and that the first seeds of an eventual Gold Bible conspiracy were sown. They argue that the origins of this claim can be traced to Mr. and Mrs. Spalding, thus predating the actions of Hurlbut. “Although Rigdon had been publicly suspected as early as 1831 of having been a shady behind-the-scenes player in

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267. “Mormonism—Religious Fanaticism—Church and State Party,” *Morning Courier and New York Enquirer*, 31 August 1831.

268. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 100, emphasis in original.

the production of *The Book of Mormon*, by all indications it was the former Mrs. Spalding's testimony that first connected him with the removal of her late husband's manuscript from the Pattersons' shop" (p. 58). As evidence for this, the authors reference an article published in the Palmyra *Wayne Sentinel* on 20 December 1833.

Doct. P. Hurlbert, of Kirtland, Ohio, who has been engaged for some time in different parts of this state, but chiefly in this neighborhood, on behalf of his fellow-townsmen, in the pursuit of facts and information concerning the origin and design of the *Book of Mormon*, which, to the surprize of all in this region who know the character of the leaders in the bungling imposition, seems already to have gained multitudes of believers in various parts of the country, requests us to say, that he has succeeded in accomplishing the object of his mission, and that an authentic history of the whole affair will shortly be given to the public. The original manuscript of the Book was written some thirty years since, by a respectable clergyman, now deceased, whose name we are not permitted to give. It was designed to be published as a romance, but the author died soon after it was written; and hence the plan failed. The pretended religious character of the work has been superadded by some more modern hand—believed to be the notorious Rigdon. These particulars have been derived by Dr. Hurlbert from the widow of the author of the original manuscript.<sup>269</sup>

Since the article attributes the connection of Rigdon and the manuscript to Spalding's widow, the authors claim that it was she and not Hurlbut who first suggested the link. There are, though, several problems with this claim. First of all, Davison is not speaking for herself. This is the *Wayne Sentinel* reporting what Hurlbut had "requested" them to print. So it is really thirdhand. Second, if reported accurately, the article would suggest that by late 1833 Davison had come to associate Rigdon with the Spalding manuscript; yet other questions remain. Did Davison

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269. "The Mormon Mystery Developed," *Wayne Sentinel*, Palmyra, New York (20 December 1833).

volunteer the idea about Rigdon herself or was it first suggested to her in her interview with Hurlbut? Or is it possible that others first suggested Rigdon's involvement even before Hurlbut arrived?

In 1880, Matilda Spalding McKinstry recalled the events leading up to her mother's 1839 letter as follows:

We heard, not long after she came to live with me—I do not remember just how long,—something of Mormonism, and the report that it had been taken from my father's "Manuscript Found"; and then came to us direct an account of the Mormon meeting at Conneaut, Ohio, and that, on one occasion when the Mormon Bible was read there in public, my father's brother, John Spaulding, Mr. Lake, and many other persons who were present, at once recognized its similarity to "The Manuscript Found," which they had heard read years before by my father in the same town. There was a great deal of talk and a great deal published at this time about Mormonism all over the country. I believe it was in 1834 that a man named Hurlburt came to my house at Monson to see my mother, who told us that he had been sent by a committee to procure the "Manuscript Found," written by the Reverend Solomon Spaulding, so as to compare it with the Mormon Bible. He presented a letter to my mother from my uncle, William H. Sabine, of Onondaga Valley, in which he requested her to loan this manuscript to Hurlburt, as he (my uncle) was desirous "to uproot" (as he expressed it) "this Mormon fraud." Hurlburt represented that he had been a convert to Mormonism, but had given it up, and through the "Manuscript Found" wished to expose its wickedness. My mother was careful to have me with her in all the conversations she had with Hurlburt, who spent a day at my house. She did not like his appearance and mistrusted his motives; but, having great respect for her brother's wishes and opinions, she reluctantly consented to his request.<sup>270</sup>

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270. Matilda Spalding McKinstry's statement, 3 April 1880, in "The Book of Mormon," *Scribner's Monthly* 20/4 (August 1880): 615.

The chronology of events described by McKinstry is informative. *First*, she says they heard something about Mormonism and “the report that it had been taken from my father’s ‘Manuscript Found.’” *Then*, after the initial report, “came to us direct an account of the Mormon meeting at Conneaut, Ohio.” After they heard these initial reports, *then* Hurlbut visited their home with a letter from her uncle, William Sabine, asking Spalding’s elderly widow to lend Hurlbut the manuscript in order to uproot the Mormon fraud. McKinstry’s 1880 statement suggests that by late 1833 Davison and her daughter had already become familiar with reports suggesting this relationship and that they had been told by relatives and others in whom they had confidence that there was a connection between Rigdon and the Spalding manuscript and that they should give Hurlbut their support. This raises the question as to whether the idea of connecting Rigdon with Spalding’s manuscript did not originate with Davison but was first suggested by others.

In his 1855 statement, Josiah Spalding stated that some time after his brother’s widow had moved to Connecticut she spoke of a man who was employed with a printer in Pittsburgh who expressed an interest in her husband’s manuscript and that this man “was afterwards known to be a leading Mormon,” although he could not recall the name of the person to whom she referred.<sup>271</sup> Certainly, by late 1833 Davison had come to believe that Rigdon was involved, but since Josiah did not say when she said this, it is impossible to know whether it was before 1833 or after that time when her views connecting Rigdon to the Spalding manuscript are documented.

The only other evidence that Davison may have expressed such a view earlier than 1833 comes from a late statement by Ann Treadwell Redfield, who claimed to have lived with Sabine from 1818 to November 1819, while Davison and her daughter lived there. In 1880, Redfield claimed that Davison had once told her that she believed Sidney Rigdon must have made a copy of her late husband’s manuscript “while

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271. Josiah Spalding statement, 6 January 1855, in Spalding, *Spalding Memorial*, 161–62.

it was in Patterson's printing-office, in Pittsburg."<sup>272</sup> Redfield said she never saw Spalding's widow after "her marriage to Mr. Davison of Hartwick," and so this could be taken as evidence that Davison saw a Rigdon connection by that time. Assuming that Redfield was not prevaricating, it is also possible that after the passage of sixty-two years she may have confused some earlier discussion about the manuscript in 1819 with published reports or rumors of Davison's 1839 letter in the press that received wide circulation at that time.

*The Spalding Enigma* contains another set of later statements suggesting that Solomon Spalding told former neighbors in Amity, Pennsylvania, that Rigdon may have copied or stolen his manuscript. These include testimony from Joseph Miller Sr. and Redick McKee (pp. 122–27). Miller made statements in 1869 and 1879 and two in 1882. In the 1879 and 1882 statements, Miller explains that Spalding told him before his death that Sidney Rigdon had worked in the printing office where his manuscript was taken and that he thought that Rigdon had stolen it. In his earliest statement in 1869, however, Miller makes no mention of this, "From what I know of Mr. Spalding's *Manuscript* and *The Book of Mormon*, I firmly believe that Joseph Smith, *by some means*, got possession of Mr. Spalding's *Manuscript*, and possibly made some changes in it and called it *The Book of Mormon*."<sup>273</sup> There is *no mention of Rigdon* or his involvement with the Pittsburgh printer, nor is there any suggestion that Spalding said Rigdon had stolen it. Redick McKee also gave statements in 1869, 1879, and 1886. In the 1879 and 1886 statements McKee says that Spalding had spoken of Rigdon as an employee or as being in some way associated with Patterson's printing business. Spalding told him that Patterson had lost the manuscript while it was at the printer, causing Spalding to be suspicious that Rigdon was responsible. However, the claim of both

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272. Ann Treadwell Redfield statement, 17 June 1880, in Dickinson, *New Light on Mormonism*, 241–42. Treadwell said she remembered hearing Mrs. Spalding talk about her late husband's manuscript, but it is not entirely clear from the statement if her comments about the widow's beliefs about Rigdon came from conversations with the widow in 1818–19 or from things she learned or heard from Sabine.

273. Joseph Miller Sr. statement, 26 March 1869, in the *Washington Reporter*, 8 April 1869; reprinted in *Historical Magazine* (August 1869): 68, emphasis added.

neighbors that Spalding's manuscript was stolen is inconsistent with the claims of Spalding's widow and daughter that it was returned by Patterson to Spalding. And, again, none of this occurs in McKee's 1869 testimony, in which he says that Mrs. Spalding took the manuscript with her when she moved.<sup>274</sup> While some elements in the Miller and McKee statements might reflect genuine recollections of Spalding, the convenient additions in the later statements cast doubt upon the accuracy of their claims about Rigdon. It is thus likely that Spalding never said such a thing.

The authors note that Rigdon was apparently a lover of books and while growing up read all the histories he could get his hands on. They assert that the only place Rigdon could have found and read books to satisfy his appetite for learning was in Pittsburgh. But is that really the only possibility? Might he not have borrowed books from friends or neighbors? Convinced that Rigdon could only have gratified his supposed appetite for books in Pittsburgh, they further suggest that he must have frequented R & J Patterson's printing establishment. The implication is that anyone who passed through Pittsburgh or made an occasional visit there would have visited the place. Are such assumptions justified? Did every traveler through Pittsburgh stop at R&J Patterson's?

In 1879, Rebecca Eichbaum provided a statement to Spalding-theory proponent Robert Patterson Jr. Eichbaum was the daughter of John Johnston, a postmaster in Pittsburgh, and the wife of William Eichbaum, who continued to serve in that capacity after her father retired. William was postmaster from 1822 to 1833, but Rebecca assisted her father as a clerk from 1811 to 1816, before she married. There she was often involved in sorting and distributing mail. In her 1879 statement Rebecca Eichbaum said she remembered many of the people who came in to retrieve their mail. These included, she said, Robert and Joseph Patterson, J. Harrison Lambdin, Silas Engles, Sidney Rigdon, and Solomon Spalding. "I remember that there was an evident intimacy between Lambdin and Rigdon. They very often came

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274. Redick McKee statement, 14 April 1869, in Washington, Pennsylvania, *Reporter*, 21 April 1869.

to the office together.” She said that while she did not know “what position, if any, Rigdon filled in Patterson’s store or printing office,” she was confident that Rigdon “was frequently, if not constantly, there for a large part of the time when I was clerk in the post-office.” She said she remembered that Engles once told her, “Rigdon was always hanging around the printing-office.”<sup>275</sup> She was describing people and events that were supposed to have taken place over sixty years earlier.

Partial support for Eichbaum’s statement has been found in a list of unclaimed letters that had been held at the Pittsburgh post office for more than thirty days. Such lists were compiled and published in several newspapers. After surveying a list of such letters in the *Commonwealth* and *Statesmen* newspapers, Cowdrey, Vanick, and Davis located references to letters being held for several persons of interest, including Solomon Spalding, John Spalding, and Sidney Rigdon. Letters for Solomon Spalding are dated 30 April and 31 October 1813 and 30 June 1816, and for John and Solomon Spalding on 31 January 1815. Letters for Sidney Rigdon were dated 30 June 1816 and 31 August and 31 October 1818. Letters so dated were listed as having been unclaimed for at least thirty days at the Pittsburgh post office. This evidence gives partial support for Eichbaum’s claim to have seen both Sidney Rigdon and Solomon Spalding in the Pittsburgh post office during the period from 1811 to 1816, showing that Rigdon likely did visit the post office in Pittsburgh on occasion to retrieve his mail during the same time that Spalding did the same thing. But while the authors must be commended for a good piece of detective work, they greatly exaggerate the implications of the find:

The importance of this material cannot be overstated, for not only does it provide incontrovertible proof of Sidney Rigdon’s presence in Pittsburgh well before 1821, but it places him there during the very time Solomon Spalding is known to have been involved with the Patterson brothers seeking publication of *A Manuscript Found*. At the same time, any question

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275. Rebecca J. Eichbaum statement, 18 September 1879, in Boyd Crumrine, ed., *History of Washington County, Pennsylvania, with Biographical Sketches of Many of Its Pioneers and Prominent Men* (Philadelphia: Everts, 1882), 433.



of Mrs. Eichbaum's credibility is effectively laid aside by the fact that these new revelations firmly support her 1879 statement. (p. 137)

There are problems with this reasoning. First, although the letters show that both Spalding and Rigdon had unclaimed mail at the Pittsburgh post office (which is not really that surprising since Rigdon lived only a few miles away at the time), the letters do not show that the two ever met, nor do they provide support for Eichbaum's claim that Rigdon was intimately associated with Patterson's business before 1822. Eichbaum's important claims remain unsupported. Second, although some critics of the Spalding theory may have been wrong in claiming that Rigdon *never* went to Pittsburgh before 1822, Rigdon himself never denied visiting the place before 1822; he only denied that he resided there before that time. The most important question with the Eichbaum statement is not whether Rigdon visited Pittsburgh, but whether he was connected with R&J Patterson prior to 1822. That has not been demonstrated.

### Red Herring or Wishful Thinking?

In 1839, in response to claims made by Matilda Davison that he had been closely associated with Patterson's Pittsburgh printing business at the time Spalding submitted his manuscript for consideration, Sidney Rigdon issued a strong statement denying any association with an alleged Spalding conspiracy. The authors argue that Rigdon lied in this statement about his past involvement with Patterson and that he therefore lacks credibility when denying knowledge of the Book of Mormon before his conversion in late 1830.

There was no man by the name of Patterson, during my residence at Pittsburgh, who had a printing office; what might have been before I lived there I know not. Mr. Robert Patterson, I was told, had owned a printing office before I lived in that city, but had been unfortunate in business, and failed before my residence there. This Mr. Patterson, who was a Presbyterian preacher, I had a very slight acquaintance with during my

residence in Pittsburgh. He was then acting under an agency, in the book and stationery business, and was the owner of no property of any kind, printing office or anything else, during the time I resided in the city. . . .

Why was not the testimony of Mr. Patterson obtained to give force to this shameful tale of lies? The only reason is, that he was not a fit tool for them to work with; he would not lie for them; for, if he were called on, he would testify to what I have here said.<sup>276</sup>

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick acknowledge evidence supporting Rigdon's claim not to have *resided* in Pittsburgh previous to 1822 (pp. 104–5), but, “of course, the question was not whether Rigdon had ever *lived* in the city, but whether he *frequented* it on a regular basis” (p. 104, emphasis in original). But since Rigdon only denied *residence* during that time, not visits, there is no evidence of deception.

In a brief history of Robert Patterson's printing activities (pp. 119–20), *The Spalding Enigma* notes that Reverend Robert Patterson Sr. (1773–1854) helped establish Patterson & Hopkins as a publisher and marketer of books on 14 June 1810. The connection with Hopkins was discontinued on 31 October 1812, at which time Robert's brother Joseph joined the venture and the name became R&J Patterson. Later, in January 1818, the business became R. Patterson & Lambdin, which lasted until February 1823, at which time the company collapsed. Robert Patterson then operated a small bookshop in town in association with Lambdin until Lambdin's death in 1825.

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick consider the Patterson & Lambdin incarnation to still be a “printing office” because it printed an almanac in 1822, although they do not say if this was before or after Rigdon's move to the city. Rigdon took up residence in Pittsburgh in 1822 and, while in Pittsburgh, preached in close vicinity to the bookshop in 1823 and 1824. According to legal papers cited, Patterson & Lambdin did not officially collapse until February 1823. While Rigdon remembered that Patterson had a bookstore, he had no recollection of Patterson &

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276. Rigdon, “Communications,” 8 June 1839.

Lambdin having been a “printing office” during his residence. The authors suggest that, because Rigdon arrived in 1822, he must have been familiar with all this and therefore was lying when he claimed not to know a Patterson with a printing office during his Pittsburgh residence. They contend that Rigdon must have known about it when he resided in Pittsburgh and suggest, because Rigdon lived in Pittsburgh and preached there, that he had to have been familiar with these details and that he was being deliberately deceitful.

In her 1839 statement, Matilda Davison did not mention Patterson’s first name. Following an argument posed by earlier Spalding researchers, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick cite several late statements suggesting that she may have been referring to Joseph Patterson rather than the older brother Robert and that it was this younger Patterson with whom Spalding actually met when submitting his manuscript for publication, rather than Robert. According to Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, if Spalding investigators had only been able to locate Joseph Patterson, he would have confirmed Rigdon’s involvement with Patterson’s business. They claim that Sidney Rigdon knew that it was Joseph and not Robert who knew about the Spalding manuscript. In order to mislead investigators, Rigdon presumably fingered Robert Patterson as a possible source of information rather than Joseph. This, the authors claim, was a red herring to distract attention from Joseph Patterson.

Sidney Rigdon, of course, could have known that Joseph Patterson was the knowledgeable brother and that Spalding’s involvement with Robert had been minimal. When he read Eber Howe’s account of Doctor Hurlbut’s unproductive interview with Robert Patterson, Rigdon knew no one was likely to get anything damaging out of “this Mr. Patterson” because the man did not know anything. Five years later, while formulating his reply to Mrs. Davison’s statement, he noted her mention of a “Mr. Patterson,” first name not given, and the idea struck him. Now that Jonathan Lambdin and Silas Engles were both dead, and as Robert Patterson’s name had already been connected with the Spalding Enigma, here was an excellent opportunity to plant a very large red herring. “*Why was*

*not the testimony of Mr. Patterson obtained . . . for, if he were called on, he would testify to what I have here said,”* Rigdon thundered forth in righteous indignation—knowing full well that his saccharine invitation was intended to lead his would-be critics down that well known garden path. Joseph Patterson had long since left Pittsburgh, and Robert had little to tell. (p. 151, emphasis in original)

According to *The Spalding Enigma*, this red herring “was a truly brilliant maneuver, for with it he successfully managed to mislead every effort to investigate the Spalding Enigma to date” (p. 121). In fact, it represents Sidney Rigdon’s “strongest and most artful effort to mislead his public” (p. 165).

Where, however, is the evidence that Joseph Patterson, had he been located, would have supported this theory? Since there is no way of proving that Joseph Patterson knew Rigdon or that he would have confirmed the claims connecting him with Spalding, this is merely a convenient and unproven supposition.

Of course, one very good reason for Rigdon to mention Robert Patterson is that he *knew* Robert Patterson, if only slightly, and *did not know* Joseph Patterson. The authors seem to think that Rigdon should have known him since he lived in Pittsburgh. In the July 1839 issue of his periodical the *Evangelist*, Walter Scott, a former associate of both Rigdon and Alexander Campbell, reprinted the Davison letter with apparent approval, but was doubtful of the claimed connection between Rigdon and Patterson. Although Davison had not mentioned Patterson’s first name, Scott also assumed, just as Rigdon did in his letter to the *Quincy Whig*, that she had made reference to Robert Patterson.

That Rigdon was ever connected with the printing office of Mr. Patterson or that this gentleman ever possessed a printing office in Pittsburgh, is unknown to me, although I lived there, and also know Mr. Patterson very well, who is a bookseller. But Rigdon was a Baptist minister in Pittsburgh, and I knew him to be perfectly known to Mr. Robert Patterson.

Why is not Mr. Patterson's testimony adduced in this case? He is now in Pittsburgh, and can doubtless throw light upon this part of the narrative, which, to me at least, appears exceedingly doubtful, if not positively erroneous. The Lord willing, we shall see to this matter and report accordingly.<sup>277</sup>

Several elements of this statement are noteworthy in light of the authors' claims about Rigdon's alleged deception. First, like Rigdon, Reverend Scott also assumes that it is Robert Patterson to whom Davison refers. Second, like Rigdon, Scott also lived in Pittsburgh in the 1820s, but did not know if Patterson ever possessed a printing office, although he did know Robert Patterson more recently as a bookseller, just as Rigdon did. However, if Walter Scott could live in Pittsburgh for several years and not know whether or not Robert Patterson had a printing office, why must we assume that Rigdon must have known and hence that he was being dishonest? Third, like Rigdon, Scott suggests that someone should obtain testimony from Robert Patterson. Apparently, this suggestion was made by Scott in good faith. Why should we not conclude the same for Rigdon? Finally, he expresses serious doubt about the whole alleged connection between Patterson and Rigdon, which he considers "exceedingly doubtful, if not positively erroneous." So much for the authors' own red herring.

**"The *Iago*" and "prime mover of the whole conspiracy"<sup>278</sup>**

The portrayal of Rigdon in the Spalding theory does not explain why he would settle for second best to Joseph Smith. Rigdon is often described by those who knew him as talented, but egotistical and proud. As an early preacher in Ohio, he was offended when others took credit for his accomplishments.<sup>279</sup> Yet we are to believe that this is the same man who played second fiddle to the ignorant "money digger" from Palmyra. After all he had done, would he not

277. Walter Scott, "The Mormon Bible," *Evangelist of the True Gospel*, n.s., 7/7 (1 July 1839): 160–61.

278. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 100, emphasis in original.

279. F. Mark McKiernan, *The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness: Sidney Rigdon, Religious Reformer 1793–1876* (Lawrence, KS: Coronado, 1971), 28.

have chafed at the public rebukes that came from the Prophet in revelations and before the church? William McLellin, onetime apostle turned enemy, who believed Joseph Smith a fallen prophet, once summarized his view:

You seem to think S. Rigdon the bottom of all M[ormonism]. Many people know better. He never heard of the work of Smith & Cowdery until C[owdery] and P[arley] P. Pratt brought the Book to him in Mentor, O[hio]. True enough, I have but little confidence in S. Rigdon, but I know he was more the tool of J. Smith than his teacher and director. He was docile in J.S. hands to my knowledge.<sup>280</sup>

One anecdote from the Missouri experience illustrates this point. There was a Sunday morning when some of the brethren were camped at Adam-ondi-Ahman with the Prophet. It had rained the night before and it was very cold, so the Prophet encouraged the brethren to get up together and wrestle to raise their spirits and keep warm.

While the sport was at its height Sidney Rigdon, the mouth-piece of the Prophet, rushed into the ring, sword in hand, and said that he would not suffer a lot of men to break the Sabbath day in that manner. For a moment all were silent, then one of the brethren, with more presence of mind than the others, said to the Prophet, "Brother Joseph, we want you to clear us from blame, for we formed the ring by your request. You told us to wrestle, and now Brother Rigdon is bringing us to account for it."

The Prophet walked into the ring and said, as he made a motion with his hand: "Brother Sidney, you had better go out of here and let the boys alone; they are amusing themselves according to my orders. You are an old man. You go and get ready for meeting and let the boys alone." Just then catching Rigdon off his guard, as quick as a flash he knocked

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280. William E. McLellin to James T. Cobb, Independence, Missouri, 14 August 1880, cited in *LDS Church News*, 8 December 1985, 10.

the sword from Rigdon's hand, then caught him by the shoulder, and said: "Now old man, you must go out, or I will throw you down." Rigdon was as large a man as the Prophet, but not so tall. The prospect of a tussel between the Prophet and the mouthpiece of the Prophet was fun for all but Rigdon, who pulled back like a crawfish, but the resistance was useless, the Prophet dragged him from the ring, bareheaded, and tore Rigdon's fine pulpit coat from the collar to the waist; then he turned to the men and said: "Go in, boys, and have your fun. You shall never have it to say that I got you into any trouble that I did not get you out of."

Rigdon complained about the loss of his hat and the tearing of his coat. The Prophet said to him: "You were out of your place. Always keep your place and you will not suffer; but you got a little out of your place and you have suffered for it. You have no one to blame but yourself." After that Rigdon never countermanded the orders of the Prophet, to my knowledge—he knew who was the boss.<sup>281</sup>

Another recollection comes from Howard Coray, one of Joseph's scribes in Nauvoo.

I had heard it remarked that Joseph Smith was Sidney Rigdon's cat's paw: soon after he returned from the East he came to see Joseph, and the thought went through my mind: now I will see, who the cat's paw is.—well, I did see; after passing the usual compliments, Rigdon said to Joseph:—"When I was preaching in Philadelphia after I had finished my discourse a man stepped up to me and desired me to explain something in John's Revelation, mentioning at the same time what it was)—"Well, I could not do it, how is it Joseph?" Joseph cited him at once right off hand to a passage in Ezekiel and something in some other book of the old Testament, saying that

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281. John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled?* (St. Louis: Moffatt, 1881), 76–78.

they explained all about it.” I thought to myself, that don’t look much like Joseph being a cats paw.<sup>282</sup>

Spalding theorists want to see Rigdon as the source of inspiration behind the doctrines and teachings of Joseph Smith. Some who observed the Prophet’s interactions with others on a daily basis, however, had difficulty reconciling that picture with what they saw and heard. While Rigdon was a talented preacher, Joseph seemed to be his superior. Philo Dibble was present with about a dozen others when Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon received and described a vision of the heavens and the three degrees of glory in 1832 (D&C 76). “There were other men in the room, perhaps twelve, among whom I was one during a part of the time—probably two-thirds of the time. I saw the glory and felt the power, but did not see the vision.” Dibble observed a significant difference between Joseph and Sidney. “Not a sound nor motion [was] made by anyone but Joseph and Sidney, and it seemed to me that they never moved a joint or limb during the time I was there, which I think was over an hour, and to the end of the vision. Joseph sat firmly and calmly all the time in the midst of a magnificent glory, but Sidney sat limp and pale, apparently as limber as a rag, observing which, Joseph remarked smilingly, ‘Sidney is not as used to it as I am.’”<sup>283</sup>

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick mention a statement attributed to Walter Sidney Rigdon, a grandchild of Sidney, from an interview published by J. H. Beadle in 1888. Walter Rigdon is reported by Beadle to have “talked with old Sidney hundreds of times about the ‘scheme of the Golden Bible,’”<sup>284</sup> and is also reported to have claimed that his

282. Howard Coray MS#1, cited in Dean Jessee, “Howard Coray’s Recollections of Joseph Smith,” *BYU Studies* 17/3 (1977): 343.

283. Philo Dibble, “Recollections of the Prophet Joseph Smith,” *Juvenile Instructor* 27/10 (1892): 303–4.

284. John H. Beadle, “The Golden Bible,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 15 April 1888. The authors blithely note that Beadle “was the author of the 1870 book *Life in Utah*.” Actually, the full title of Beadle’s book was *Life in Utah; Or, The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*, and it went through at least six editions from 1870 to 1904. He also published *Brigham’s Destroying Angel; Being the Life, Confession, and Startling Disclosures of the Notorious Bill Hickman, The Danite Chief of Utah*. “One feels certain that Beadle did some retouching of the Hickman manuscript, if he did no more than that. There are phrases in the Hickman confessions that



father and other members of the family knew that the Book of Mormon was derived from the Spalding manuscript, but refused to talk about it while their father was alive (p. 354). But the Beadle interview is inconsistent with the testimony of other family members and friends, who consistently affirmed that Rigdon disclaimed any involvement with the production of the Book of Mormon.

*The Spalding Enigma* protests that Rigdon never made any attempt to respond to the Spalding theory in print until 1839 (pp. 109–13). They claim that this is because he must have had something to hide. However, although there may not be any printed accounts of such a response, some who lived in Kirtland remembered public rebuttals to claims linking him with the origin of the Book of Mormon. Phineas, Hiel, and Mary D. Bronson recalled:

In the spring of 1833 or 1834, at the house of Samuel Baker, near New Portage, Medina county, Ohio, we, whose signatures are affixed, did hear Elder Sidney Rigdon, in the presence of a large congregation, say he had been informed that some in the neighborhood had accused him of being the instigator of the Book of Mormon. Standing in the door-way, there being many standing in the door-yard, he, holding up the Book of Mormon, said, “I testify in the presence of this congregation, and before God and all the Holy Angels up yonder, (pointing towards heaven), before whom I expect to give an account at the judgment day, that I never saw a sentence of the Book of Mormon, I never penned a sentence of the Book of Mormon, I never knew that there was such a book in existence as the Book of Mormon, until it was presented to me by Parley P. Pratt, in the form that it now is.”<sup>285</sup>

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are typically Beadle. This may or may not mean an inaccurate confession, but it does mean some friendly editorial assistance, if not ghost-writing, and probably a market orientation.” Leonard J. Arrington, “Kate Field and J. H. Beadle: Manipulators of the Mormon Past,” lecture given at the University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 31 March 1971, 17 n. 53.

285. Statement by Phineas Bronson, Hiel Bronson, and Mary D. Bronson, in Rudolph Etzenhouser, *From Palmyra, New York, 1830, to Independence, Missouri, 1894* (Independence, MO: Ensign Publishing House, 1894), 388.

David Whitmer also remembered that Rigdon frequently responded to these charges. According to an interview published in the *Chicago Times* on 14 October 1881, “Mr Whitmer emphatically asserts that he has heard Rigdon, in the pulpit and in private conversations, declare that the Spaulding story, that he had used a book called ‘The Manuscript Found’ for the purpose of preparing the ‘Book of Mormon,’ was as false as were many other [charges] that were then being made against the infant church, and he assures me that the story is as untruthful as it is ridiculous.”<sup>286</sup>

Others who visited Rigdon following his excommunication in 1844 also note that he always affirmed that he had nothing to do with the origin of the Book of Mormon. One visitor at Rigdon’s home in Friendship, New York, in 1867 described the former church leader as a “grand looking old man, large and portly,” who exuded a manner of “intellectual importance” and was “an intellectual giant of a certain type,” “a man of extraordinary spiritual aspirations,” yet “lacking in the elements of a great leader.” He reported, “Mr. Rigdon still felt bad towards President Young, whom he accused of supplanting him and by his shrewdness depriving him of his rights as the lawful successor to Joseph Smith.” He then asked, “Elder Rigdon, it is reputed that you wrote the Book of Mormon; did you or did you not?” To which he replied, “I did *not* write the Book of Mormon. It is the revelations of Jesus Christ.”<sup>287</sup> In an interview with A. W. Cowles published in 1869, Rigdon “solemnly affirm[ed]” that when Oliver Cowdery and others gave him a copy of the Book of Mormon in late 1830 it “was his first personal knowledge of Joe Smith and the Mormons.”<sup>288</sup>

Several members of Rigdon’s family who were present when Mormon missionaries first contacted Rigdon in Mentor, Ohio, also provided supporting testimony. In a sworn statement made in 1904, Athalia Robinson, Rigdon’s oldest daughter, said that both she “and

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286. *Chicago Times* correspondent interview, 14 October 1881, Richmond, Missouri, *Chicago Times*, 17 October 1881, in *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 77.

287. “Abram Hatch,” in Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Cannon & Sons, 1904), 4:167, emphasis in original.

288. *Moore’s Rural New Yorker* 20/4 (23 January 1869).

her mother were present when the book was presented which was a bound volume. Her father stated and she is positive it was the first time he ever saw the book and that he was not the author of it and had nothing to do with its production. This was the first time he had ever heard of Joseph Smith.”<sup>289</sup>

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick are aware that “Rigdon denied having anything to do with the Spalding Enigma on several occasions” but dismiss these denials as subterfuge since they believe that they have shown Rigdon to be dishonest about his past and about Hurlbut (p. 353). However, their claim for Rigdon’s dishonesty on these matters appears to be exaggerated, if not unfounded. They also suggest that “Rigdon had simply come to believe his own lies, though one must concede the possibility that he truly did live in fear of reprisals from the agents of those whose secrets he kept” (p. 353). They cite no evidence that Rigdon himself lived in such a state but mention later rumors suggesting that a son-in-law, George W. Robinson, who had left the church in Nauvoo, may have feared for his life. The rumor comes from an elderly grandchild of Sidney Rigdon who reportedly told Noel B. Croft that Athalia Robinson told her that her husband George Robinson had been part of a plot to kill Joseph Smith and replace him with Rigdon, who could then be easily controlled by others. According to other local rumors, George Robinson went “so far as to have a bullet-proof room constructed for him in his bank and heavy bars placed over some of the lower windows of his home” (p. 353). This rumored paranoia is supposed to show that Sidney Rigdon and his children were so afraid of possible vengeance from unnamed and undocumented agents of the dead Spalding conspirators that they made statements affirming that Rigdon said he had nothing to do with the origin of the Book of Mormon.

E. L. Kelley and W. H. Kelley interviewed Rigdon’s daughter Nancy Rigdon Ellis in 1884. Nancy was eight years old at the time her father joined the church. According to E. L. Kelley,

She says she was eight years of age at the time that the preachers of the Latter Day Saints first came to her father’s in Mentor,

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289. Athalia Robinson, notarized statement, 26 May 1904.

Ohio; and has a full remembrance of it because of the contest which soon arose between her father and Pratt and Cowdery, over the Book of Mormon. She says:

“I saw them hand him the book, and I am positive as can be that he never saw it before. He read it and examined it for about an hour and then threw it down, and said he did not believe a word in it.”

She further stated that her father in the last years of his life called his family together and told them, that as sure as there was a God in heaven, he never had anything to do in getting up the Book of Mormon. And never saw any such thing as a manuscript written by Solomon Spalding.<sup>290</sup>

That same year she was interviewed by a reporter for the *Pittsburgh Leader*. In an article that had previously appeared in that newspaper, a Reverend Coover had repeated the allegation that Rigdon had stolen the Spalding manuscript from Patterson’s printing office. Her response was then published in that paper on 18 May 1884:

I have never had the honor of seeing this so-called Reverend Coover, who of late had been so free in his use of dead men’s names, but I understand he parts his hair in the middle of his head, a fact which, from what I have heard and read of him, is no surprise to me. Now, while I most emphatically decline to be drawn into any controversy over that story of Coover, which, if there was any foundation for it, I can not, for the life of me, see why it was allowed to remain quiet for years after all the actors are laid in their graves. Yet I will say this, that my father, who had the respect of all who knew him, and at a time when he had but little hope of living from one day to another, said to the clergymen around him, of which there was a number belonging to various denominations. These were his words: “As I expect to die and meet my Maker,

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290. *Saints Herald* 31 (1884): 339, reprinted in *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1967), 4:451–52.

I know nothing about where the manuscript of the Mormon bible came from.”<sup>291</sup>

Perhaps the most poignant account was written by John Wycliff Rigdon, a son, who interviewed his father in 1865. John had visited the Latter-day Saints in Utah and had not been favorably impressed.

I concluded I would make an investigation for my own satisfaction and find out, if I could, if he had all these years been deceiving his family and the world, by telling that which was not true, and I was in earnest about it. If Sidney Rigdon, my father, had thrown his life away by telling a falsehood and bringing sorrow and disgrace upon his family, I wanted to know it and was determined to find out the facts, no matter what the consequences might be. I reached home in the fall of 1865, found my father in good health and (he) was very much pleased to see me. As he had not heard anything from me for some time, he was afraid that I had been killed by the Indians. Shortly after I had arrived home, I went to my father's room; he was there and alone, and now was the time for me to commence my inquiries in regard to the origin of the *Book of Mormon*, and as to the truth of the Mormon religion. I told him what I had seen in Salt Lake City, and I said to him that what I had seen in Salt Lake had not impressed me very favorably toward the Mormon church, and as to the origin of the *Book of Mormon* I had some doubts. You have been charged with writing that book and giving it to Joseph Smith to introduce to the world. You have always told me one story; that you never saw the book until it was presented to you by Parley P. Pratt and Oliver Cowdery; and all you ever knew of the origin of that book was what they told you and what Joseph Smith and the witnesses who claimed to have seen the plates had told you. Is this true? If so, all right; if it is not, you owe it to me and to your family to tell it. You are an old man and you

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291. *Pittsburgh Leader*, 18 May 1884, as cited in *The History of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, 4:453.

will soon pass away, and I wish to know if Joseph Smith, in your intimacy with him for fourteen years, has not said something to you that led you to believe he obtained that book in some other way than what he had told you. Give me all you know about it, that I may know the truth. My father, after I had finished saying what I have repeated above, looked at me a moment, raised his hand above his head and slowly said, with tears glistening in his eyes: "My son, I can swear before high heaven that what I have told you about the origin of that book is true. Your mother and sister, Mrs. Athalia Robinson, were present when that book was handed to me in Mentor Ohio, and all I ever knew about the origin of that book was what Parley P. Pratt, Oliver Cowdery, Joseph Smith and the witnesses who claimed they saw the plates have told me, and in all of my intimacy with Joseph Smith he never told me but one story, and that was that he found it engraved upon gold plates in a hill near Palmyra, New York, and that an angel had appeared to him and directed him where to find it; and I have never, to you or to any one else, told but the one story, and that I now repeat to you." I believed him, and now believe he told me the truth. He also said to me after[ward] that Mormonism was true; that Joseph Smith was a Prophet, and this world would find it out some day.

After my father's death, my mother, who survived him several years was in the enjoyment of good health up to the time of her last sickness, she being eighty-six years old. A short time before her death I had a conversation with her about the origin of the *Book of Mormon* and wanted to know what she remembered about its being presented to my father. She said to me in that conversation that what my father had told me about the book being presented to him was true for she was present at the time and knew that was the first time he ever saw it, and that the stories told about my father writing the *Book of Mormon* were not true.<sup>292</sup>

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292. *Comprehensive History of the Church*, 1:234–35.

There is simply no good reason to view Sidney Rigdon as a conspirator behind the scenes to produce the Book of Mormon, but there are good reasons to reject the suggestion.

### Oliver Cowdery

In order to link Rigdon and Joseph Smith, the authors claim that Oliver Cowdery was responsible for bringing Rigdon and Joseph Smith together.<sup>293</sup> They make their argument for this claim in chapters 8, 9, and 10 (pp. 209–308). Noting significant gaps of information or limited sources on portions of Oliver Cowdery’s life, they suggest that Cowdery may have been ashamed of his past and therefore deliberately concealed much of this information (p. 210). Those who work with historical sources, however—in family history, for example—realize that this is a common problem in tracing the history of individuals that is far from unique to Oliver Cowdery. Nonetheless, the authors prefer to see conspiracies everywhere: “One must also question why pro-Mormon historians do not seem to have been particularly concerned with uncovering who this man was,” they complain. They also fault Latter-day Saint scholars for making “so slight an effort to fill the void” (p. 210). But their complaints are misconceived. There is a substantial literature on Oliver Cowdery of which the authors show little or no awareness and with which they make little attempt to engage.<sup>294</sup>

Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick paint Oliver Cowdery as a none too smart dupe of Sidney Rigdon who “was simply too credulous for his own good” and “too weak to resist the sly manipulations of Joseph Smith’s overpowering personality. In short, Oliver was a convenient stooge to machinations that were, at first, largely over his head—things that, when he finally began to perceive what was really happening, he was powerless to stop or withdraw from without considerable risk” (p. 211). While this is the proposed view, it is dramatically inconsistent with the actual Oliver, who appears to have been a man of exceptional

293. I wish to thank Larry E. Morris for his suggestions on this section.

294. See the appendix for further bibliographic sources on Oliver Cowdery.

intelligence and ability both as an elder of the church and as a non-Mormon lawyer.<sup>295</sup>

### Mistaken Identities

In November 1830, Oliver Cowdery, Parley P. Pratt, Peter Whitmer Jr., and Ziba Peterson visited western Ohio on their way to Missouri to fulfill a mission to the Lamanites.<sup>296</sup> Local Ohio newspapers took note of the missionary visit and some of their activities. On 30 November 1830, the *Cleveland Herald* printed an article on Mormonism; the writer—probably the editor, John St. John—had noticed the name of Oliver Cowdery in some of the newspaper descriptions of the missionaries’ activities.

On reading the name of Oliver Cowdery, in support of the divine authenticity of the work, whatever faith we might have been inspired with on reading the certificate, was banished,

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295. See, for example, Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 37–65, 170–75, 178–79; Scott H. Faulring, “The Return of Oliver Cowdery,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 117–73. W. Lang—a lawyer who read and studied law with Oliver Cowdery in Tiffin, Ohio, before passing the bar and who had a distinguished career as an attorney, mayor, and state senator—said, “Mr Cowdery was an able lawyer and a great advocate. His manners were easy and gentlemanly; he was polite, dignified, yet courteous. He had an open countenance, high forehead, dark brown eyes, Roman nose, clenched lips and prominent lower jaw. He shaved smooth and was neat and cleanly in his person. He was of light stature, about five feet, five inches high, and had a loose, easy walk. With all his kind and friendly disposition, there was a certain degree of sadness that seemed to pervade his whole being. His association with others was marked by the great amount of information his conversation conveyed and the beauty of his musical voice. His addresses to the court and jury were characterized by a high order of oratory, with brilliant and forensic force. He was modest and reserved, never spoke ill of any one, never complained. He left Tiffin with his family for Elkhorn, in Wisconsin, in 1847, where he remained but a short time, and then moved to Missouri, where he died in 1848 [1850]. The writer read law with Mr. Cowdery in Tiffin, and was intimately acquainted with him from the time he came here until he left, which afforded me every opportunity to study and love his noble and true manhood.” W. Lang, *History of Seneca County* (Springfield, OH: Transcript Printing, 1880), 365.

296. For an overview, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “The Impact of the First Preaching in Ohio,” *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 474–96.



for we had known Cowdry some seven or eight years ago, when he was a dabbler in the art of Printing, and principally occupied in writing and printing pamphlets, with which, as a pedestrian Pedlar he visited the towns and villages of western New-York and Canada.<sup>297</sup>

In what may be an echo of this earlier article, the *Lockport Balance* in New York printed another piece in 1832 on Mormonism. The author, probably the editor Orsamus Turner, portrayed the Book of Mormon witness, without further explanation, as “an itinerant pamphlet pedlar, and occasionally, a journeyman printer, named *Oliver Cowdry*.”<sup>298</sup> In 1849, Turner published a local history of western New York in which he described early settlers and pioneers of the region. In a short sketch for the town of Albion, New York, near Lockport, he recalled, “In 1823 it [“the fine lands in the immediate neighborhood of Albion”] had sufficiently advanced to indicate the necessity of a press and newspaper, and Oliver Cowdry, (who has been the pioneer printer in at least a half dozen localities,) took a part of the old battered ‘small pica’ that had been used in printing the Lockport Observatory, and adding to it indifferent materials from other sources, commenced the publication of the ‘Newport Patriot.’”<sup>299</sup>

If correct, these two newspaper articles and Turner’s 1849 recollection would place Oliver in New York around 1822 or 1823, working there as a “pioneer printer” and “journeyman printer,” a veteran of various publishing ventures that included commencing a paper in Albion in 1823 and writing and publishing pamphlets in western New York and Canada, which he peddled and sold in those locations. The authors favor these sources because they would, if accepted, place Oliver in New York—where they could more easily connect him with their hypothetical Gold Bible conspiracy.<sup>300</sup>

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297. “The Golden Bible,” *Cleveland Herald*, 25 November 1830.

298. “Mormonism,” *Lockport Balance*, circa September 1832; reprinted in the *Boston Recorder*, 10 October 1832.

299. Orsamus Turner, *Pioneer History of the Holland Purchase of Western New York* . . . (Buffalo: Jewett, Thomas, 1849), 658.

300. Cowdry, who was born in October 1806, could scarcely have been a veteran of anything in 1822–23.

Unfortunately for the authors, though, there is no supporting evidence for the claim that Oliver was involved in printing before December 1829, when he provided some assistance in the preparation of the Book of Mormon for publication. In a letter to Joseph Smith in December 1829, Oliver wrote: "It may look rather strange to you to find that I have so soon become a printer."<sup>301</sup> The clear implication in this private letter to Joseph Smith is that printing was a new experience for him. Moreover, it can be clearly shown that it was *Franklin* Cowdery, Oliver's uncle, and not Oliver Cowdery, who began publication of the *Newport Patriot* in 1822.<sup>302</sup>

It is true that, during the Kirtland period and after his excommunication in 1838, Oliver engaged in a few printing ventures, but there is no support for this kind of activity before 1829. Second, a family source, Oliver's half-sister Lucy Cowdery Young, said that when Oliver, who had previously lived in Vermont, "arrived at the age of twenty he went to the State of New York where his older brothers were married and settled." This would be around 1826. During that time, she said, he clerked in a store and after two years went to Manchester, where he taught school.<sup>303</sup> While Cowdery, Davis, and Vanick assert that Lucy was mistaken about this, no evidence refutes her recollection. The authors also undercut their own theory in their characterization of Oliver's health, describing him as weak, not very intelligent, and a "poor, consumptive, wheezing 'little man'" (p. 211) with an often fragile constitution. Yet it is this same individual who is supposed to have traveled on foot across the length and breadth of western New York and Canada, writing, printing, and peddling pamphlets, all at the tender age of 16! This seems unlikely.

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301. Oliver Cowdery to Joseph Smith, 28 December 1829, in Richard L. Anderson and Scott H. Faulring, eds., *Witness of the Second Elder: The Documentary History of Oliver Cowdery*, (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 1:80.

302. Milton W. Hamilton, *The Country Printer: New York State, 1785-1830* (Port Washington, NY: Friedman, 1936), 266. Turner's 1849 recollection seems to have been off by a year.

303. Lucy Cowdery Young to Brigham H. Young, 7 March 1887, Milo, Ms 842, Family and Church History Department Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; see Anderson and Faulring, *Witness of the Second Elder*, 4.

A better explanation is that the sources above represent a case of mistaken identity in which the two editors confused Oliver with Franklin Cowdrey. Franklin *was* a pioneer printer who engaged in numerous publishing ventures in New York from 1817–48, which included the *Moscow Advertiser and Livingston Farmer* (1817), the *Olean Hamilton Recorder* (1819–20), the *Angelica Allegany Republican* (1820–22), the *Angelica News Record and Allegany Patron of Industry* (1822), the *Newport Patriot* (1824–25), the *Geneva Ontario Chronicle* (1828–29), the *Geneva Chronicle* (1829), the *Albion Orleans Mercury* (1832), the *Cuylerville Telegraph* (1847–48), the *Rochester Genesee Olio* (1847), and, in Ohio, the *Oberlin Evangelist* (1847). In 1852, Turner quoted an old resident of Allegany who remembered that, in 1820, “the *pioneer printer* in so many different localities—Franklin Cowdrey—had moved a rude press, and a few fonts of battered type, from Olean, where he had published the *Hamilton Recorder*, and had started the first paper in Allegany county, the *Angelica Republican*.”<sup>304</sup> “It was a pretty hard place for newspaper publishing,” Franklin recalled,

I had to take my pay in all manner of traps—just what I could get. I feasted upon fat venison; it hung around my domicil in the shape of saddles, quarters, and hams; and I had maple sugar in profusion; the great trouble was to get something the paper and ink maker would take in payment. . . . To print for a livelihood there, was up-hill work—rather less lucrative than hunting and trapping. And so little intercourse was there with the business world, that the highways were often so bad getting over, that paper had to be carried on horseback; and ink manufactories so distant, that typo made his own printing ink, composed mostly of linseed oil, lamp black, and rosin; during the three years he *luminated* the woods of Cattaraugus and Allegany.<sup>305</sup>

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304. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps & Gorham's Purchase, and Morris' Reserve* (Rochester: Alling, 1852), 554.

305. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, 554, emphasis in original.

One historian of New York printers noted that there was a “general opinion” that “Franklin Cowdery, was poorly qualified to speak for the printers. . . . He had complained constantly about the public patronage and his own meager support.”<sup>306</sup> With Oliver’s notoriety as one of the Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon and as one of the early missionaries to Ohio, it would have been easy to mistake one Cowdery for the other. The authors speculate that on occasion from 1822 to 1827 Oliver may have *worked for* Franklin in several of these printing ventures, but there is no evidence for this.

It is not enough, though, to get Oliver Cowdery to New York in 1822. They also want to place him in or near Palmyra where he can conspire with the Smith family in the early 1820s. In order to bolster this claim, they cite an 1869 history of Vermont by Robert Parks and an 1849 history of New York by Orsamus Turner. In 1869, Parks recalled, “We well remember this same Oliver Cowdery when in our boyhood. . . . He attended school in the District where we reside[d] in 1821 and 1822. He then went to Palmyra, N.Y.” (p. 237). Cowdery, Davis, and Vanick take this rather dogmatically to mean that Oliver left Wells, Vermont, and arrived in Palmyra in late 1822 or 1823, but there is no reason to interpret Parks’s statement so narrowly. Oliver *did* go to Palmyra *after* he left Vermont. Writing almost fifty years after the event, Parks could easily mean by “then” anything from 1823 to 1829.

In another mid-nineteenth-century history of New York, Orsamus Turner wrote a brief sketch of early Mormonism. As a young man, Turner began his apprenticeship in late 1818 with Timothy Strong at the *Palmyra Register*. He appears to have spent 1821 and 1822 in Canandaigua, where he finished his apprenticeship working for James Beamis. After this, during a brief return to Palmyra, Turner heard of a printer position in Lockport about one hundred miles away. He then moved there and purchased the *Lockport Observatory* in August 1822. Turner’s brief discussion of early Mormonism is a mixture of hearsay and personal recollection and is filled with sarcasm and permeated with a tone of ridicule. Turner admitted that he did not take

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306. Hamilton, *Country Printer*, 92. On Franklin’s publishing ventures, see 265–66.

Mormonism seriously, treating it “lightly—with a seeming levity.”<sup>307</sup> Still, his own personal recollections, where they can be shown to be such, are valuable in that they tend to confirm and flesh out details about the Smith family residence in Palmyra. As Richard L. Anderson explains, however, “Turner’s personal recollections of Joseph Smith of necessity refer to the period *prior to* the late summer of 1822 and are probably no later than 1820, the latest date of Palmyra memoirs in his writings.”<sup>308</sup> Dan Vogel, while admitting that it was possible for Turner to have occasionally visited Palmyra after that time, claims that “much of what Turner writes, particularly about events subsequent to his departure from the area, is from the standpoint of a distant observer.”<sup>309</sup>

Eager to put Cowdery in Palmyra by 1822, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick uncritically accept all of Turner’s statements, including passing remarks about Cowdery, as events observed. But this is obviously problematic. For example, Turner said that after the death of Alvin Smith, “the mantle of the Prophet which Mrs. and Mr. Joseph Smith and one Oliver Cowdery, had wove of themselves—every thread of it—fell upon their next eldest son, Joseph Smith, Jr.”<sup>310</sup> *The Spalding Enigma* transfigures this comment, along with Turner’s 1832 *Lockport Balance* article, into firsthand testimony for Oliver being in Palmyra

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307. In Turner’s opinion, Mormonism was a “bald, clumsy cheat” that only “an enthusiast, a monomaniac or a knave” could believe in. It could only be treated with ridicule “because it will admit of no other treatment. There is no dignity about the whole thing; nothing to entitle it to mild treatment. It deserves none of the charity extended to ordinary religious fanaticism, for knavery and fraud has been with it incipiently and progressively. It has not even the poor merit of ingenuity. Its success is a slur upon the age. Fanaticism promoted it at first; then ill advised persecution; then the designs of demagogues who wished to command the suffrages of its followers; until finally an American Congress has abetted the fraud and imposition by its acts, and we are to have a state of our proud Union—in this boasted era of light and knowledge—the very name of which will sanction and dignify the fraud and falsehood of Mormon Hill, the gold plates, and the spurious revelation” (Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, 217). According to Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick, though, Turner “had no particular religious axe to grind” (p. 242).

308. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Circumstantial Confirmation of the First Vision through Reminiscences,” *BYU Studies* 9/3 (1969): 378, emphasis added.

309. Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 3:47.

310. Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement*, 213.

in 1823 (p. 243). But Turner was living in Lockport in 1823 when Alvin died—approximately a hundred miles away—and there is simply no evidence that he was present in Palmyra, even less that he was lurking at Alvin’s deathbed when Alvin passed away. There is no basis upon which to assert that Turner’s comments on Alvin’s death were based upon anything more than distant hearsay. The same can be said of his comments about Oliver. In fact, while Turner describes firsthand experiences with Joseph Smith, he never gives any indication that he had so much as met the Book of Mormon scribe. Based upon this dubious foundation, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick then embark on a series of bewildering speculations and irrelevancies as they opine where Oliver *may* have been and what he *might* have been doing. *Maybe* he was dousing with Walters the magician over in Sodus or Palmyra or wherever. *Maybe* he was scribing for William Morgan on his exposé of Freemasonry. This kind of thing can be fun, of course. Stacking each unproven assumption upon the previous unproven assumption, the authors construct an ugly theoretical caricature of Cowdery, a veritable castle in the clouds, but it has no foundation and the picture is a mirage. It is their wish list, not history. Those seeking to know the historical Oliver Cowdery will have to look elsewhere.

### Other Enigmas

While not critical to supporting their Spalding thesis, some errors in *The Spalding Enigma* are notable and tend to reduce confidence in its authors and their work. In their summary of the Book of Mormon, for example, they assert that “According to the story written on the plates, there were three separate migrations of Israelites. The first was a tribe known as the Jaredites” (p. 24). However, the Jaredites are not Israelite but leave Mesopotamia at the time of the great Tower of Babel and the confounding of languages, long before Israel came into existence. Another claim is that Moroni explained to Joseph Smith that the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated had been buried in a cave near his home. “During this experience, Smith was informed that several groups of Israelites

had migrated to North America many centuries before, and a sacred record of their ancient wanderings had been preserved and lay hidden in a cave beneath a small hill near Palmyra” (p. 23). Actually, though, according to Joseph Smith’s own account, “not far from the top, under a stone of considerable size, lay the plates, deposited in a stone box. This stone was thick and rounding in the middle on the upper side, and thinner towards the edges, so that the middle part of it was visible above the ground, but the edge all around was covered with earth” (Joseph Smith—History 1:51–52). The plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated were found within this box, *not in any* “cave.” There is folklore revolving around a later vision of a cave with wagonloads of Nephite records, but none of the sources for this come from Joseph Smith, only through secondary and tertiary and sometimes untraceable sources.<sup>311</sup> None of these accounts suggests that Joseph Smith retrieved the plates for the Book of Mormon from the cave. It may be that the authors want to portray the cave story as the traditional account in order to make the Book of Mormon account sound more like Spalding’s “Manuscript Story,” in which the author finds the record in a cave. But this is misleading.

A more significant issue has to do with their characterization of events relating to conditions under which the Book of Mormon was translated. For example, the book reports that Joseph Smith, in dictating the text of the Book of Mormon, “reportedly read them aloud from a place of concealment behind a curtain while various amanuenses (or ‘scribes’) carefully took down his words” (p. 24). The reports about the curtain come from Rev. John Clark, Professor Charles Anthon, and the Palmyra gossipmonger Abner Cole.<sup>312</sup> Clark and Anthon spoke to Harris during his trip to New York City in the winter of 1827 and 1828, when Harris carried the characters to New York City for examination. Cole does not say when in the process the curtain was used, but it is likely that he refers to the same time period. Additional testimony

311. Cameron J. Packer, “Cumorah’s Cave,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1–2 (2004): 50–57.

312. “Gold Bible, No. 6,” *Reflector*, Palmyra, New York, 9 March 1831; Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 270–71. John A. Clark, “Gleanings by the Way,” *Episcopal Recorder*, 5 September 1840.

from Martin Harris describes his activities as scribe during the translation of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon. That testimony suggests that after his return from New York, Joseph Smith used the seer stone while dictating and that there was nothing present to obstruct the translator from his view. A similar situation is described by subsequent scribes and witnesses for the remainder of the translation in Harmony, Pennsylvania, and at the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York. Speaking of the translation activities at his home in Fayette, New York, David Whitmer related, as reported by the *Chicago Tribune* correspondent:

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.<sup>313</sup>

On another occasion, Whitmer recalled, "I often sat by and saw 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."<sup>314</sup> The key point is that the Book of Mormon text, as we know it today, was—according to those who witnessed its dictation—dictated by Joseph Smith by placing the seer stone in a hat, covering his face or eyes with the hat, and dictating hour after hour without the apparent aid of papers or manuscript of any kind. While

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

314. William E. McLellin to My Dear Friends, February 1870, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 233–34, brackets in original.



we have no way of knowing firsthand precisely what was going on in Joseph Smith's mind while he was doing this, evidence for these observations by scribes and family can be found in what remains of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon itself.<sup>315</sup> It seems to me that this is a key problem for theories of Book of Mormon origins that suggest that Joseph Smith was reading something from notes or a prepared manuscript. In order to support such an explanation, one has to dismiss the firsthand testimony of those who were there as well as evidence in the original manuscript.<sup>316</sup>

Readers may also be misled by the authors' statement that the translation and publication of the Book of Mormon took about two and one-half years (p. 178). This merely describes Joseph Smith's experiences with the plates but not the period of translation. The Book of Mormon text as we have it was essentially dictated after the arrival of Oliver Cowdery in early April 1829. When the translation recommenced after the loss of the 116 pages, Joseph and Oliver continued with the book of Mosiah through Moroni and then 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon, the later phase being completed after the 1829 move to the Whitmer home in Fayette, New York. The original manuscript for the book of Mosiah is no longer extant; however, the earliest surviving portion of that manuscript—Alma 10:31–45 through Ether 15:17, with the exception of Alma 45:22—was written in the hand of Oliver Cowdery. Most of what survives of 1 Nephi through Enos also shows Cowdery to be the main scribe, with the exception of a few chapters.<sup>317</sup> Since Cowdery did not arrive in Harmony, Pennsylvania, until April 1829 and the translation was completed in June, this means that most of the Book of Mormon was dictated in about two and a half months, and not two and a half years.

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315. Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 61–93.

316. See Daniel C. Peterson, "Not So Easily Dismissed: Some Facts for Which Counterexplanations of the Book of Mormon Will Need to Account," in this number, xii–xxiv.

317. Skousen, *Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon*, 13–14.

## Book of Mormon Witnesses and the “Eye of Faith”

An additional claim that requires response has to do with the nature of the testimony of the Book of Mormon witnesses. Speaking of the plates, the authors quip in passing, “Naturally, no one has seen them since; and, as it turns out, no one really saw them then, except with ‘spiritual eyes’—a point various writers have written much about over the years” (p. 24). Later on, Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick also insist that “In fact, it has never been established that *anyone*, not even the Mormons’ much touted witnesses to *The Book of Mormon* themselves, ever saw the plates in a physical sense, but rather only with their ‘spiritual eyes of faith’” (p. 178, emphasis in original). But the Eight Witnesses claimed to have both seen and hefted the plates. It is difficult to characterize their testimony as anything other than physical in nature. While the Three Witnesses saw the angel and the plates in vision, it is misleading to imply that they did not claim that what they saw was real. Quite the contrary. For the witnesses, at least, the plates were no less real than the resurrected Jesus was to his disciples. One may choose to believe or not to believe such testimony, but to mischaracterize the nature of what they claimed is bad history. On this, the reader will want to consider Richard Anderson’s important recent discussion of the issue.<sup>318</sup>

One key question that is almost never asked by critics is what terms such as *eye of faith* and *spiritual eyes* may have meant to the witnesses. The term *eye of faith* cannot be accurately understood unless one is familiar with the scriptural context behind its usage. The Three Witnesses of the Book of Mormon were familiar with the scriptures in which that language is found, and when they felt that they had been misunderstood, they gave additional clarification. None of this is discussed in *The Spalding Enigma*. What is meant by having an “eye of faith”? When the Lord gives a promise, those who believe in his words, those with faith, look forward to their eventual and *actual* realization, even though the promises are not fulfilled at first.

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

In one Book of Mormon example, Alma asks: “Do ye exercise faith in the redemption of him who created you? Do you look forward with an *eye of faith*, and view this mortal body raised in immortality, and this corruption raised in incorruption, to stand before God to be judged according to the deeds which have been done in the mortal body?” (Alma 5:15). So here we have the Lord’s promise of a resurrection for the just and the unjust, a subsequent righteous judgment from God for our deeds, and rewards of good or bad things according to his promises. Even though we will not experience the resurrection until later, we believe now that we actually will one day. In light of that belief, we live our lives in a way that is consistent with that expectation, looking forward to the time when through Christ we are truly resurrected.

In another passage from the Book of Mormon, we again see the pattern. “And there were many,” Moroni says, “whose faith was so exceedingly strong, even before Christ came, who could not be kept from within the veil, but *truly saw with their eyes* the things which they had beheld with an *eye of faith*, and they were glad” (Ether 12:19). They had an eye of faith in the past, but later “truly saw.” The Book of Mormon witnesses also at first had an eye of faith and lived accordingly, but later they were blessed with an actual view of the plates and truly saw with their eyes the things that earlier they had only hoped for, just as prophets of old received knowledge after first exercising faith (see Ether 12:19; D&C 17:2). Additional confusion regarding the witnesses can also arise among those only partially acquainted with the historical sources because Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery also spoke of other experiences that preceded their vision in which they hefted or handled the covered plates during the translation. During those earlier experiences, they looked forward with an “eye of faith” to the things they eventually *truly saw* with their eyes. One has to keep these two kinds of testimony in mind when evaluating their statements.

Similarly, to conclude that a vision with “spiritual eyes” means “imaginary” is unjustified and does not do justice to sources on the witnesses for whom the plates and the angel were clearly a reality. The

term *spiritual eyes* in Latter-day Saint usage comes from the experience of Moses on Mount Sinai. “The glory of God was upon Moses; therefore Moses could endure his presence” (Moses 1:2). Moses, being mortal, had to be transfigured by the glory and power of God for his own protection in order to speak with God face to face. Concerning this experience, Moses said, “But now *mine own eyes* have beheld God; but not my natural, but my spiritual eyes, for my natural eyes could not have beheld; for I should have withered and died in his presence; but his glory was upon me; and I beheld his face, for I was transfigured before him” (Moses 1:11). Mortality has limitations, but God can increase man’s ability through divine power to see things “not visible to the natural eye” (Moses 6:36).

This seems to be what David Whitmer meant when he tried to clarify the reality of his vision of the plates and the angel: “Of course we were in the spirit when we had the view, for no man can behold the face of an angel, except in a spiritual view, but we were in the body also, and everything was as natural to us, as it is at any time.”<sup>319</sup> To put it another way, “spiritual eyes,” in scriptural terms and in the context of the witnesses’ testimony, experience *increased* perception, not less. “I saw them [the plates and the other artifacts] just as plain as I see this bed (striking the bed beside him with his hand).”<sup>320</sup> “I heard the voice of the Angel just as stated in said Book, and the engravings on the plates were shown to us, and we were commanded to bear record of them; and if they are not true, then there is no truth.”<sup>321</sup> On another occasion, a visitor to David Whitmer’s home suggested “if it might not have been possible that he, Mr. Whitmer, had been mistaken and had simply been moved upon by some mental disturbance, or hallucination, which had deceived him into *thinking* he saw the Personage, the Angel, the plates, the Urim and Thummim, and the

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319. David Whitmer to Anthony Metcalf, 2 April 1887, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 247.

320. Orson Pratt, Joseph F. Smith interview, 16 November 1878, Richmond, Missouri, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 40.

321. James H. Hart Interview (1), 21 August 1883, Richmond, Missouri, James H. Hart Notebook, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 96.

sword of Laban.”<sup>322</sup> Joseph Smith III, who was present at the time, declared, “How well and distinctly I remember the manner in which Elder Whitmer arose and drew himself up to his full height—a little over six feet—and said, in solemn and impressive tones: ‘No, Sir! I was not under any hallucination, nor was I deceived! I saw with these eyes and I heard with these ears! *I know whereof I speak!*’”<sup>323</sup>

Although not interviewed as frequently as David Whitmer, Martin Harris also emphasized the reality of the experience. One account is typical. When asked if he was sure that he had seen the angel and the plates, he replied, “‘Gentlemen,’ and he held out his right hand, ‘do you see that hand? Are you sure you see it? Or are your eyes playing you a trick or something? No. Well, as sure as you see my hand so sure did I see the Angel and the plates. Brethren, I know I saw and heard these things, and the Lord knows I know these things of which I have spoken are true.’”<sup>324</sup> To Jacob Gates, Oliver Cowdery bore a similar testimony, “My eyes saw, my ears heard, and my understanding was touched, and I know that whereof I testified is true. It was no dream, no vain imagination of the mind—it was real.”<sup>325</sup>

In contrast to the experience of the Three Witnesses, the experience of the Eight Witnesses with the plates involved no vision, but included the additional element of physically handling the plates. “Joseph Smith Jun., the translator of this work, has shown unto us the plates of which hath been spoken, which have the appearance of gold; and as many of the leaves as the said Smith has translated we did handle with our hands; and we also saw the engravings thereon, all of which has the appearance of ancient work and of curious workmanship.” The term *curious*, in its early nineteenth-century sense, meant “wrought with care and art; elegant, neat.” The Eight not only saw but said they “hefted.” They

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322. Joseph Smith III et al. interview, mid-July 1884, Richmond, Missouri, *Saints Herald*, 28 January 1936, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 135.

323. Joseph Smith III et al. interview, in Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 134–35, emphasis in original.

324. Statement of William Glen to O. E. Fischbacher, 30 May 1943, Cardston, Alberta, Canada, in C. Frank Steele, “Harris Testimony Recalled: Canadian Tells of Seeing Witness,” *Deseret News*, Church Edition, 2 October 1943, 6.

325. Jacob F. Gates, “Testimony of Jacob Gates” (30 January 1912), *Improvement Era*, March 1912, 418–19.

knew “of a surety” that Joseph Smith had the plates because they had seen and handled them. In 1838, Sally Parker heard Hyrum Smith, one of the Eight Witnesses, speak in direct refutation to the accusations of some dissenters that the experience was illusionary. “He said he had but [two] hands and [two] eyes he said he had [seen] the plates with his eyes and handled them with his hands.”<sup>326</sup> Clearly, the witnesses meant to convey that their testimony was no less real than that given by New Testament apostles concerning the resurrected body of Jesus, “For we have not followed,” said Peter, “cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were *eyewitnesses* of his majesty” (2 Peter 1:16, emphasis added). The apostle John spoke of that “which we have *heard*, which we have *seen with our eyes*, which we have *looked upon*, and our *hands have handled*, of the Word of life. . . . That which we have *seen* and *heard* declare we unto you” (1 John 1:1, 3, emphasis added).

Such was also the claim of three Book of Mormon witnesses who saw the plates and heard the angel and the voice of God, and eight others who saw and examined the plates with their eyes and hands. A buried record from the dust, words of hope and warning written by saints long dead, comes forth again in power and mercy like the resurrected Jesus from the tomb, out of the ground, and is seen, handled, and declared by special chosen witnesses. Again, one may believe it to be true or dismiss it as false but one should never misrepresent the nature of what is claimed or what is at stake.

## Conclusion

Whether one accepts the Spalding explanation or some other theory, one still has to explain not only *if*, but *how* Joseph Smith or any other candidate could write such a book, a point upon which critics have never agreed and probably never will agree. The Book of Mormon will always be an enigma for the unbeliever. The Latter-day Saint, of course, already has an explanation that nicely circumvents that puzzle.

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326. Sally Parker to John Kempton, 26 August 1838, Family and Church History Department Archives.

zle. For those who are unwilling to believe Joseph Smith's explanation of the origin of the Book of Mormon but who still cannot see the ignorant Palmyra plowboy as responsible for its contents, some variation of the Spalding theory with its mythical "Manuscript Found" may be the best fiction they can contrive.<sup>327</sup>

## Appendix

A more complete bibliography on Cowdery would include Richard L. Anderson, "Reuben Miller, Recorder of Oliver Cowdery's Reaffirmations," *BYU Studies* 8/3 (1968): 277–93; Anderson, "Oliver Cowdery's Non-Mormon Reputation," *Improvement Era*, August 1968, 18–26; Anderson, "The Scribe as Witness: 'New Evidence from Modern Witnesses,'" *Improvement Era*, January 1969, 53–59; Anderson, "The Second Witness of Priesthood Restoration," *Improvement Era*, September 1968, 15–24; Anderson, "The Second Witness of Priesthood Succession," *Improvement Era*, November 1968, 14–20; Anderson, "The Impact of the First Preaching in Ohio," *BYU Studies* 11 (Summer 1971): 474–96; Anderson, "Oliver Cowdery, Esq.: His Non-Church Decade," in *To the Glory of God: Mormon Essays on Great Issues*, ed. Truman G. Madsen and Charles D. Tate (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 199–216; Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 37–65, 151–91; Anderson, "The Credibility of the Book of Mormon Translators," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 213–37; Anderson, "The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Seeking," *BYU Studies* 24/4 (1984): 521–32; Anderson, "Did Oliver Cowdery, one of the three special Book of Mormon witnesses, express doubt about his testimony?" *I Have a Question*, *Ensign* (April 1987): 23–25; Anderson, "Cowdery, Oliver," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:335–40; Scott H. Faulring, "The Book of Mormon: A Blueprint for Organizing the Church," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 60–69; Faulring, "The Return of Oliver

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327. See, for example, Peterson, "Not So Easily Dismissed," in this number of the *Review*, pages xxxv–xliv.

Cowdery,” in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 117–73; John W. Welch, “Oliver Cowdery’s 1835 Response to Alexander Campbell’s 1831 ‘Delusions,’” in *Disciple as Witness*, 435–58; Larry E. Morris, “Oliver Cowdery’s Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 39/1 (2000): 106–29; Morris, “‘The Private Character of the Man Who Bore That Testimony’: Oliver Cowdery and His Critics,” *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 311–51. Much important information can also be found in John W. Welch, ed., with Erick B. Carlson, *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press and Deseret Book, 2005). In addition to the above, a multivolume work by Richard Anderson and Scott Faulring that will publish all known documents relating to Oliver Cowdery has been in preparation for over a decade and is expected to appear in the near future. A preliminary copy of this work, entitled *Witness of the Second Elder: The Documentary History of Oliver Cowdery*, was completed in 1999 and has been on file since then in the FARMS Library.

The failure of Cowdrey, Davis, and Vanick to engage serious scholarship on Cowdery is apparent in their discussion of the so-called Wood Scrape episode in Middletown, Vermont (pp. 213–14). As Anderson and Morris demonstrate, there is little historical foundation for attempts to link the Cowderys and the Smiths to the event. Anderson, “The Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Seeking,” 521–32; Morris, “Oliver Cowdery’s Vermont Years and the Origins of Mormonism,” 113–18.



## THE BOOK OF MORMON AS LITERATURE

Richard Dilworth Rust

James Duke has performed a labor of love and deep devotion to the Book of Mormon in producing *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon*. A professor at Brigham Young University for four decades, Duke specialized in the sociology of religion and also taught courses on the Book of Mormon. His treatment of this scripture obviously comes out of many years of study, pondering, and effort.

As its title suggests, the book is an extensive compendium of literary elements or forms, as Duke calls them, that cumulatively reveal the Book of Mormon to be a great literary masterpiece. Duke's work is, in effect, an encyclopedic presentation of themes, sermons, rhetorical structures, and the like. He treats ninety different terms, typically defining them, providing examples of them, and then listing their occurrences.

Duke developed his understanding of literary forms from books like Sidney B. Sperry's *Our Book of Mormon* (1947), Wilfred G. E. Watson's *Traditional Techniques in Classical Hebrew Verse* (1994), and Hugh W. Pinnock's *Finding Biblical Hebrew and Other Ancient Literary Forms in the Book of Mormon* (1999). The book, however, that had the most

Review of James T. Duke. *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon*. Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2004. xii + 328 pp., with bibliography and index. \$24.95.

profound influence on Duke and that is cited repeatedly is Donald W. Parry's *The Book of Mormon Text Reformatted according to Parallelistic Patterns* (1992, 1998). In a number of respects, Duke's work is an amplification of Parry's in that Duke frequently cites and enumerates Parry's patterns and then adds to them.

*The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon* is made up primarily of many lists that Duke hopes others will use for further exploration. His interpretation is often limited to pointing out that a pattern is beautiful and likely serves to help make the relevant passages memorable. Duke desires that what he has provided will encourage others to explore the Book of Mormon, especially in academic settings. As he says in his introduction, "Universities and colleges have long had a tradition of teaching one or more courses in 'The Bible as Literature.' Such courses are usually found in the English Department. However, to my knowledge no university has yet offered a course in 'The Book of Mormon as Literature.' My fondest wish would be that the present book would advance the recognition of the greatness of the literature found in the Book of Mormon" (p. 5). James Duke will be pleased to know that Charles Swift is now teaching "The Book of Mormon as Sacred Literature" as a new class for the honors program at Brigham Young University.

Duke confesses he is not trained in literary interpretation and thus makes minor errors such as calling some formulations using "like" or "as" similes when they are rather simply comparisons of like qualities. However, he counterbalances this by the thoroughness of his lists, by the depth of his study, and by his infectious love of the Book of Mormon. The spirit in which he has approached this work is a model for serious Latter-day Saint students of the Book of Mormon.

In his conclusion, Duke makes one statement that reveals what is probably a stumbling block to many in considering the Book of Mormon as a literary work: "I make no claim that literary style is as important as the spiritual content of the prophetic messages. In a sense, literary style is fluff, or the frosting on the cake" (p. 311). Duke then backs away from this view, though, saying: "Literary style helps people to pay attention to the message, remember it, and feel a sense of spirituality as well as

beauty. So literary style is really not fluff after all, but an essential ingredient in communicating God's message to his children" (p. 312). I would add that literary style is not just the frosting on the cake called the Book of Mormon—it is an essential part of the cake. Plato had it right: truth, goodness, and beauty are three parts of a whole. "That which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually" (Moroni 7:13). Mormon the poet knew exactly what he was talking about: Truth, that "which is of God," employs beauty (it "inviteth and enticeth") to do good. Latter-day Saints appropriately sing, "Beautiful words of love / Coming from God above."<sup>1</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson put it this way: "The Father, the Spirit, and the Son . . . stand respectively for the love of truth, for the love of good, and for the love of beauty. These three are equal. . . . The world is not painted, or adorned, but is from the beginning beautiful; and God has not made some beautiful things, but Beauty is the creator of the universe."<sup>2</sup> My hope and expectation is that faithful scholars in the future will build on what James Duke and others have done to reveal more perfectly how form and content are integrated in the Book of Mormon to create a spiritual masterpiece made so in part by its literary aspects.

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1. "Oh, Holy Words of Truth and Love," *Hymns*, no. 271.

2. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The Poet," in *Essays: Second Series* (Boston: Munroe, 1844), 7.



## BEHIND THE MASK, BEHIND THE CURTAIN: UNCOVERING THE ILLUSION

Brant A. Gardner

Magicians are illusionists who entertain with wonderful things that appear real. Of course their craft is not real magic any more than the Wizard of Oz was more than a man behind a curtain. It is masterful illusion, the art of misdirection, a play upon our credulity. A magician lures us into believing we have seen something that is not really there.

Living Hope Ministries has produced a film entitled *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon* that performs magic tricks with ideas. It slickly demonstrates its points with the classic techniques of misdirection, unexamined assumptions, and hidden information. In technique and effect, the film is the analog of a magic show. One can watch it and actually believe that one has seen something, although that is not in reality what happened.

Not that long ago a few television specials took a different tack on magic shows. Rather than celebrate the illusion, they showed the reality behind the curtains. It seems appropriate to use that model as I examine *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*. When we see how the magician performed the trick, it does not seem nearly so impressive. In this case,

Review of Joel P. Kramer and Scott R. Johnson. *The Bible vs. the Book of Mormon*. Brigham City, UT: Living Hope Ministries, 2005. \$20.00.

the illusion is that the film is based on scholarship. Unmasked, the film is far from scholarly—it is empty propaganda.

The film is separated into several segments. To help those who might like to follow along, I will divide this review into the film's segments and discuss them in order. For each segment I will present Living Hope's illusion, and then I will unmask it.

## Introduction

*The Illusion:* The main question of the introduction echoes throughout the film: "Is the Book of Mormon comparable to the Bible?" The film carefully creates a contrast between a believable Bible and an unbelievable Book of Mormon.

*The Unmasking:* The film clearly intends to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon and the Bible are not comparable by taking a very critical view of the Book of Mormon while presenting the Bible as though it generated no controversy at all. This approach is a fundamental misrepresentation of the scholarly climate for both the Bible and the Book of Mormon.

William G. Dever, a professor of Near Eastern archaeology and anthropology at the University of Arizona, believes that the Bible is historical. Nevertheless, he notes:

The "archaeological revolution" in biblical studies confidently predicted by [George E.] Wright and his teacher, the legendary William Foxwell Albright, had come about by the 1980s, but not entirely in the positive way that they had expected. Many of the "central events" as narrated in the Hebrew Bible turn out not to be historically verifiable (i.e., not "true") at all.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the above quotation, the "truth" of the Bible is obtained by faith and revelation, whether it is historically verifiable or not. By ignoring the questions that are currently asked of the Bible, the film creates the illusion that the Bible is unassaulted and unassailable but

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1. William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2001), 21.

that the Book of Mormon suffers from questions on every front. The reality is that the Bible must also stand before modern scholarship and answer serious questions. In that respect, the Bible and the Book of Mormon are quite comparable. Hard questions may be asked of each, and in the end, the answers, not the questions, are important. In this film, the viewer never even sees the questions directed at the Bible. For the Book of Mormon, they never see the answers.

### **The Story of the Bible; The Story of the Book of Mormon**

*The Illusion:* The film provides an outline of the stories found in the Bible and declares these stories to be historical. The Book of Mormon is presented as a work that merely claims to be history.

*The Unmasking:* The illusion of these two segments is subtle. While ostensibly simply setting the stage, the film portrays a Bible that can be easily confirmed as historical and a Book of Mormon for which no authentication can be found.

For the Book of Mormon, the misdirection comes in the way the story is presented. Viewers are told that the Bible is a historical account of the Old World and that the Book of Mormon is a historical account of the Americas. This subtle illusion depends upon viewer predispositions. Viewers who are familiar with the Bible know it took place in a specific location in the Old World. Hearing that the book is a historical account of the Old World, they immediately think of a small area between the ancient cultures of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon and do not conclude that the Bible is a history of the entire Old World.

This contrasts with the illusion created when the Book of Mormon is mentioned. The film portrays it as a “historical account of the Americas.” Lacking any similar limiting preknowledge of the Book of Mormon, a viewer may easily suppose that this means the entire Western Hemisphere. Indeed, many (probably most) Latter-day Saints may have supposed that for a number of years. The film plays upon existing assumptions without calling attention to what the producers do not want the viewer to see, creating a powerful illusion. In this case, the illusionists do not want to deal with the best Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Mormon.

That body of scholarship, which has been growing in volume and sophistication of method and detail for at least the last forty years (and presaged for perhaps one hundred years before that),<sup>2</sup> is completely ignored in the film. In exactly those places in which a scholarly presentation would discuss the best contrary evidence, this film opts for the propaganda technique of ignoring anything that does not support its thesis.

There are only two possible explanations for interpreting this remarkable lack of scholarly honesty. Either every person appearing in the film is unaware of that body of scholarship, or withholding that information is intentional. While the first could well be true for some of the experts in the film (particularly the archaeologists in Israel), it is extremely doubtful for others. Thomas W. Murphy (who has a PhD in anthropology), for example, appears as one of the primary experts in the film. He recently published an article in which he addresses some of the issues he so carefully ignores in this film.<sup>3</sup> Murphy is obviously aware of Latter-day Saint scholarship that presents a different side to the issues he discusses, yet he gives no indication of that awareness at any point in this film. The film's producers and editors should have had access to relevant information from Murphy that should have been presented. One must conclude that this magician knows more than he wants the audience to see.

## Geography

*The Illusion:* The film shows a number of modern signs bearing the names of ancient locations. In addition to the names, the narration tells us that various mountains and rivers correspond to descrip-

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2. Matthew Roper, "Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 225–75.

3. Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 61–63. Much of the best work on the Book of Mormon is published or sponsored by FARMS. In these pages Murphy speaks directly of the work of FARMS and specifically of the limited geography of the Book of Mormon that alters the way Latter-day Saint scholars perceive Book of Mormon history in the real world. Murphy certainly knows of FARMS even though in the film he studiously avoids engaging any of the findings and arguments the organization has published.



tions in the Bible. At this point, the film cuts to an expert witness. William E. Wilson,<sup>4</sup> an erstwhile archaeologist who is described inaccurately as a Latter-day Saint,<sup>5</sup> says: “There is no map showing Book of Mormon lands because they can’t place it on earth. They don’t know where it is.” Following this comment, the film cuts to pictures of maps of Book of Mormon lands, clearly none of which is a real-world map.

*The Unmasking:* The most favorable reading of this section has the makers of the film concentrating on the lack of an official declaration of the location of Book of Mormon lands. While the church clearly has no official position, that does not mean that “they don’t know where it is.” John E. Clark, who is both a Latter-day Saint and a frequently cited Mesoamerican archaeologist, notes in his article on geography for the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*: “Many scholars currently see northern Central America and southern Mexico (Mesoamerica) as the most likely location of the Book of Mormon lands. However, such views are private and do not represent an official position of the Church.”<sup>6</sup> A statement of location that appears in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* may not be an official position (as Clark notes), but it certainly indicates at least a favorable consideration of the position. The statement is strong enough that the film should have addressed it explicitly.

Wilson and others imply that Latter-day Saint scholars “don’t know where it is.” Unless Wilson is oblivious of LDS scholarship (which would make him a poor “expert”), it is an intentional misstatement. Wilson’s statement is even more interesting because he performs a mind-reading trick, announcing a reason for the church’s lack of an official statement (when no explanation has been given). Since direct evidence contradicts Wilson’s assertion about the identification of a probable location

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4. Writing at [www.lhvm.org/wilson.htm](http://www.lhvm.org/wilson.htm) (accessed 4 January 2006), Living Hope Ministries admitted: “The first duplication run of the video incorrectly named the LDS anthropologist from Northern Arizona University (NAU) as ‘Wil West.’ The name Wil West is a nickname of sorts that we mistakenly used instead of his legal name, which is William E. Wilson.” They then offer to replace older copies of the video having the titling error with copies having the corrected title.

5. Late in the film Wilson discusses losing faith in the Book of Mormon. He presents himself in evangelical terms at the end of the film and not as a Latter-day Saint.

6. John E. Clark, “Book of Mormon Geography,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:178.

for Book of Mormon events, we simply cannot believe his mind-reading trick either.

Nevertheless, in spite of the lack of explicit interaction with Latter-day Saint scholarship, the film's editors appear to be aware of at least its general outlines, for they spend a good deal of time filming in Mesoamerica. The only reason for selecting that area of the world, the very area that Clark identified as the place where many Latter-day Saint scholars locate the Book of Mormon, would be to respond to the scholarship they pretend does not exist. The illusionists attempt to combat a position that they do not admit actually exists. The illusion is stronger because they make it appear that there is no contradictory information, even when they know there is.

Murphy also claims that "The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints takes no official position on the geography of the Book of Mormon. One of the reasons for this is obvious. It is that the events never took place anywhere!" Half of the statement is true. When Murphy notes that there is no official geography, he is on firm ground. But when he gives a reason, he is attempting the same mind-reading technique Wilson used earlier. How good is this inventive answer?

The most generous reading is that it is Murphy's version of sleight of hand. Stating that the church does not know where the Book of Mormon took place may be a way to read the fact of official neutrality on the topic, but it distorts the scholarly picture by suggesting that there is no known location. Latter-day Saint scholars have been homing in on Mesoamerica for over one hundred and fifty years. Certainly the last thirty to forty years have seen a significant refinement of this position. As noted earlier, Murphy certainly knows this, though throughout the film he avoids the relevant scholarship.

John L. Sorenson has presented the best arguments for placing the Book of Mormon in the real world. He was circulating a correlation of the Book of Mormon to a specific geography in the 1970s.<sup>7</sup> For various reasons, this information was first published by David Palmer in

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7. In 1975, John Sorenson gave me a copy of his manuscript that later became *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. He had circulated it to others earlier than that.

1981.<sup>8</sup> In 1984, Sorenson published information in the *Ensign* about his correlation of the Book of Mormon to real-world geography, along with some of the implications of setting the text in that area of the world.<sup>9</sup> Sorenson published his book-length correlation of the Book of Mormon to a specific geography in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* in 1985.<sup>10</sup>

Sorenson's geography identifies the spatial relationships according to the text of the Book of Mormon and then compares them to specific features of Mesoamerica. He locates valleys, lakes, rivers, and hills, just as the film indicates has been done for the Bible.<sup>11</sup> The only reason that the Book of Mormon appears incomparable to the Bible in geography is that the producers have not shared Sorenson's information with their viewers. As with any illusion, the important thing is not what you see but what you are not allowed to see.

Is it possible that the authors of the film were simply unaware of the major focus of Latter-day Saint scholarly work on Book of Mormon geography for the last thirty years? Believing that stretches one's credulity, particularly since the film spends so much time discussing Mesoamerica and uses Murphy (who has written about this geographic position) as an expert witness and since the cover of Sorenson's book is actually displayed in one of the film's collages. Ignorance did not keep this information from the viewers but rather a choice made by the film's producers, who decided to keep the best information from the audience. One would suspect that if the producers had had a good answer

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8. David Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient America* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1981), now being reissued in a new paperback format as *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2005).

9. See John L. Sorenson, "Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture," *Ensign*, September 1984, 26–37; October 1984, 12–23.

10. See John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985).

11. It should be noted that the methodology for locating the Book of Mormon in the real world begins with the text itself. An internal geography is created from the descriptions of the text. These details are laid out in John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000). A similar examination of the geographic clues in Homer's *Iliad* led Schliemann to the location now acknowledged as the site of the legendary Troy.

to geographical issues, they would have made it part of the film. Since such an acknowledgment is entirely absent, one must suppose that they really have no answer and consequently prefer to pretend that one does not exist.

## Peoples and Empires

*The Illusion:* This part of the film contrasts the clear evidence for civilizations mentioned in the Bible to a declared lack of evidence for Book of Mormon cultures. The Old World evidence is presented by showing impressive archaeological remains. For the Book of Mormon, the narrator begins by discussing the Jaredites: “The Jaredites are promised that they will become the greatest nation on earth.” As this statement is read, the film pans to a countryside that is empty of any identifiable human influence. The film’s expert, Murphy, then declares that “no traces of it” can be found.

*The Unmasking:* Of course the makers of the film give no indication of what the “it” is that they were looking for and did not find. Certainly they could have found something to film other than an empty countryside. I live in New Mexico, which has large tracts of empty countryside. Filming that while suggesting that Albuquerque did not exist would be an interesting visual illusion but would obviously be incorrect. What are they not telling us about the Jaredites?

They have avoided two major points. The first is that the geographic correlation in Sorenson’s work suggests that the land of the Jaredites corresponds to an area within the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The Book of Mormon tells us that in this location we should find a major civilization with advanced architecture and political structures and that we should find them by at least 1200 BC. The Book of Mormon tells us where to look and what to look for.

The second important bit of information withheld from us is that the Isthmian region is the location of what has been called the mother civilization of Mesoamerica, a civilization present in that area since at least 1200 BC (and earlier). The culture has been given the name *Olmec* (what they called themselves is unknown). The Olmec undertook massive building projects and developed an artistic style that influenced

Mesoamerican art for centuries. In the Mesoamerican region, which would have been their whole world, they were clearly the greatest of nations.

While it would not be accurate to equate the Jaredites with the Olmec, it is certainly plausible that the Jaredites participated in that culture. The Book of Mormon predicted an ancient high civilization in a certain location and time. Archaeology has found one that fits the geographical, architectural, and temporal description of the Book of Mormon.

The film never mentions the Olmec. It never discusses the correlation between that culture and the geography mentioned in the Book of Mormon. The very evidence that contradicts their position is suppressed. Once again, we might generously assume that they were unaware of the best Latter-day Saint scholarship. But Murphy cannot make that excuse since he is certainly aware of it. Even though he disagrees with this literature, he intentionally oversimplifies when he says that no traces of the Jaredites can be found.<sup>12</sup> Once again, in the film, too much of what the viewer can see is controlled by the agenda and not by the substance of a scholarly discussion. The stage magician makes sure you see what he wants you to see. The stage magician also makes sure that you do not see what he does not want you to see. The film is more illusory than scholarly.

*More Archaeological Illusion:* The film attempts to demonstrate that Mesoamerica cannot have any relationship to the Book of Mormon. Two experts are interviewed. Archaeologist Steven Whittington, of the University of Maine, states: “I don’t know of any evidence that the Nephites existed in the Americas,” and Murphy provides even more damaging opinions: “The civilizations we find throughout Central America tended to peak, find their great climax, between 600 and 900 AD, well after the events described in the Book of Mormon.”

*The Unmasking:* There is no way to know how much information Whittington has about the Book of Mormon. Likely he was unaware of

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12. For information on the Jaredites, see parts 2 and 3 of Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 151–423.

Latter-day Saint scholarship on the text. Would Living Hope Ministries have informed him? One can best read Whittington's statement as an honest evaluation from someone unfamiliar with the whole picture. It is true, however, that nothing in the New World has been found with the name *Nephite* on it.

Less explicable is Murphy's statement, which is completely accurate—the civilizations of Mesoamerica did reach their climax between AD 600 and 900. As Murphy claims, this period is well after the close of the Book of Mormon. The statement is not problematic, but its context is. Murphy leads the viewers to believe that the late florescence of Mesoamerican culture precludes any early Mesoamerican cultures. Murphy must know that his statement is misleading. If he knows enough to make that cautiously correct statement, he knows enough to realize that he left out significant relevant information. While the high point of Mesoamerican culture occurs later, nevertheless, there were very impressive predecessors. Archaeology clearly demonstrates that there were impressive cities during Book of Mormon times. The ruins of Nakbé and El Mirador are massive sites with very impressive architecture that flourished during Book of Mormon times. All the aspects of Mesoamerican culture and society that peak during the Late Classic—social, religious, architectural, and artistic—were present in less elaborate forms much earlier, including in Book of Mormon times. In the regions where Sorenson suggests that the Book of Mormon took place, he has identified possible candidate sites that date to the correct period for the Book of Mormon and fit the geographic descriptions in the text.<sup>13</sup> The pinnacle of Mesoamerican culture came later but was built on a foundation that is known to have been in the area Sorenson suggests for Book of Mormon activities and during the correct time.

Perhaps, however, Murphy's statement was pronounced innocently and was pulled out of context by the film's editors, who are certainly not above such a trick. Later in the film they pull quotations from Gordon B. Hinckley and Daniel C. Peterson out of context. Whether Murphy himself or the editors created this particular deception, someone has seri-

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13. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 141, 152, 168, and others.

ously misrepresented the situation in Mesoamerica. Either the editors or Murphy (or both) have attempted to have us see something that is not really there. With a wave of his magician's rhetorical wand, Murphy's statement has made more than a thousand years of Mesoamerican culture vanish into thin air.

*Another Disappearing Civilization Illusion:* Continuing the theme of missing remains, the film concentrates on the idea that a large civilization cannot vanish without a trace. First, the narrator says: "The Bible speaks of peoples who no longer exist. Are they missing?" The response comes from Dr. Gabriel Barkay, a biblical archaeologist from Bar-Ilan University, Israel. He suggests that while the Canaanites no longer exist, we know about them through Egyptian sources and archaeological sites.

Dr. Katharina Galor of Brown University, associate director of the Tiberias excavation in Israel, then tells us that the Philistines had their own material culture that can be distinguished in the archaeological remains. Finally, Dr. Yizhar Hirschfeld, an archaeologist from the Hebrew University and director of the Tiberias excavation in Israel, confirms that it simply is not possible for a civilization to vanish without a trace.

*The Unmasking:* Of course, all these experts are correct. Unlike Murphy's illusion of a disappearing culture, in the real world civilizations leave traces. The problem does not lie with what these experts say but with the context in which their statements have been placed. Following the sleight of hand that made it appear that nothing in the New World existed during Book of Mormon times, these experts appear to be placing a final archaeological condemnation on a culture that should have left a trace and yet seems to be completely absent.

This final condemnation, however, is what begs to be examined. If we begin with Barkay's statement, we find the first indication of an issue that appears in other parts of the film. Barkay speaks of Egyptian records and the presence of Canaanites in those records, which is important historical confirmation of a Canaanite people. Is there support for Jaredites and Nephites in the New World outside of

the Book of Mormon? No. On that we can agree. Is this because, as the film suggests, nothing existed? No.

The problem is not that no remains have survived from the right place and time but rather that no *texts* have survived! Very few texts of any kind from Book of Mormon times are in existence. Even those few that date to the right time do not originate from locations that had any known correspondence with cities in the area where the Book of Mormon likely took place. Suggesting that the case of Egyptian documents should be instructive merely indicates that Barkay is familiar with the Old World but not with the New.

The Jaredites do not appear in texts. The Olmec left no texts. The New World can only envy the text-rich Old World. In spite of the lack of texts, however, the cultures did exist. Not only did the cultures exist, but members of those civilizations wrote. Evidence of early writing survives,<sup>14</sup> but not texts. The problem with the New World is not that the cultures were illiterate but that they wrote on perishable materials.

The claim that different cultures leave differing types of remains is certainly true. Mesoamerican archaeologists are quite aware of this and have traced a number of different cultural complexes through time and space. The issue is not whether different peoples can be identified but whether we are able to place familiar names to the remains of these identified peoples.

Could archaeological remains distinguish between Jaredite and Nephite civilizations? They might, if we knew what belonged to each. Archaeologists can certainly distinguish between Olmec and Maya, which are cultures from periods and regions appropriate to the Book of Mormon. If the Jaredites followed Olmec culture and the Nephites followed Maya culture, then we have already distinguished between the two. Note the problem that Dever discusses in attempting to find archaeological evidence of early Israel:

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14. Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 32.



The villages that have been excavated are characterized by U-shaped courtyard houses (the so-called “four-room houses”), clustered in groups of two to four, often sharing common walls. The houses have room for animal shelter and storage of provisions on the first floor and ample space for a large extended family on the second floor. These distinctive houses have virtually no precedents in Canaan, but they would be ideal farmhouses. . . . Harvard’s Lawrence Stager has demonstrated that this unique house form and overall layout of these hill-country villages correspond closely with many narratives of daily life in the period of the Judges in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, reflecting no doubt a close-knit family and clan structure and an agrarian lifestyle. In Stager’s view the single-courtyard house represents the nuclear family dwelling; and the cluster of several such houses would then be the residence of the extended, or multi-generation family equivalent to the biblical *bêt-’āb*, or “house of the father.”<sup>15</sup>

Dever is, of course, trying to find evidence of early Israel in Canaan. He finds archaeological remains that are different. How does he determine that they are early Israelite? Nothing specifically identifies them as such. They are simply farming villages. He determines that they were Israelite because they are in the right place and seem to match descriptions in the biblical text.

Is finding Book of Mormon lands or cultures comparable to this kind of real-world archaeology? We can perform exactly the same kind of analysis that Dever and Stager did in comparing the dwellings with the text. Starting with the text, we can match the features of the text to a Mesoamerican dwelling compound just as did Dever and Stager. Mesoamerican dwellings were basically compounds for multiple family units. How well does this archaeological feature fit with the rare Book of Mormon descriptions of dwelling units? We find the following in Alma: “For behold, he hath blessed mine house, he hath blessed me, and my women, and my children, and my father and my

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15. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* 111–12.

kinsfolk; yea, even all my kindred hath he blessed, and the blessing of the Lord hath rested upon us according to the words which he spake” (Alma 10:11). When Amulek describes Alma’s blessing, he paints a picture of how Amulek perceives his kin connections. These descriptions fit the general picture of Mesoamerican households.

First we have a structural division in the sentence that separates a list of kin from the generic “all my kindred.” The sentence progresses from named sets to a generalized set of kindred, with “all my kindred” being the largest and most inclusive category. Among the Aztecs, there were certain penalties that could be applied to all of one’s relatives.<sup>16</sup> For a penalty to be assessed upon all of one’s relatives, there had to be a definition of what “all” meant—either to the fifth or the fourth generation, depending on the source.<sup>17</sup> Although the Aztecs represent a different language and time, the same necessities of defining a maximum kin group most likely would also have dictated Amulek’s concepts of what “all my kindred” might mean.

The first set of kin is more interesting. The first term Amulek uses is “my house.” For kin-based societies, this typically is as real as it is symbolic of the family. Kin-based societies frequently live in compounds. Excellent documents allow anthropologists to visualize some Aztec households close to the time of the Conquest. For the Aztecs, the “family” was termed *techan tlaca* or “the people of one’s house.” One account from 1580 indicates that houses typically contained six or seven married couples besides unmarried youth.<sup>18</sup>

The archaeological discovery of living areas that clearly contain multiple buildings led archaeologists to the conclusion that such an area was a family compound, which is a very common feature of the archaeo-

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16. Bartolomé de las Casas, *Apologética Historia Sumaria*, ed. Edmundo O’Gorman (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1967), 2:401.

17. See Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala* (Mexico: Ateneo Nacional de Ciencias y Artes, 1947), 95; and Edward E. Calneck, “The Sahagún Texts as a Source of Sociological Information,” in *Sixteenth-Century Mexico: The Work of Sahagún*, ed. Munro S. Edmonson (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1974), 200.

18. Francisco de Castañeda, “Official Reports on the Towns of Tequizistlan, Tepechpan, Acolman, and San Juan Teotihuacan,” trans. and ed. Zelia Nuttall, *Papers of the Peabody Museum of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University* 11/2 (1926): 55.

logical sites of the Maya area dating to the Book of Mormon time period. A simple example is the site of Salinas La Blanca (which predates the Nephites), which has examples of two household mounds with multiple thatched houses, one with three houses and one with four.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, Amulek may plausibly have lived in a typical Mesoamerican household compound. When Amulek speaks first of Alma blessing his “house” and then lists specific groups, we are justified in assuming that these are people who are living in the same “house,” which would mean the entire dwelling area, not a single structure.

In the case of Dever and Stager, they began with an accepted text against which they matched discovered remains. In the case of the Book of Mormon we know the remains and must then match them to the text. In both cases we have text and dwellings, but for each a different piece of data becomes the measuring device. Nevertheless, the comparison is the same. We have to match actual dates, geography, and features with the dates, geography, and features noted in the text. Same problem, same solution: compare the archaeology and the text.

*The Machine Illusion:* Murphy notes that the Nephites built machines. The film displays the following verse from the Book of Mormon:

And we multiplied exceedingly, and spread upon the face of the land, and became exceedingly rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things, and in fine workmanship of wood, in buildings, and in machinery, and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel, making all manner of tools of every kind to till the ground, and weapons of war—yea, the sharp pointed arrow, and the quiver, and the dart, and the javelin, and all preparations for war. (Jarom 1:8)

*The Unmasking:* Murphy allows a viewer’s modern perceptions to color the way the word *machinery* is read. Our modern world is so full of machines that we automatically equate that word with the kinds of machines with which we are familiar. Nevertheless, the fundamental

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19. Kent V. Flannery, “The Early Formative Household Cluster on the Guatemalan Pacific Coast,” in *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, ed. Kent V. Flannery (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 32.

definition of *machinery* (from Webster's 1828 dictionary) is "a complicated work, or combination of mechanical powers in a work, designed to increase, regulate or apply motion and force."<sup>20</sup> A lever is a machine. It cannot be known exactly what machinery is meant in the Nephite record, but it need not be the modern equipment that Murphy seems to imply.

### Cities

*The Illusion:* The film spends a lot of time focusing on how the evidence for biblical cities is linked to the perseverance in the use of biblical names. This persistence of biblical names is contrasted with the absence of Book of Mormon names at Mesoamerican sites. To enforce the idea that those names should be present, the film presents expert Hector Escobedo, identified as a New World archaeologist from Guatemala. He states that "because of the advances in epigraphy, we are now able to read the ancient names of most of the sites."

This discussion is followed by the opinions of William Wilson and Thomas Murphy. Wilson tells us that "there is no evidence as far as where Zarahemla is, which is one of the big cities mentioned in the Book of Mormon." Murphy, filmed against the background of the archaeological site of Palenque, explains: "Here we are standing at Palenque today. The buildings that we see in front of us were, in fact, constructed several centuries after the events described in the Book of Mormon. So this could not possibly have been a Nephite city." The impression is that since no sites bear Book of Mormon names, they cannot be Book of Mormon sites. This impression is bolstered by the idea that sites like Palenque postdate the Book of Mormon.

*The Unmasking.* Most of Escobedo's statement is accurate. The advances in epigraphy have yielded the ancient names of *some* of the sites. The difference is that he uses the word *most*, which is certainly an exaggeration. I do not impute any deception to Escobedo. I do not know the context in which he said *most* or whether he would will-

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20. Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828; repr. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

ingly alter that word if he had the opportunity. The fact is that names have been identified for *some* sites. The first problem with Escobedo's unfortunate choice of the word *most* is that the original name can only be determined when texts are extant, and texts in stone tend to relate only to the Classic period, which covers the time from AD 250 to 800. For the greatest part of Book of Mormon history, we cannot identify the original names of sites because no texts remain to tell us the names. Unlike the Old World, in which the persistence of place-names has been recently demonstrated, such a continuation of place-names did not happen in the New World. The name *Zarahemla* may not have survived for the same reason that all but a handful of ancient names have not survived. Original names were lost and in most cases were replaced by the names the Aztecs used to refer to the locations, not what the natives of the area used earlier.

The second problem with the use of *most* is that there are really a fairly limited number of known city names. The names of cities are read from a glyph called an "emblem glyph," which has long been recognized as the identifier of a particular city. Peter Mathews wrote the seminal article on the analysis of these emblem glyphs. He lists thirty-five emblem glyphs for known sites and three more that refer to sites that have not yet been identified.<sup>21</sup> Of the thousands of archaeological sites in Guatemala alone, thirty-eight can hardly be called *most*, even if every one of those could be read for the ancient name. Undoubtedly, more have been discovered since Mathews's article, but those fortunate advances will still not yield the effect that the editors have intended, which is to suggest that we know all the city names and that Book of Mormon names are not found among them. The facts are that few names are known and that those are for the latest part of the Book of Mormon at best and from areas that are not generally considered to be part of Nephite territory. The film's comments about Mesoamerican place-names are pure illusion. The facts contradict them.

What of Wilson's assertion that "There is no evidence as far as where Zarahemla is"? This statement can only be made by avoiding

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21. Peter Mathews, "Classic Maya Emblem Glyphs," in *Classic Maya Political History*, ed. T. Patrick Culbert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 20–21.

John L. Sorenson's correlation of Book of Mormon geography to the Mesoamerican area. Sorenson describes the site of Santa Rosa as a plausible candidate for Zarahemla, noting that it is on the correct side of the nearby river, dates to the time at which the Book of Mormon indicates there should be a city in this location, and contains an interesting archaeological feature that might be related to the reign of King Benjamin.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Wilson is unaware of Sorenson's work. However, how expert is a person who is unfamiliar with the recent scholarship on the subject on which he is expressing an opinion?

It is more likely that Wilson is familiar with Sorenson's work (he alludes to one of Sorenson's arguments later when he discusses horses). Probably he is simply indicating that Santa Rosa cannot be *proven* to be Zarahemla. That is certainly true. However, Wilson's comment does not hint at the serious scholarship he is dismissing. The illusion continues that such scholarship does not exist.

Earlier in the film, Murphy made a similar statement about Palenque's late date. The same editing problem occurs again. Whether or not Murphy was a willing accomplice to the deception cannot be known, but certainly this statement is used to imply that no sites relate to the Book of Mormon. Palenque is a beautiful site, and, because of this, it has appeared in books that discuss the Book of Mormon. However, no serious Latter-day Saint scholar of the Book of Mormon correlates Palenque with the Book of Mormon for the very reason that Murphy suggests. It is too late. Murphy's statement is correct for Palenque but deceptive for its implications about the actual time periods of the Book of Mormon.

Murphy concludes this section with a personal note: "What I found in my anthropology classes was that my Christian friend was right [who said that you could walk in places mentioned in the Bible]. The Book of Mormon was wrong." I counter with a personal note of my own. I took anthropology classes as well and, unlike Murphy, specialized in Mesoamerican ethnohistory (though I did not ultimately receive a PhD). That is precisely the kind of class that Murphy suggests told him that the Book of Mormon was wrong. I found no such thing. We were

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22. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 152–57.

certainly in different classes in different institutions (he in Washington State and I in the State University of New York at Albany), but I cannot imagine that the class itself made the difference. What I found was that the tools of ethnohistory were directly applicable to understanding the Book of Mormon against a real-world background.

### Flora and Fauna

*The Illusion:* The film explains that the Bible discusses a number of animals and plants. It shows pictures of these animals and plants and notes that what was described in the Bible is usually still present in the Old World today. It then contrasts the abundance of biblical flora and fauna with the absence of significant Book of Mormon animals or plants in the New World. The film spends a lot of time talking about horses and emphasizing that, while the Book of Mormon mentions horses, none were present prior to the time they were introduced by the Spanish.

*The Unmasking:* The technique used in this section is the emphasis of existing assumptions contrasted by the absence of any contradictory information. Is the Bible really as different from the Book of Mormon as is suggested? Not according to archaeologist Donald B. Redford. He notes that camels are integral to the story of Gideon and appear throughout the early period of the Bible. Nevertheless, camels “do not appear in the Near East as domesticated beasts of burden until the ninth century B.C.”<sup>23</sup> The Bible and the Book of Mormon both must answer questions. As noted earlier, it is the answers that are important. The film continues to avoid questions about the Bible and answers for the Book of Mormon.

In discussing the Book of Mormon we have the second “optical illusion” in this section when the film zooms to a verse in the Book of Mormon (the first was panning an empty landscape while speaking of Jaredite cities): “Their land also is full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures; their land is also full of horses, neither

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23. Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 277.

is there any end of their chariots” (2 Nephi 12:7), suggesting that Book of Mormon culture includes vast numbers of horses and chariots.

What the editors do not tell the viewer is that the verse is a direct quotation of Isaiah 2:7. It may be in the Book of Mormon, but it refers to the Old World. Since the heading of the chapter clearly indicates that it comes from Isaiah, I cannot imagine how the editors could have made the mistake of assuming that this referred to the New World. If they were close enough to take the picture they used, they were close enough to see that this verse was a quotation from Isaiah. The only reasonable conclusion is that they intended to deceive. Ironically, then, the most damning passage about horses they could find in the Book of Mormon is from Isaiah.

The deception continues in the narration: “The Book of Mormon describes the use of horse-drawn chariots during massive battles involving tens of thousands of warriors.” This might seem plausible to one who has never read the Book of Mormon and has seen only the Isaiah passage. The statement is absolutely incorrect. Nothing like it appears in the text of the Book of Mormon. Horses are never ridden. Horses are never described as pulling chariots (though we do see the phrase *horses and chariots* in the text). No battle scene includes either horses or chariots.<sup>24</sup>

One would think that the film’s “Latter-day Saint experts” would have corrected such an error of fact. Unfortunately, the expert quoted makes the very same factual error. “So the stories of riding horses into battle,” Wilson claims, “could not have occurred in the Americas.” Stories of riding horses into battle do not occur in the Book of Mormon. Wilson’s conclusion demonstrates that he has not read the Book of Mormon carefully or that he is simply willing to invent statements about it.

## Metallurgy and Writing

*The Metallurgy Illusion:* This section begins with witness Wilson noting that “The Book of Mormon specifically stated that there was

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24. The following list includes all the passages mentioning horses in the Book of Mormon: 1 Nephi 18:25; Enos 1:21; Alma 18:9–12; 20:6; 3 Nephi 3:22; 4:4; 6:1; 21:14 (quoting Micah 5:10); and Ether 9:19.



steel in the New World.” The narrator notes that no smelting sites have been discovered and suggests: “It is the lack of specific types of metal in the Americas that poses a serious problem for the Book of Mormon account—an account that claims that both the Jaredites and the Nephites used metal armor in their warfare, metal coins for their currency, and are even described as using metal plates to write on.”

*The Unmasking:* Wilson’s understanding of Book of Mormon issues appears to be superficial. In addition to his error in recalling what the text says about horses, he specifically worries about the mention of steel. His statement is problematic because the Book of Mormon clearly follows the King James Version of the Bible, which also uses the word *steel*. What Wilson misses is that the KJV’s use of *steel* is the translation of a word that really could be better translated as “brass” or “copper” (see 2 Samuel 22:35; Job 20:24; Psalm 18:34; Jeremiah 15:12). Wilson assumes that a translation must accurately represent the words in the original text, even though we know from the KJV (and other translations) that this is not always the case.<sup>25</sup>

Why does it matter that the Bible’s translators used the “wrong” English word? It matters because the King James Version is a translation of another language into English and the Book of Mormon claims to be a translation of another language into English. Suggesting that *steel* must mean what a modern reader understands as steel demonstrates a rather simplistic understanding of the complex issues involved in translation, for both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Precisely at yet another place where the Bible and the Book of Mormon can be shown to be very comparable, the film’s witness shows no signs of understanding the issue.

Next we have the narrator’s claim that the Nephites used metal armor, metal coins, and metal plates to write on. The plates were of metal, certainly. The issue of coins will be discussed below. Some texts appear to indicate that there were metal implements of war. Most Latter-day Saint scholars concede that the evidence for metallurgy in Mesoamerica does not currently support what appears in the English text of the Book

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25. Robert Young, *Young’s Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, 22nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1970), 933, s.v. “steel.”

of Mormon. Although direct archaeological evidence of metallurgy has not been found for Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon period, linguistic reconstructions indicate that a word for metal existed in proto-Zoque, which is the time of the Book of Mormon Nephites.<sup>26</sup> Some knowledge of metals is very ancient. If the film finds anything that may be problematic for the Book of Mormon, the lack of metallurgy might be it. However, basing an entire argument on the absence of something is a curious enterprise.

### Language and Literacy

*The Writing Illusion:* Because the Book of Mormon absolutely requires literacy, the editors of this film want to paint a picture of a New World with a general absence of writing, or at least an absence of anything that Nephites might have written. Two expert witnesses are brought in to confirm this idea. First, Dr. Peter Williams, from the University of Aberdeen, suggests: "One of the things that is said about the Nephites is that they were a culture with writing. Now a culture with writing leaves records. And if that number of people did not leave a record, well I don't think they existed." The next expert, Dr. Simon Gathercole, professor of Old Testament at the University of Aberdeen, agrees: "The idea that there could have been an empire that lasted for a thousand years, that claimed to be literate and for there to be no historical trace at all, is extremely far-fetched."

The long textual tradition of the Bible is contrasted with the absence of a textual tradition for the Book of Mormon. Murphy opines that the lack of a documentary tradition suggests that the Book of Mormon was written in 1830.

*The Unmasking:* It is forgivable to hear scholars of the Old World speak with such ease about textual traditions. The Old World is rich in texts. Unfortunately, being an expert in Old World history does not transfer to being one in New World history. In contrast to the document-rich Old World, the New World is text-poor. With precious

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26. See Søren Wichmann, *The Relationship among the Mixe-Zoquean Languages of Mexico* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995), 564, s.v. "fiero."

exceptions, the texts of the New World have perished either through nature or through Spanish zealotry. The best sources of texts are those literally written in stone. These come from the Maya region and date to the Classic period. Very few texts exist for Book of Mormon times.

However, no Mesoamerican scholar believes that writing was invented at the same time the Maya began carving glyphs in stone. The writing on stone came late, but the writing system must have developed earlier. Yet the evidence is lost because the materials the Mesoamericans wrote on have disappeared. John Justeson and Terrence Kaufman have recently proposed a translation of an epi-Olmec stela that appears to have glyph forms that pre-date the Maya glyphs.<sup>27</sup> Joyce Marcus, professor of anthropology and curator of Latin American Archaeology at the University of Michigan, declares: "It is now clear that writing began in Mesoamerica among pre-state societies. Those societies [date] to the period 700–400 B.C."<sup>28</sup>

The film's experts now have a problem. Secular Mesoamericanists declare that writing did exist in the time period of the Book of Mormon and that evidence of writing exists even though texts have not been preserved. The real experts of the New World have demonstrated that the film's Old World experts do not have accurate information with regard to the New World, though doubtless all but Murphy were unaware of this.

What then of Murphy's suggestion that the lack of a textual tradition suggests that the Book of Mormon was written in 1830? Murphy is either ignorant of important texts on Mesoamerican history or is intentionally misrepresenting the effect of a lack of textual history. As one who is presented as an expert on Mesoamerica, we may expect him to be familiar with the important texts for Mesoamerican history.

An important source of information on Aztec history and religion is the *Histoire du Mechique*, a manuscript from the sixteenth century. Ángel María Garibay describes the manuscript: "the language is from

27. John Justeson and Terrence Kaufman, "Un desciframiento de la escritura jeroglífica epi-olmeca: métodos y resultados," *Arqueologia* (July–December 1992): 15–25, for information on the translation. The information on the relationship of the epi-Olmec glyphs to the Maya forms is from John Justeson, personal communication.

28. Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems*, 32.

the same century with its archaic writing forms and construction. The redactor or translator placed, apart from the aforementioned title, the note ‘traduite del Spagnol’ [translated from Spanish].”<sup>29</sup> The manuscript is signed in two places by Andrés Thevet, who is the presumed translator. This document does not have a textual history. It is in the wrong language, was found in the wrong country, and was found later than it purports to have been written. Nevertheless, scholars accept it as a valuable source of information. Murphy’s statement would have us discard the *Histoire du Mechique* and claim that Thevet wrote it rather than translated it. But Murphy would be alone in his claim, should he be so bold as to hold the *Histoire du Mechique* to the same standard as he does the Book of Mormon. He is either wrong or ignorant of the way texts are used and evaluated.

*Another Language Illusion:* The film next emphasizes the Book of Mormon’s claim to having been written in “reformed Egyptian.” The narrator questions Simon Gathercole: “Would a Hebrew of around about 600 BC know how to write in the ancient reformed Egyptian?” He responds: “What’s ancient reformed Egyptian?” Wilson makes sure that we understand the implication: “Linguists and others will state that they’ve never heard of reformed Egyptian, unless they’re Mormon. . . . The reason why the mainstream linguists don’t have a thing to say about it is that it is a fictional language.”

*The Unmasking:* Mormon does say that he redacted the Book of Mormon in reformed Egyptian. But rather than relying on the Living Hope Ministries to correctly depict his words, I will quote them here directly:

And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called *among us* the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech.

And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by

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29. Ángel María Garibay Kintana, ed. *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, 1973), 14, my translation.

us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record.

But the Lord knoweth the things which we have written, and also that none other people knoweth our language; and because that none other people knoweth our language, therefore he hath prepared means for the interpretation thereof. (Mormon 9:32–34)

This “reformed Egyptian” comes one thousand years after the Book of Mormon’s declared textual tradition began. When Nephi begins, he indicates only that “I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). He does not mention “reformed” here. What happened between Nephi and Mormon? The text says that things have changed. Whatever they called Egyptian had been changed and hence was called “reformed.” Even the Hebrew of their ancestors had been changed. The final result was that the Nephites had a script that was unlike any other that they knew—including that of the small plates, which were in Nephi’s original “learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians.”

Why have the experts not heard of reformed Egyptian? Because they are scholars of the Old World and reformed Egyptian was never an Old World language. Why do we not clearly find it in the New World? First, we have no idea how the script was changed, so we do not know what to look for.<sup>30</sup> Second, we run into the problem of the absence of texts in Mesoamerica. Mesoamericanists certainly do not assume that the lack of texts indicates that writing did not exist. Wilson oversimplifies again and continues to present his misunderstanding as demonstrated fact.

## Coins

*The Illusion:* The film provides an entire section on coins, obviously believing that this is an important argument against the Book

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30. The document known as the Anthon transcript shows some characters from the plates. That gives us some model to check against, but there are so few texts that the transcript is currently of no assistance. The Anthon transcript does tell us, however, that the “reformed” part is sufficient that the text is no longer obviously related to Egyptian as we understand it.

of Mormon. Experts discuss the coins found in biblical sites and indicate that, if there were metal coins, we should find them. We do not find them anywhere in the Americas; therefore, the film concludes, the Book of Mormon must be incorrect.

*The Unmasking:* As with the fauna, the film's authorities fail to give an accurate picture of the Bible. While maintaining that coins are an anachronism in the Book of Mormon, they fail to mention that they are also anachronistically present in the Bible. Redford lists the use of coined money in 1 Samuel as one of the "blatant anachronisms."<sup>31</sup> The Bible and the Book of Mormon continue to be comparable at least in that those who wish to find issues with them have fodder for their search.

More particularly, however, we have the disingenuous way in which the film presents the "fact" that there were coins in the Book of Mormon. They show an excerpt of the Book of Mormon, but they display a header that was added in 1981 rather than the actual text!

The film at this point does not tell the viewer a number of things. It does not tell the viewer that this visual does not represent the actual text of the Book of Mormon. It does not tell the viewer that Latter-day Saint scholars believe the text refers to weights and measures (not coins). It does not tell the viewer that the Nephite system of weights and measures is similar in a number of ways to the Egyptian system.<sup>32</sup>

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31. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times*, 305. Note the difference between biblical and Book of Mormon anachronisms. Those that Redford lists for the Bible exist in the original language. Those of the Book of Mormon exist (necessarily) in the translation. Anachronisms in the original are considered serious, where a translator's anachronism can simply reflect the word choice of the translator.

32. John W. Welch, "Weighing and Measuring in the Worlds of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 41–42. A possible textual indication of coins might be Alma 11:4, which says "Now these are the names of the different pieces of their gold." Of this Welch notes: "It should be clear from all of the foregoing that we are talking here about weights and measures, not coins. When the Book of Mormon speaks of 'the different pieces of their gold, and of their silver,' as well as naming them 'according to their value' (Alma 11:4), we should probably not think that it is referring to minted coins. Rather, the term *pieces* most likely refers to metallic weights of some sort." Welch, "Weighing and Measuring," 43.

Royal Skousen says: "In the text proper, the gold and silver units are referred to as *pieces*, not *coins*: 'now these are the names of the different **pieces** of their gold and of their silver according to their value' (Alma 11:4). Here in Alma 11, there is no specific evidence

This section absolutely depends on playing on the viewers' assumptions and reinforcing those while avoiding all facts to the contrary, which thus creates an illusion by misdirection.

## Warfare

*The Illusion:* War plays an important part in both the Bible and the Book of Mormon. Old World archaeology has found remnants of battles at certain cities where vast numbers of arrowheads have been found. In contrast, the New World does not have similar evidence. The narrator tells us: "The footnotes in the Book of Mormon suggest that the Lamanite extermination of the Nephites took place around 400 AD. Yet, it left no archaeological evidence. By contrast, a much smaller battle that happened centuries earlier in the first century AD in Palestine demonstrates what one can expect to find if a battle like the one described in the Book of Mormon had really occurred."

*The Unmasking:* When one is looking for evidence of a battle, it is essential to dig at the location where the battle took place. A known

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for a coin system (that is, minted pieces of precious metal, with possibly images or writing, perhaps the stipulated weight, on the pieces). The noncanonical chapter summary for Alma 11 has traditionally referred to these monetary units as coins or coinage:

1920 summary	Nephite coins and measures
1981 summary	Nephite coinage set forth

The use of the word *coin* was also used in the primitive tables of contents (referred to as "reference(s)" or "index") that were added to copies of some of the early Book of Mormon editions (which had no versification system and thus needed some kind of help in finding passages):

1830 edition	Names of money
1837 and 1840 editions	Names of Nephite coin
1840 edition	Coins named
1841 edition	Coins named

The word *coin*, of course, claims more than what the text actually says. Interestingly, the 1981 chapter summary has been changed in the recently published Doubleday edition of the Book of Mormon (2004) to read 'The Nephite **monetary system** set forth' (the text for this edition was provided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)." This discussion will appear in 2006 in Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon: Part 3, Mosiah 17–Alma 20*.

historical siege took place at Masada (the first-century site mentioned in the film). Digging at that location is digging at a battle site.

What about the Book of Mormon battles? Most of the Book of Mormon battles take place on open fields, not in cities. Since the archaeological excavations concentrate on the cities, it is not very surprising that the remnants of large battles are not found there, where they did not happen. That does not mean, however, that the battles did not happen. The Aztecs fought tremendous battles, but archaeologists have not yet located great battlefields littered with bodies or artifacts. Yet the Aztecs lived much later than Book of Mormon times. Once again, the authors of the film use a general problem from all of Mesoamerica and presume that it has specific meaning for the Book of Mormon. The lack of remnants of a battle for the Nephites no more means that there were no Nephites than the lack of evidence for Aztec battles means that there were no Aztecs. This argument is another demonstration that the film's experts are not expert in the issues of Mesoamerican archaeology.

*The Cumorah Illusion:* The film attempts to make it appear that Latter-day Saints are afraid to do archaeological excavations at the New York Hill Cumorah because they know that they will not find the evidence of battles there. Murphy attempts to strengthen this problem: "Growing up Mormon, I was always taught that the Hill Cumorah was the location of the culminating events of the Book of Mormon."

*The Unmasking:* I do not doubt that Murphy might have been taught at some age by someone that the Hill Cumorah was the hill of the Book of Mormon. I was taught the same thing. However, since at least the 1950s Latter-day Saint scholarship on the Book of Mormon has argued that the text's Cumorah is in Mesoamerica. The New York hill is merely a namesake.<sup>33</sup> Why do we not find evidence of the final

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33. On Cumorah, see Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 347. David Palmer used the geographic data from the Book of Mormon to make a tentative identification of the Book of Mormon's Cumorah. See Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah*, 89–123. For early studies, see Jesse A. Washburn and Jesse N. Washburn, *From Babel to Cumorah* (Provo, UT: New Era Publishing, 1937); Thomas S. Ferguson, *Cumorah—Where?* (Independence, MO: Zion's, 1947); and Sidney B. Sperry, "Were There Two Cumorahs?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 260–68 (a previously unpublished handout used in a Religion 622 class on 31 March 1964).



battles at the New York hill? Because those battles happened thousands of miles away. It is not surprising to find nothing when you look for something in the wrong place.

## Temples

*The Illusion:* The film suggests that the Book of Mormon's mention of a Nephite temple in 2 Nephi 5:16 contradicts Jewish law. Their expert is Rabbi Chaim Richman, director of the Temple Institute in Jerusalem: "Any person who studies the Bible understands the centrality of worship here in Jerusalem on the Temple Mount. The very idea of a temple anywhere other than Mount Moriah is a total impossibility. The Jews are literally not allowed to erect a temple anywhere in the world except for right here."

*The Unmasking:* Rabbi Richman is certainly earnest in his opinion. His opinion, however, does not reflect historical reality. Dever discusses a temple that has been excavated at Arad (not far east of Beersheba). This temple existed in the ninth to eighth centuries BC. One of the ostraca (potsherds with writing) from the site bears the inscription "house/temple of Yahweh."<sup>34</sup> The discovery of the Elephantine documents shows a group of Israelites leaving Israel and moving to a home on the Nile, where they build a replica of Solomon's temple.<sup>35</sup>

Richman knows his modern traditions better than his archaeology. The evidence of archaeology in the Old World tells us that, when Nephi built a replica of Solomon's temple, he was simply doing what others had done and would yet do.

## Priesthood

*The Priesthood Illusion:* The narrator attempts to create yet another issue for Book of Mormon temples when he asserts that "The Book of

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34. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* 181.

35. Hugh W. Nibley, "Two Shots in the Dark," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982), 108.

Mormon claim poses a problem because appointing priests who are not Aaronic Levites was expressly forbidden in the Old Testament.”

*The Unmasking:* Scholars do not know if the temples at Elephantine and Arad were staffed by descendants of Aaron, but recent research indicates that there were important temple officials who were not descendants of Aaron. Margaret Barker, a biblical scholar, notes that an important distinction between the Melchizedek and Aaronic Priesthoods was in the nature of its transmission. The Melchizedek Priesthood had no priestly descent (Hebrews 7), while the Aaronic Priesthood was characterized by lineal descent.<sup>36</sup> Barker argues that early evidence suggests a Melchizedek Priesthood presence in the temple prior to the Aaronic presence. She notes that “the Yeb texts, which describe a community who worshipped the LORD in southern Egypt in the fifth century BCE, often mention priests, but never mention the familiar biblical names of Aaron or Levi. The ‘surface’ picture of the Aaronite high priesthood in the Old Testament, therefore, must be treated with caution.”<sup>37</sup> Barker’s citation of the Yeb texts places a possible reference to non-Aaronic priests in the temple closer to the time of Nephi. Contrary to the assumptions advanced by the narrator, the evidence suggests Nephite temple worship contained no surprises. In fact, it represents an older form of Israelite worship—precisely what the text *should* do.

## Historical Figures

*The Illusion:* The Bible uses the names of specific people. Some of these names have been verified in the archaeological or textual records. Inscriptions mentioning David have been found. Jesus Christ is referenced in early non-Christian texts. Asserting the confirmation of many biblical figures, Philip Lindholm (listed as a scholar from Oxford University) claims for Book of Mormon figures: “We have no evidence that they ever existed.”

*The Unmasking:* As with the previous discussion of textual traditions, the experts do not appear to understand the issues of Meso-

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36. Margaret Barker, *The Great High Priest: The Temple Roots of Christian Liturgy* (London: Clark, 2003), 113.

37. Barker, *Great High Priest*, 122.

american textual tradition. For the great majority of Mesoamerica, no adequate texts have survived to tell us about anything, let alone personal names. To date, the earliest name I can find is Yax Ehb' Xook, the founder of the Tikal lineage. In the absence of direct dating for his name, epigrapher Simon Martin and anthropologist Nikolai Grube deduce a time period around AD 90. This name comes from a king list, and the first contemporary data—that is, data that are not derived from delving into history—come from AD 292.<sup>38</sup> The only people meriting mention are the kings or queens, and there are few of those.

We do not find Book of Mormon names in Maya inscriptions for two reasons. First, few inscriptions are contemporary with the Book of Mormon. Second, they come from cities that are not considered by Latter-day Saint scholars to have been Nephite. If the vast majority of names refer to the kings and queens of a particular location and that location is not Nephite, we have little hope of finding a reference to a Nephite name there.

*The Jesus Christ Illusion:* The film spends a good deal of time on the historical information confirming the existence of Jesus Christ in the Old World, contrasted directly to an absence of evidence for the appearance of Christ in the New World. According to Murphy, “To claim that Jesus was a historical person here in the ancient Americas is a rather absurd proposal.” The narrator asks the other Latter-day Saint “expert,” Wilson: “Is it accurate to say that Jesus visited the Americas?” Wilson responds: “There is no evidence for that at all.”

*The Unmasking:* First, I must note that, outside of the Book of Mormon’s account, I would agree with Wilson: proof of Christ’s visit has not been found. And, while some Latter-day Saints use the legends of Quetzalcoatl as evidence of a cultural memory of his visit, I cannot discover any connection between those legends and Christ’s appearance in the New World.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the lack of specific data

38. Simon Martin and Nikolai Grube, *Chronicle of the Maya Kings and Queens* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2000), 26.

39. Brant A. Gardner, “The Christianization of Quetzalcoatl,” *Sunstone* 10/11 (1986): 6–10. An updated and revised version is “Digging for Quetzalcoatl’s Christian Roots,” available at [frontpage2k.nmia.com/~nahualli/LDStopics/DigQ/DigQ%20TOC.htm](http://frontpage2k.nmia.com/~nahualli/LDStopics/DigQ/DigQ%20TOC.htm) (accessed 18 January 2006).

about a particular person does not necessarily invalidate his or her existence.

Dever explains the problem of assuming that archaeology can support a religious text. Both the Bible and the Book of Mormon share this issue, an issue on which this film is noticeably silent:

The overwhelming archaeological evidence today of largely indigenous origins for early Israel leaves no room for an exodus from Egypt or a 40-year pilgrimage through the Sinai wilderness. A Moses-like figure may have existed somewhere in southern Transjordan in the mid-late 13th century B.C., where many scholars think the biblical traditions concerning the god Yahweh arose. But archaeology can do nothing to confirm such a figure as a historical personage, much less prove that he was the founder of later Israelite religion.<sup>40</sup>

Archaeologists feel fortunate when they discover evidence of *any* named person. However, dealing with historical people is not the task that archaeology performs best. Archaeology deals with the physical remains from cultures but deals with individuals only when texts are involved. Murphy is wrong when he opines: “To claim that Jesus was a historical person here in the ancient Americas is a rather absurd proposal.” Without texts dating to the time of Christ, the absence of evidence is to be expected. Murphy’s statement may rest on his assumption that the appearance of Christ is absurd because he does not believe in the ability of a resurrected Christ to appear to men. However, if we believe in the New Testament’s descriptions of Christ appearing to various disciples after his death, nothing would prevent that same resurrected Christ from appearing to other individuals in a distant place. Clearly, Murphy was merely speaking derogatorily.

A fascinating statement comes from Lindholm of Oxford University: “I cannot understand how archaeological evidence and textual evidence can point to the historical reality of Christ in Palestine and yet be entirely lost in the New World.” That statement embodies perhaps the entire vision of the film: If someone cannot understand

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40. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* 99.

something, it cannot be true. Lindholm appears to be unfamiliar with Mesoamerican ethnohistory. Why should we find evidence of Christ in the Old World but not in the New? Because of the absence of contemporary texts. Lindholm's lack of understanding comes from a lack of relevant expertise.

But the appearance of the Savior must have been so spectacular that everyone would have remembered it. At least, we may think so. However, the Savior appeared only to the people gathered in one city, Bountiful, and to those who could assemble over the course of a single night. Out of the millions of people in the New World, the appearance came to a few thousand at best. Those were all believers. They certainly kept their tradition, but the Book of Mormon tells us that they were destroyed around AD 400. Their memories would have died with them, save for their record, which we have as the Book of Mormon.

What about other peoples? Should they not have retained at least a faint memory of a God who descended? Again, we might think so, but assuming that ancient peoples did what we would do is naive. The ancient world was full of descended gods. Mythology in Mesoamerica has a large class of demigods, or extra-humans who come to this earth.

### Christianity in Mesoamerica

*The Christian Illusion:* The film argues that we should find evidences of Christianity in Mesoamerica, but we do not. Murphy claims that after Christ came "there was a massive conversion to Christianity." A Honduran archaeologist, Eliseo Fajardo Madrid, notes: "Here you do not find any evidence of Christianity."

*The Unmasking:* Here, again, the film plays on a couple of assumptions. The first is that when the Book of Mormon suggests, in Murphy's words, a "massive conversion to Christianity," this means a virtually universal conversion. Second, it assumes that Christianity is easy to recognize in archaeological remains. Those may be common assumptions, but they are assumptions that need to be questioned, whether related to the Book of Mormon or not.

First, what does the Book of Mormon say about the aftermath of the conversion?

And it came to pass that there was no contention in the land, because of the love of God which did dwell in the hearts of the people.

And there were no envyings, nor strifes, nor tumults, nor whoredoms, nor lyings, nor murders, nor any manner of lasciviousness; and surely there could not be a happier people among all the people who had been created by the hand of God.

There were no robbers, nor murderers, neither were there Lamanites, nor any manner of -ites; but they were in one, the children of Christ, and heirs to the kingdom of God. (4 Nephi 1:15–17)

Certainly this describes a conversion and a peace in the land. The issue, as with virtually all hyperconservative readings of the Book of Mormon, is the assumption that *the land* must refer to a massive area (frequently assumed to be the entire hemisphere). The textual use of *land* in the Book of Mormon is typically limited in geographic scope and should not be construed to be a large area.<sup>41</sup> The Book of Mormon *land* is used in a fashion similar to biblical *lands*, which encompass the biblical nations but not the entire world of all known peoples of the time.

In this case, the text is clearly speaking of the Nephites and gives no indication that Nephite political influence has extended beyond its earlier boundaries. Among the previously divided Nephites there were now no contentions or “-ites.” The text does not imply that this “massive conversion” should be seen at all outside the confines of the land associated with the Nephites.

The next problem is the question of what a conversion to Christianity might look like in the archaeological record. We have a long

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41. See Brant A. Gardner, “An Exploration in Critical Methodology: Critiquing a Critique,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 199–205; see also Matthew Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 225–75.

history of understanding Christianity in the Old World, but does that mean that we would recognize Christianity in the New World? Archaeologists can only reconstruct religion from artifacts and preserved art. Iconography is the study of the religious art and symbols of a people. Is there an exclusive Christian iconography? Would Christian iconography in the New World resemble that found in the Old World?

The best way to understand the answer to this question is to examine the iconographic history of Israel and early Christianity. Both Israel and early Christianity were very comfortable borrowing and incorporating iconography from their neighbors, even when that iconography was part of their neighbor's religion.

Historian Ramsay MacMullen notes:

The tangible record gives the same impression of shared territory. For example, among the grave-goods of late Roman Egypt, very much the same things are found whether the burial be Christian or not. In a Pannonian grave was placed a box ornamented with a relief of the gods, Orpheus in the center, Sol and Luna in the corners, but the Chi-Rho as well; elsewhere, in Danube burials, similar random mixtures of symbolism appear, with gods and busts of Saint Peter and Saint Paul all in the same bas-relief. The Romans who bought cheap little baked clay oil-lamps from the shop of Annus Serapiodorus in the capital apparently didn't care whether he put the Good Shepherd or Bacchus or both together on his products; and the rich patrons of mosaicists in Gaul, North Africa, and Syria were similarly casual about the very confused symbolism they commissioned for their floors.<sup>42</sup>

The iconography of the region was intermixed in early Christianity. Graydon F. Snyder, professor of New Testament (retired) at Chicago Theological Seminary, describes a similar mixture of symbols for Hellenistic Judaism:

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42. Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 78.

A nearly complete list of symbols used by Jews through the sixth century shows ninety-seven decorations and symbols of which only the *etrog*, *lulab*, menorah, and shofar became consistent signs of Jewish identity. For the most part the remaining ninety-three symbols come from either the general Hellenistic culture (zodiac signs, garlands) or, occasionally, come from Jewish life (the Torah shrine).<sup>43</sup>

Both early Christians and at least the Hellenistic Jews accepted iconographic elements from surrounding cultures and incorporated them into their own art. Their iconography was not particularly unique; rather, it reflected the area and the time. This does not mean, however, that the use of these borrowed visual symbols was reflected in their textual descriptions of religion:

In their synagogues Jews of the first centuries in the Christian era were quite willing to use a large number of Greco-Roman decorations and symbols. Some scholars, like Goodenough, see in such symbols signals of a more mystical Judaism. Others assume that Jewish leaders had no choice but to use ateliers who offered, as a matter of course, pagan decorations and symbols. Or, in terms of interaction, Jews were willing to utilize the decorations and symbols of their non-Jewish neighbors. By so doing they indicated their active participation in the Greco-Roman culture. But *none* of these symbols became a part of the Jewish iconic conversation. In that sense, by the first two centuries of the Christian era Judaism had developed a firm symbolic identity. It could accept and utilize pagan symbolic material, but did not incorporate it.<sup>44</sup>

Among the Jews, the use of pagan artistic forms did not alter their religion. The use of a pagan symbol did not necessarily bring with it the meaning of that symbol within the pagan world. As Snyder indicates, they could “accept and utilize pagan symbolic material, but did not

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43. Graydon F. Snyder, *Inculturation of the Jesus Tradition: The Impact of Jesus on Jewish and Roman Cultures* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1999), 13.

44. Snyder, *Inculturation of the Jesus Tradition*, 92.



incorporate it.” When physical iconography borrowed from paganism, that fact is not necessarily mentioned in the text.

Christianity applied the same methods to its iconography. Even the visual representation of Christ appears in earliest Christianity to have borrowed imagery from Apollo.<sup>45</sup> The early borrowing of symbols was so complete that John Dominic Crossan says of a sarcophagus from AD 150–275 that it can be “read as either pagan or Christian.”<sup>46</sup>

If, in the Old World, early Christianity borrowed its symbol set from its surrounding Hellenistic culture and did so in ways that might make certain artifacts ambiguous, as in the sarcophagus Crossan discusses, then what ought we to expect of the New World? When we look for New World Christians, what do we look for? Do we look for representations of Apollo? Do we look for any of the Greek-inspired icons of the Old World? What we know as Christian from the Old World is dependent on the relationship of that area of the world to Greece. That condition does not exist in the New World. Based on the history of both Israel and early Christianity, we would expect the New World Israelites and Christians to do as their Old World counterparts did—adapt the iconography of the surrounding cultures.

Do we find evidence of Christianity? Who knows? The sarcophagus Crossan mentions could easily be Christian or pagan. If the same forces developed in New World Israelite/Christian art, there would be a similar ambiguity. Saying that archaeologists cannot find evidence of Christianity in the New World simply demonstrates a simplistic assumption about what ought to be found. If the earliest artistic depictions of Jesus Christ were based on Apollo, perhaps the New World artists would have borrowed the corn god (who was clearly a god who died and was resurrected). Enough correspondence between Christ and the corn god can be found as to suggest that a Nephite artist might borrow that symbol. If we therefore find a depiction of a corn god, is it pagan or Christian? Is the sarcophagus pagan or Christian?

45. “From Apollo to Jesus,” at [www.jesusneverexisted.com/melange.html](http://www.jesusneverexisted.com/melange.html) (accessed 16 December 2005). This site clearly has its own agenda, but its visual representations of the transformations of Jesus’s appearance are still instructive.

46. John Dominic Crossan, *The Essential Jesus: What Jesus Really Taught* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), 30.

These questions are, at this point, unanswerable. But the apparent lack of Christian symbols in the archaeological remains is not, as the film suggests, evidence that Book of Mormon Christianity did not exist.

### The Various Conclusions

From this point on, the authors are wrapping up their case. This last part of the film is divided into several segments on the DVD, and each segment provides the conclusions of the expert witnesses rather than new material. At this point, I will shift the model I am using from unmasking the illusions to examining the witness testimony to see whether or not we can or should believe it as presented.

*Witness:* Murphy. As part of a discussion indicating that the Bible has been used as a guide to archaeology, Murphy states: “On the other hand, the Book of Mormon has never been used by the Smithsonian as a guide to historical archaeological research.”

*Examination:* This statement is typical of several that Murphy makes in the film. Technically, he is correct, but he allows the viewer to be misled into believing more than what was said. It is quite true that the Smithsonian has not used the Book of Mormon as a guide to archaeological research. But the Book of Mormon has been used as a guide to archaeological research by others. The investigations of the New World Archaeological Foundation (NWAf) focused on a particular area of Chiapas where the model of Book of Mormon geography predicted that sites dating to the Preclassic would be found. While the archaeological work the NWAf performed was intentionally kept separate from the Book of Mormon, the fact remains that the original decision of a location to dig was based on a prediction from the Book of Mormon text, a prediction that turned out to be correct in that the area did have Preclassic sites.<sup>47</sup>

*Witness:* Barkay. “It doesn’t make sense to me. The Book of Mormon, with all due honor, I don’t think it has anything to do with the culture of 600 BC, and I’m an expert on that period.”

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47. See Daniel C. Peterson, “On the New World Archaeological Foundation,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 221–33.

*Examination:* Differences of opinion are normal among scholars. While we cannot know on what basis Dr. Barkay makes his comment, we can contrast it with that of another expert on the preexilic period, Margaret Barker, a Methodist minister who has written extensively on both the Old and New Testaments. She recently presented a paper at the Worlds of Joseph Smith conference, 6 May 2005, held at the Library of Congress. She discussed the image of the tree of life in 1 Nephi:

The tree of life made one happy, according to the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 3:18), but for detailed descriptions of the tree we have to rely on the noncanonical texts. Enoch described it as perfumed, with fruits like grapes (1 Enoch 32:5), and a text discovered in Egypt in 1945 described the tree as beautiful, fiery, and with fruit like white grapes. I do not know of any other source that describes the fruit as *white* grapes. Imagine my surprise when I read the account of Lehi's vision of the tree whose *white fruit* made one happy, and the interpretation that the Virgin in Nazareth was the mother of the Son of God after the manner of the flesh (1 Nephi 11:14–23). This is the Heavenly Mother, represented by the tree of life, and then Mary and her Son on earth. This revelation to Joseph Smith was the ancient Wisdom symbolism, intact, and almost certainly as it was known in 600 BCE.<sup>48</sup>

Barkay is certainly entitled to his opinion. Viewers are entitled to know, on the other hand, that other qualified professionals have other opinions.

*Witness:* Wilson. “As an anthropologist, when I step back and look at the big picture, when you can't find the places that it's talking about and you can't identify the people that it's talking about and you can't

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48. Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2006), 76; also in *BYU Studies* 44/4 (2005): 76. See 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 L. Bitton (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 191–243, and a shorter version, “Nephi and His Asherah,” in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 16–25.

find the types of material goods that it's talking about—there is a major problem.”

*Examination:* Wilson tells us that he looked for the Book of Mormon in western New York and failed to find it. Latter-day Saint scholars are not surprised. It is difficult to find something when you look for it in the wrong place. Given other statements from Wilson in which he gets information from the Book of Mormon wrong, it appears that not only was he looking in the wrong place, but he was looking for the wrong things. Not surprisingly, and certainly to no condemnation of the Book of Mormon, he found nothing.

*Witness:* Murphy. “The Book of Mormon is full of mistakes, factual mistakes. Okay, it is suggesting that Jesus, for example, was born in Jerusalem rather than Bethlehem.”

*Examination:* This statement is rather surprising. Murphy is presented as a Latter-day Saint anthropologist. As such, we have an expectation that he is acquainted with the relevant literature on the topic. But this statement suggests that he is remarkably deficient in his understanding of the relevant LDS literature. Robert Smith discusses that very issue:

It has been alleged that the Book of Mormon commits a foolish error by predicting that Jesus would be born “at Jerusalem.” But just as Rome was *urbs et orbis*, “city and world,” so Jerusalem was not simply a city, not even just a city-state. It is and was a symbol of Zion. It typified all that which the exiles in Babylonia had lost (see Psalms 137:5–6), and, in our time, it is the focus of the return of other exiles from their nearly two millennia of dispersion. . . .

In the same way that the “land” or district of Jerusalem was administratively distinguished from the city of Jerusalem, so, according to Kenneth Kitchen, the great city of Hazor (Tell el-Qeda) was distinguished from the state of Hazor. Thus, Abraham had dwelt or “sojourned” in the territory of Gerar, rather than in the city itself (Tell Abu Hureira; Genesis 20:1). . . .

Thus it is quite apparent that Jerusalem “did double duty as the royal and the district capital.” As early as Canaanite times, Jerusalem held royal status, and it was termed mat URU sa-lim (“land of Jerusalem”) in the Amarna Letters.

Where then was Jesus born? Truly, in Bethlehem of the land of Judaea (see Micah 5:2; Matthew 2:1–6; Luke 2:4)—any child could tell you that in Joseph Smith’s time as well as in ours. What no one in modern times would have known for sure (before the 1887 discovery of the Tell El-Amarna Tablets) was that Bethlehem was also part of an area anciently called the land of Jerusalem.<sup>49</sup>

It would not have taken much research for Murphy to discover how inaccurate such a criticism is. Either he did not do the research, or he is intentionally concealing the evidence.

*Witness:* Wilson, speaking of Thomas Stuart Ferguson (who was one of the forces behind what became the New World Archaeological Foundation): “Ferguson was one of the prime movers and shakers in the research area in Central America, and he couldn’t find anything.”

*Examination:* This is a short enough statement that we must attempt to put some meaning behind it. No matter what happened with Ferguson, he certainly found *something*. When we look, we always find *something*. We may not find what we are looking for, but we find something. Clearly Wilson does not mean to say that Ferguson failed to find anything at all. What Wilson must mean is that Ferguson did not find what he was looking for. What Wilson never tells us is whether Ferguson was looking for the right things.<sup>50</sup> While the film intends that Ferguson’s

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49. Robert F. Smith, “The Land of Jerusalem: The Place of Jesus’ Birth,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 170–71. See Daniel C. Peterson, Matthew Roper, and William J. Hamblin, “On Alma 7:10 and the Birthplace of Jesus Christ” (1995), on the FARMS Web site at farms.byu.edu (accessed 16 January 2006).

50. See Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper, “Ein Heldenleben? On Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an Elias for Cultural Mormons,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 184; John Gee, “The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas,” *FARMS Review* 10/2 (1998): 158–83; see also John Sorenson, review of *Fantastic Archaeology: The Wild Side of North American Prehistory*, by Stephen Williams, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 54–57.

example demonstrate the futility of comparing the Book of Mormon to archaeology, it really does more to compare Book of Mormon archaeology to biblical archaeology. Both went through more naive phases. Dever describes the earlier biblical archaeology:

In retrospect, the demise of biblical archaeology was probably inevitable. The reasons are many. First, what may be called internal weaknesses of the movement were numerous: its reputation for amateurish fieldwork, naïve or biased scholarship, and poor publications; its parochial character, related as it was largely to the conservative (if not Fundamentalist) character of so much of American religious life; its reactionary nature, locked into dated theological issues, which left it unable to respond creatively to new developments in or outside the field; its resistance to growing trends toward specialization and professionalism, which made it extremely vulnerable; and, above all, the fact that it failed to achieve its own major objective, i.e., the demonstration of the “historicity” of the Bible (at least as it was seen at the time).<sup>51</sup>

Ferguson was a lawyer, not an archaeologist. His contributions should not be minimized, but they were significantly related to the beginning push to create the New World Archaeological Foundation and are not related to any archaeological expertise.<sup>52</sup> As with the biblical archaeology movement Dever describes, Ferguson appears to have been looking for the wrong things with the wrong models. His case is very comparable to that of certain biblical archaeologists. His experience no more proclaims the Book of Mormon ahistorical than do the parallel experiences of the practitioners of early biblical archaeology. As with so much of this film, the editors avoid telling the entire story.

While it remains true that we will never find a “Nephi slept here” sign from Mesoamerica, it is not true that we cannot find evidence

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51. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know?* 58.

52. See Peterson and Roper, “*Ein Heldenleben?*” 175–77.

linking Mesoamerica to the Book of Mormon.<sup>53</sup> In this section of the film the shot pans to several books written about the Book of Mormon, including Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Clearly those at Living Hope Ministries have access to the book, although apparently they have done no more than film the cover.

*Witnesses:* Wilson and Murphy (with a special and unwitting “guest appearance” by Daniel C. Peterson). The section begins with a statement by Wilson: “And so what the apologists do is they—they work at trying to help people to keep them from losing their faith and they’ll use whatever means are possible.” The film cuts to a clip from a film in which Daniel C. Peterson discusses the Book of Mormon. The entire transcript of the clip is:

The Book of Mormon makes sense as plausible history. The whole thing seems right. It makes sense. There is very little in it apart from the explicitly religious events (the miracles, the visitations, and so on) that a secular historian would find at all troublesome.

Murphy replies: “Well, Dan Peterson is lying. The problem, first and foremost, with the Book of Mormon is its secular history. It gets the history wrong. The myth has been disproved again and again by archaeologists and historians on secular grounds—not religious ones.”

*Examination:* That Wilson would accuse Latter-day Saint apologists of “us[ing] whatever means are possible” is portentous. The sectarian anti-Mormon editors of the film could not have created a more ironic introduction to their own tactics, which really do border on “whatever means are possible.”

Peterson’s statement is removed from its context as it was presented in the original FARMS video:

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53. Any interested scholar would quickly find Sorenson’s *Ancient American Setting*. It would not take much more effort to add Palmer’s *In Search of Cumorah*. The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) has a number of articles on their Web site as does the Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research (FAIR).

Another thing about the Book of Mormon that we need to keep in mind as we consider other more specific things is simply that it makes sense as plausible history. I spend a lot of time reading ancient history, medieval history, and so on, and I find the Book of Mormon to be plausible. It's not straining for effect, it's not trying to achieve some Romanticism, or some pseudo-Oriental flavor that would impress its audience. It's a very matter-of-fact narrative of what happened, and what happened seems to be a very plausible kind of thing—people behave the way people actually do behave. We have parallels for the behavior of Nephites and Lamanites from other historical cultures. So again, the whole thing seems right. It makes sense. There is very little in it, apart from the explicitly religious events (the miracles, the visitations, and so on) that a secular historian would find at all troublesome.<sup>54</sup>

Placed in context, is Peterson “lying” about the specific data he is discussing? Hardly. Nevertheless, Murphy claims that he is lying because the Book of Mormon gets secular history wrong. That is a bold statement, particularly since the only evidence for Murphy's statement comes from evidence that has been carefully selected and protected from any contradictory information.

Contrary to the impression given in the film, I have found several ways in which the Book of Mormon reflects secular history quite accurately.<sup>55</sup> Is Murphy lying? I am sure that he sees the data differently than I do. Nevertheless, the section becomes a poster child for “us[ing] whatever means are possible.” Ironically, what Wilson claims for the apologists is precisely what this film's editors do in presenting their message. They remove statements from context. They suppress contrary data. They present incorrect statements as though they were

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54. Transcription courtesy of Dana Repouille, e-mail to FAIR List, 28 November 2005. Copy in my possession.

55. Brant A. Gardner, “Social History of the Early Nephites,” paper presented at the FAIR conference, August 2001, at [www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001GarB.html](http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2001GarB.html) (accessed 11 January 2006); and Brant A. Gardner, “The Case for Historicity: Discerning the Book of Mormon's Production Culture,” paper presented at the FAIR conference, August 2004, at [www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2004GarB.html](http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2004GarB.html) (accessed 11 January 2006).



fact.<sup>56</sup> Are the film's editors lying? They are at least using any means possible to make their case, even when those means distort the real picture.

*Witness:* Wilson.

What apologists want to do is prove it. Prove that the Book of Mormon is true. So they come up with really outrageous ideas that any bona fide archaeologist or anthropologist would simply shake their head at.

For example, horses. They say, well maybe, maybe they weren't horses. Maybe they were tapir or deer. Well, how do you ride something that is a little bit bigger than a dog into battle? It's an outrageous idea.

So they're using these very spurious arguments to say here's how we prove that the Book of Mormon is true. And time doesn't permit to go through every single one of their arguments, but if you really look at those arguments carefully, if this argument was brought up in a scientific community, I can tell you they'd be laughed out of the building.

*Examination:* This statement certainly sounds authoritative. Unfortunately, Wilson is remarkably incorrect on virtually every point. I cannot, of course, respond to any of the "outrageous ideas" that he does not mention. The one he mentions, however, is more outrageous in his misrepresentation than in the actual argument.

Wilson speaks of horses, tapirs, and deer. Fortunately, this information is enough to trace the argument he claims is "outrageous." As with other information in this film, examining the actual argument rather than Wilson's crude caricature is instructive. John Sorenson discusses the problem of cross-cultural onomastica (the names we use for animals, things, or people). He introduces his discussion by giving examples from cross-cultural issues that arose when the Spanish arrived in the New World:

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56. Some of the incorrect statements are innocent and due to the "experts" lack of familiarity with the New World.

Anthropologists tell us that the world's peoples have many different models for classifying animals or plants, as they do for labeling geographical directions or dividing up time. . . . When the Spaniards reached the Americas, they had trouble labeling the native creatures systematically. Yet the Indians had an even harder time classifying the animals the Europeans brought along.

A good example of the confusion is with the coatimundi (*Nasua narica*). Landa, the padre who favored us with a detailed description of Yucatan, wrote of the beast, "There is an animal which they call *chic*, wonderfully active, as large as a small dog, with a snout like a sucking pig. The Indian women raise them, and they leave nothing which they do not root over and turn upside down; and it is an incredible thing how wonderfully fond they are of playing with the Indian women, and how they clean them from lice." The flesh of the coati was also widely eaten, and the animal remains a pet today in some rural Mexican homes. . . . What ought the coati to be called in English? One common Spanish name is *tejon*. Unfortunately, *tejon* is also the Spanish name for badger as well as raccoon. Another name, from the Aztecs, is *pisote* (Nahuatl *pezotli*), which means basically glutton. Yet *pisote* is sometimes applied also to the peccary or wild pig. In regard to the peccary, the Nahuatl terms *quauhcoyameatl* and *quahpizotl* were developed after the conquest to distinguish the native species from the introduced Castilian pig, so by extension the coati was sometimes termed *quauhpezotli*, tree-glutton, to distinguish it from the peccary, the ground-glutton. Finally, the Mayan languages labeled the coati for its playful aspect, hence *chic*, clown.<sup>57</sup>

The introduction to the issue is based on what *anthropologists* understand about the problem of cross-cultural naming. So far there is nothing in this description that any anthropologist or archaeologist would

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57. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 289–90.

shake a head at (to use Wilson's language). In fact, in cross-cultural conditions, anthropologists expect precisely what Sorenson describes. Is it possible that anthropologist Wilson is unaware of this?

What, then, is the outrageous claim for horses, tapirs, and deer? From Sorenson:

True horses (*Equus* sp.) were present in the western hemisphere long ago, but it has been assumed that they did not survive to the time when settled peoples inhabited the New World. I recently summarized evidence suggesting that the issue is not settled. Actual horse bones have been found in a number of archaeological sites on the Yucatan Peninsula, in one case with artifacts six feet beneath the surface under circumstances that rule out their coming from Spanish horses. Still, other large animals might have functioned or looked enough like a horse that one of them was what was referred to by *horse*. A prehispanic figure modeled on the cover of an incense burner from Poptun, Guatemala, shows a man sitting on the back of a deer holding its ears or horns, and a stone monument dating to around A.D. 700 represents a woman astride the neck of a deer, grasping its horns. Then there is another figurine of a person riding an animal, this one from central Mexico. Possibly, then, the deer served as a sort of "horse" for riding. (That was a practice in Siberia until recently, so the idea is not as odd as moderns might think. Besides, in the Quiche languages of highland Guatemala we have expressions like *keh*, deer or horse, *keheh*, mount or ride, and so on.)<sup>58</sup>

What Sorenson says is that when Nephites encountered the same problem of cross-cultural naming as did the Spanish, they may have applied the same solution. In that condition, the word *horse* might have been used as the name for the unfamiliar animal, the deer. Sorenson is not suggesting that Nephites did not know the difference between horses and deer. He is simply suggesting that, according to known

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58. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 295–96.

human practice, they might have used a common name for a known animal to refer to a previously unknown animal that they felt was somehow similar to the more familiar one. That is hardly an “outrageous” suggestion. Sorenson is doing exactly what an anthropologist would do—applying known human behavior in similar conditions to explain human behavior in a different setting.

What about the tapir? Is Sorenson’s argument any more “outrageous” when tapirs are involved? Again, it is instructive to return to the original argument rather than to Wilson’s far too brief summary:

As we examine the writings about Mesoamerica’s large fauna, we find the linguistic problem assails us at every turn. Natives and Spaniards shared the difficulty. The lowland Maya at first named all the big animals of the Spaniards—horse, mule, ass—with the name of the nearest native of equivalent size—the tapir. The Spaniards, however, thought the tapir looked like a pig, although it weighs up to 700 pounds. Others considered the tapir to resemble the ass; sixty years ago in southern Mexico the beast was called *anteburro* or “once-an-ass.”<sup>59</sup>

As with the deer, Sorenson’s suggestions about tapirs follow known practices, which is not outrageous, as Wilson’s mockery implies.

What is outrageous, however, is Wilson’s “evidence” for a “problem” in Sorenson’s argument. Wilson asks: “Well, how do you ride something that is a little bit bigger than a dog into battle? It’s an outrageous idea.” Why, yes it is. It is outrageous that Wilson makes this statement and does not understand why he is completely incorrect. Wilson here repeats the erroneous idea that the Book of Mormon has horses that are ridden or appear in battle. Wilson’s “proof” that a Latter-day Saint scholar’s argument is “outrageous” is a statement that is demonstrably contrary to fact. Sadly, it appears that Wilson is aware neither of what the Book of Mormon actually says nor of how anthropologists deal with cross-cultural onomastica.

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59. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 293.

Ironically, Wilson suggests: “If this argument was brought up in a scientific community, I can tell you they’d be laughed out of the building.” Rather, it would be anyone calling himself an anthropologist who was completely unaware of common anthropological principles and who misrepresented a primary text who would be laughed out of the building. As an illusionist, Wilson appears to be learning the trade. To use another show-business analogy, Wilson is a ventriloquist whose lips are moving. He is presented as an expert witness, but he continually demonstrates that he is far from expert in this field.

*Witnesses:* President Gordon B. Hinckley and Wilson. President Hinckley is quoted from his address at the close of the April 2002 general conference:

As a church, we have critics, many of them. They say we do not believe in the traditional Christ of Christianity. There is some substance to what they say. Our faith, our knowledge is not based on ancient tradition. . . . Our faith, our knowledge comes of the witness of a prophet in this dispensation.

According to Wilson: “The prophet of the Mormon church, Gordon B. Hinckley, has stated that he does not believe in the Christian Christ.”

*Examination:* The ellipses in the text are appropriately entered so that we might be aware that text has been removed. However, the text was removed because it did not allow the editors to shape the statement exactly as they wished. The original is:

As a Church we have critics, many of them. They say we do not believe in the traditional Christ of Christianity. There is some substance to what they say. Our faith, our knowledge is not based on ancient tradition, the creeds which came of a finite understanding and out of the almost infinite discussions of men trying to arrive at a definition of the risen Christ. Our faith, our knowledge comes of the witness of a prophet in this dispensation who saw before him the great God of the universe and His Beloved Son, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. They spoke to him. He spoke with Them. He testified openly, unequivocally, and unabashedly of that great vision.

It was a vision of the Almighty and of the Redeemer of the world, glorious beyond our understanding but certain and unequivocating in the knowledge which it brought. It is out of that knowledge, rooted deep in the soil of modern revelation, that we, in the words of Nephi, “talk of Christ, we rejoice in Christ, we preach of Christ, we prophesy of Christ, and we write according to our prophecies, that [we and] our children may know to what source [we] may look for a remission of [our] sins” (2 Ne. 25:26).<sup>60</sup>

Certainly President Hinckley indicated that “there is some substance to what they say,” but he qualified his statement; the qualification is what Living Hope Ministries edited out of the film. President Hinckley contrasted the prophetic understanding of Christ to the flawed traditions of men. That certainly does not sound like a denial of Christ or the worship of someone other than Jesus of Nazareth, except to those whose agenda is to depict the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as somehow non-Christian. Wilson’s performance continues to caricature rather than to accurately represent his reference.

*Witnesses:* Murphy and Wilson. In their closing remarks, Murphy and Wilson both play on the theme of lies versus honesty. Wilson concludes: “If the church is based on lies, the lie of the Book of Mormon, then I can’t condone it.” And in his final remarks, Murphy speculates: “As a Mormon scholar, I wonder . . . why it is that we won’t be honest. . . . Let the truth be told.”

*Examination:* These are amazing statements in a film that is designed to hide contradictory evidence. Murphy is aware of contradictory positions to many of his statements but never engages them or even hints that they exist. While he is more careful than Wilson about making blatantly incorrect statements, some of Murphy’s “accurate” statements are placed in such a way as to give the impression that they have said something else entirely. Given the tactics of the film, I would recast Wilson’s statement: If the film is based on a lie, then I cannot condone it.

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60. Gordon B. Hinckley, “We Look to Christ,” *Ensign*, May 2002, 90–91.

## Conclusion

If this were a magic show, we might be entertained. However, this film produced by Living Hope Ministries presents itself as much more than illusion. In this case, we cannot ignore those behind the curtain. I find myself echoing (in a very different context) one of Murphy's statements: "Let the truth be told." There is a truth to be told, but it is not found in this film.





## THE WRONG PLACE FOR LEHI'S TRAIL AND THE VALLEY OF LEMUEL

Jeffrey R. Chadwick

“**T**hey’re digging in the wrong place!” So goes the famous line from the classic film *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. The simultaneous exclamation of Indiana Jones and his Egyptian friend Salah (played respectively by Harrison Ford and John Rhys-Davies), the line is a favorite of long-time Near Eastern archaeologists like myself. We never admit to students or laymen that we enjoy the movie—we prefer to appear detached and scientific to those whom we lecture. Instead we watch it in secret, usually on a weekend evening off from the exhausting tasks of our annual excavations. My latest viewing was just last summer, at a private gathering of old friends (all crack field archaeologists themselves) in Jerusalem. Cold drinks and kosher pizza in hand, we again cheered the unlikely adventures of Hollywood’s most famous explorer. And we always laugh out loud together every time we hear that line: “They’re digging in the wrong place!” We have all experienced what it is like to dig in the wrong place.

Which brings us to the subject at hand—the 2003 book *Lehi in the Wilderness* by George Potter and Richard Wellington. *Lehi in the Wilderness* is an ambitious and handsomely illustrated attempt to

Review of George Potter and Richard Wellington. *Lehi in the Wilderness*. Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2003. xv + 191 pp., with bibliography. \$39.95.

determine the exact route of Lehi's trail from Jerusalem to Bountiful and to locate precisely the various camps of his party as described in the Book of Mormon text. Potter and Wellington present their findings in a lively and personalized narrative that relates their travels, adventures, and learning experiences in various locations around the Arabian peninsula. Their story is engaging and is also handsomely illustrated with color photographs and maps. But when it comes to some of the sites that, they conclude, were connected with Lehi's journey, to put it simply, "they're digging in the wrong place."

Potter and Wellington were expatriates (American and British respectively) living in Saudi Arabia in 1995 when their Book of Mormon story began. Wellington was an employee of ARAMCO (the Arabian American Oil Company), and Potter was head of his own financial consulting company. Chapter 1 of their adventure takes place "one hot May morning" (p. 1) when they set out into the Saudi desert in search of the so-called Arabian Mount Sinai—Jebel al-Lawz. "Fate" (p. 2) and "providence" (p. 8) combine to lead them to a wadi (desert valley) called Tayyib al-Ism, where they find a small stream of water running through the narrow canyon. Almost immediately, "George surmised that we were walking in the Valley of Lemuel" (p. 10).

The chance discovery of the valley of Lemuel inspired the authors to push forward with further Book of Mormon research. In chapter 2 they visit the modern kingdom of Jordan, where they decide that after leaving Jerusalem, Lehi crossed the Jordan river and traveled south from Amman to the Gulf of Aqaba. His route was not via the Arabah valley nor the famous King's Highway (preferred by other Book of Mormon researchers), but along a desert road much further east, which they identify as the biblical "Way of the Wilderness" of 2 Samuel 15:23.

In chapter 3 the authors return to Tayyib al-Ism, where they explain, point by point, why they think this particular wadi has to have been the valley of Lemuel. A detailed description of the features of the site is compared to the Book of Mormon narrative. They even manage to find an "altar of stones" at the summit of a hill near the valley, just like the one built by Lehi. Potter and Wellington suggest that such altars were

dedicated in a special ceremony they call a “*Nephi* ceremony,” which is “perhaps . . . a clue as to the Hebrew origins of Nephi’s name” (p. 40).

Rolling down desert highways and byways in their Land Rover, the authors proceed to discover what they believe is more of the exact route Lehi traveled and most of the exact places where he camped, from chapter 4 (“Lehi’s Trail to Southern Arabia”) on to chapter 9 (“Discovering Nephi’s Harbor”). Having mapped every mile of the Book of Mormon’s Old World journey, they conclude with “A Tribute to Nephi” (chapter 10) and “A Tribute to Joseph Smith, the Translator” (chapter 11), followed by an impressive list of the “81 new, documented evidences” they claim to have brought to light.

This book is a remarkable read. From the outset, however, it was clear that theories proposed by the authors run counter to textual descriptions in Nephi’s own record. In my opinion, entire chapters of *Lehi in the Wilderness* are unreliable efforts at mapping out the movements of Lehi’s party after leaving Jerusalem. In spite of their best efforts and noble intentions, Potter and Wellington miss the mark in terms of some of the most important places Nephi described. Quite simply, “they’re digging in the wrong place.”

This is not to say that *Lehi in the Wilderness* is without merit. I learned valuable things from reading about Potter and Wellington’s experiences in the Arabian desert. I am convinced that a couple of chapters in the book should become required reading for students researching the topic of Lehi in Arabia. Even if their exact places can be questioned, features of desert life they describe are bound to have been part of Lehi’s experience. Additionally, their energy, enthusiasm, forthrightness, and obvious conviction that the Book of Mormon is both spiritually true and factually accurate are all positive aspects of the book.

Although I address areas where I feel *Lehi in the Wilderness* goes wrong, it is only fair to note where the authors get it right. Chapter 9, “Discovering Nephi’s Harbor,” is a fascinating treatment. I have studied and taught the story of Nephi building his ship hundreds of times, but I had never considered some of the issues they explore in relating what would have been involved in building a craft large enough and sturdy

enough to take a party of more than fifty people and all the provisions they would have needed on a long ocean voyage. I tend to doubt their assertion that Lehi's party brought local Arabians with them across the Pacific, and I remain unconvinced that their Khor Rori location in Oman, east of Salalah, was in fact Nephi's ship-building harbor. But the research into the details of ship building offered in chapter 9 is worth the book's pricey cost.

With regard to Lehi's trail across Arabia, three notable researchers preceded Potter and Wellington in exploring possible Book of Mormon locations on the peninsula—Lynn Hilton, Warren Aston, and Kent Brown. The treatment they receive in the book is uneven. Brown's opinions (and his support of the authors' efforts) are mentioned on numerous occasions. But Aston's ground-breaking work on the locations of both Bountiful and Nahom is barely noted. And Hilton's pioneering efforts to identify the Arabian trail of Lehi are not mentioned. These deficits are difficult to defend in terms of giving credit where credit is due. Potter and Wellington also seem to have a less than glowing opinion of FARMS (with the exception of Brown), judging from their complaints about the organization in their introduction. "Our work seemed to meet with almost universal disapproval among the community of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) at BYU" (p. xiii). Perhaps some of the reasons for this perceived "disapproval" on the part of a very capable community of Book of Mormon scholars lies in the weaknesses of their models.

Before discussing what I consider to be some errors in *Lehi in the Wilderness*, I grant a disclaimer of my own: I have no on-the-ground experience in Arabia proper. My desires to visit the area notwithstanding, I have never been granted a visa to travel to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, or Oman. My twenty-five years' experience and travel in the Near East as an archaeologist and teacher have been primarily in Israel, Jordan, Egypt, and the Sinai. This limits my personal knowledge of Book of Mormon-related geography in the Near East to the territory between Jerusalem and the valley of Lemuel. But it is territory with which I am intimately acquainted, and an area in which I proceed (on foot, by jeep,

or in print) with confidence. It is in this very area, from Jerusalem to the valley of Lemuel, that Potter and Wellington go astray.

### The Route from Jerusalem to the Red Sea

Nephi gives us a short, matter-of-fact statement about the first leg of his family's journey upon leaving Jerusalem: they "departed into the wilderness" and then "came down by the borders near the shore of the Red Sea" (1 Nephi 2:4–5). No further details are given—no names of camps, no description of terrain, no account of difficulties. Unlike the family's journey after leaving the valley of Lemuel, where we are told of the "director" (or Liahona) that aided them, where we are told the names of places they camped, and where we are told of adventures and hardships they experienced, the trip to the Red Sea is treated as a mundane matter of fact. This is probably because it *was* for them a mundane matter of fact.

Lehi and his sons had probably traveled to the Red Sea's Gulf of Eilat (or Gulf of Aqaba) many times in the years prior to their final departure from Jerusalem. They seem to have known the trail well. It was a regularly traveled route that exited the city to the southeast, into the wilderness of Judah east of Bethlehem and Tekoa, and descended via the Arugot valley to Ein Gedi. From Ein Gedi, the path turned south along the western shore of the Dead Sea and continued straight south through the desert wilderness of the Arabah valley to the Gulf of Eilat. The copper-mining area of Timna was located half a day's journey north of the gulf shore, and other copper-mining sites were located in nearby northern Sinai. It was probably to this area that Lehi and sons had come to mine copper ore and smelt it on-site into ingots for their metal-smithing activities back in Jerusalem (their smithing abilities are frequently noted throughout Nephi's writings).<sup>1</sup>

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1. For a detailed description of the possible metal mining, smelting, and smithing activities of Lehi and his sons and the connection to the Red Sea area, see Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Lehi's House at Jerusalem and the Land of His Inheritance" in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 113–17.

The distance from Jerusalem to the Gulf of Eilat via the Ein Gedi/Arabah valley route is just under two hundred miles and takes ten days to cover on foot, averaging twenty miles per day.<sup>2</sup> It is not known if Lehi and his family used camels for their desert travel. (They are never mentioned by Nephi, although Potter and Wellington assume throughout their book that camels must have been used.) If camels were employed, it would probably have shortened the travel time (via the Ein Gedi/Arabah valley) by one to two days. South of the Dead Sea, the route passed from Judean territory into Edomite territory, but there is no report of enmity between Edom and Judah from the death of Josiah until well into Zedekiah's reign. There would have been no danger to Lehi's travel parties from hostile neighbors along the Arabah valley. In every respect, the direct route south from Jerusalem to the Red Sea via Ein Gedi and the Arabah valley is the most plausible path for Lehi and his family to have followed. But it is not the path that Potter and Wellington prefer.

A word about alternative proposals is in order before examining their model. Lynn Hilton, who traveled in Arabia in 1975, suggested three different routes from Jerusalem to the Red Sea for Lehi's trail, mainly derived from modern highways in Israel and Jordan. These were first published in the *Ensign* in 1976 and subsequently in book form.<sup>3</sup> None was exactly the same as the ancient Ein Gedi/Arabah valley route described above, but one was similar—a Jericho/Qumran/Arabah valley route. (Hilton was unaware that travel south from Jericho and Qumran to Ein Gedi along the Dead Sea's western shore was not possible anciently—the modern road along the desert cliffs between Qumran and Ein Gedi was first cut and paved by Israelis only after 1967.)

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2. See D. Kelly Ogden and Jeffrey R. Chadwick, *The Holy Land—A Geographical, Historical, and Archaeological Guide to the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem: BYU Jerusalem Center/HaMakor, 1990), 39. During the 1980s and 1990s the Jerusalem/Ein Gedi/Arabah valley route to the Gulf of Eilat was explored in its entirety on foot in separate projects by Ogden and Chadwick, who served as Near Eastern studies professors at BYU's Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies.

3. Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976). See also Lynn M. Hilton and Hope A. Hilton, "In Search of Lehi's Trail," *Ensign*, September 1976, 32–54, and October 1976, 34–63; Lynn M. Hilton, *Discovering Lehi* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 1996).

Hilton's second route was to proceed southwest from Jerusalem via Hebron to Beersheba, then turn east to connect to the Arabah valley south of the Dead Sea. This was an unlikely and out-of-the-way route but was more practical than the third he proposed, which was to travel east from Jerusalem across the Jordan River to the area of modern Amman, Jordan (the ancient capital of Ammon), and then turn south to travel along the ancient King's Highway past Kerak and Petra to Aqaba. The difficulties with the King's Highway route are well known. Its path ran through territories controlled by Ammon and Moab, kingdoms that were enemies to Judah at the time of Lehi's trek. It is also much longer than the preferable Ein Gedi/Arabah valley route.

Traveling the practical and most likely route from Jerusalem straight south to the Red Sea via the Ein Gedi/Arabah valley route could be likened to a modern driving trip from Salt Lake City south to Phoenix. There is a direct and practical path for both journeys. By contrast, traveling from Jerusalem to the Red Sea via the King's Highway would be like driving from Salt Lake City to Phoenix via Denver—the eastward loop is a much longer and quite unnecessary addition to the route.

But now let us consider the route proposed in *Lehi in the Wilderness*. Potter and Wellington suggest that “Lehi would have wished to travel quickly, so he would no doubt have chosen an existing route” (p. 21). True, but they also maintain that “because the Jews were actively seeking Lehi's life” (p. 19) he would have needed “to escape Zedekiah's sphere of influence as quickly as possible” (p. 21). They therefore rule out any travel through Judah and dismiss the Arabah valley route without even discussing its merits. In addition, they give no hint that they even explored the route. Instead, they posit that Lehi traveled eastward from Jerusalem across the Jordan River, as in Hilton's third option, but rather than having Lehi travel south along the King's Highway (which they believe was too heavily settled and farmed to be described as “wilderness”), they opt for a route that lies even further to the east. This route, which passes from Amman to Ma'an through Jordan's east desert fringe, is identified in the book as the “Way of the Wilderness” spoken of in 2 Samuel 15:23. Potter and Wellington drove along this route,

suggesting that Lehi must have come this way, turning southwest at Ma'an to descend through the mountains to Aqaba (see p. 22).

The problems with this scenario are significant. First of all, if traveling from Jerusalem to the Red Sea via the King's Highway would be like driving from Salt Lake City to Phoenix by way of Denver, then a trip from Jerusalem to Aqaba on the route suggested by Potter and Wellington would be like going from Salt Lake City to Phoenix via Kansas! In terms of time, expense, effort, danger, or any issues of practical geography, it makes no sense at all. The route is well over a hundred miles longer (a significant issue on foot or on camel), and, like the King's Highway, it passed through territories of two known enemies of Judah (Ammon and Moab). It was also surely *terra incognita* to Lehi.

Second, the "Way of the Wilderness" name that Potter and Wellington take from 2 Samuel 15:23 is misapplied. King David is said to have "passed over the brook Kidron . . . toward the way of the wilderness." The "brook Kidron" is the valley east of Jerusalem's Old City, and the "way of the wilderness" refers to the desert path one encounters just over the Mount of Olives (cf. 2 Samuel 15:30). Perhaps they thought that when David was passing over the "brook Kidron" to the "way of the wilderness" he was passing over the Jordan River. But David's fording of the Jordan did not occur until two chapters later (cf. 2 Samuel 17:22), and there is no mention of "the way of the wilderness" in an east-of-Jordan context. Potter and Wellington have simply misread the passage and misused the biblical "way of the wilderness" phrase. It has no reference to a path in eastern Jordan.

A third problematic issue is the idea that Lehi would have wanted to avoid Judean territory. Potter and Wellington's claim that crossing the Jordan and taking an eastern Jordanian wilderness road somehow avoided travel through land that was in "Zedekiah's sphere of influence" (p. 21), while a route south through the Arabah valley did not, is incorrect. Judean territory in the period we are discussing extended east from Jerusalem all the way to the Jordan River, and possibly as far



east as the foothills of Mount Nebo.<sup>4</sup> Whether Lehi journeyed from Jerusalem southeast down to Ein Gedi or from Jerusalem slightly north-east down to the Jordan River, in either case he was within the borders of Judah. To cross the Jordan River to Ammon, Lehi would have had to pass through as much of “Zedekiah’s sphere of influence” as he would going from Jerusalem to the Arabah valley via Ein Gedi.

Curiously, Potter and Wellington bring up the fact that John the Baptist was “preaching in the wilderness of Judea” (Matthew 3:1). They then locate that event at Wadi el-Kharrar, a site just east of the Jordan River, which they visited. Lehi must have crossed the Jordan at this point, they claim (p. 21). But in doing so, they get caught in a geographical contradiction: In saying el-Kharrar is in the wilderness of Judea, and in saying Lehi traveled by way of el-Kharrar, they are saying that Lehi indeed traveled in the wilderness *in Judah* (Judea). But travel in Judah is exactly what they say Lehi would not have wanted to do. Avoiding travel in Judah was the reason they gave for maintaining that Lehi would not have journeyed south to the Red Sea via the Arabah valley (pp. 19–20). The authors cannot have it both ways on this issue.

In fact, Potter and Wellington (like others before them) probably overstate the actual danger to Lehi in Judah. While it is true that some in Jerusalem had sought to take Lehi’s life (1 Nephi 1:20; 2:1), these may have been spontaneous attempts of individuals angry with his prophecies, not necessarily a conspiracy in which Zedekiah or the government was involved. Once outside the big city, on the wilderness paths to either Jericho or Ein Gedi, Lehi was probably as secure as anyone else traveling the byways of Judah.

In any case, that there was probably no plot against the family of Lehi seems obvious from the fact that when his sons returned to Jerusalem to get the plates of brass, they had no trouble obtaining an initial audience with Laban (see 1 Nephi 3:4–12). Nor was any danger reported in returning to Jerusalem to convince Ishmael’s family to join Lehi’s party (see 1 Nephi 7:2–5). Judah was probably not the

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4. See *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed., ed. Yohanan Aharoni, Michael Avi-Yonah, Anson R. Rainey, and Ze’ev Safrai (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 122, map 158.

wholesale hotbed of hostility to Lehi and his family that many commentaries have assumed.

By contrast, Ammon and Moab, two kingdoms through which the authors maintain Lehi traveled on their “Way of the Wilderness,” were quite hostile to Judah in this period (cf. 2 Kings 24:2), and Jews journeying through their territories would place themselves at considerable risk. It is highly unlikely that Lehi could have passed through those kingdoms with a fraction of the security he would have still enjoyed in his native Judean territory.

One final note on the trail to the Red Sea: When Nephi and his brothers twice traveled back up to Jerusalem, they seem to have done so along the same route that Lehi took on the way down. Like the initial journey to the Red Sea, these trips were matter-of-factly noted (see 1 Nephi 3:9; 4:38; 7:3, 5) without any of the descriptions we see in the post-valley of Lemuel travel narrative. The fact that Nephi and his brothers traveled without their father, the time and means (including food and fodder) those journeys must have cost, and the unanticipated difficulties that occurred on those trips all combine to suggest that the shortest and most practical route between Jerusalem and the Red Sea was the one Lehi’s family utilized. That route would be the Ein Gedi/Arabah valley route, not the much longer, less logical, and misnamed “Way of the Wilderness” suggested in *Lehi in the Wilderness*. In terms of Lehi’s trail to the Red Sea, Potter and Wellington are simply “digging in the wrong place.”

### The Borders Near (and Nearer) the Red Sea

Nephi’s description that Lehi “came down by the borders near the Red Sea” is immediately followed by the explanation that he “traveled . . . in the borders which are nearer the Red Sea” (1 Nephi 2:5). What Nephi could have meant by his use of the term *borders* has been extensively discussed. In what way were the “borders near the Red Sea” different from “the borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea”? My own sense of this is that by using whatever word wound up being translated as “borders” Nephi was trying to say *limits*—specifically, the *limits* of dry land as one comes closer to the sea. By “borders near the Red

Sea” Nephi would simply have been referring to a place near the Gulf of Eilat coast, but not right on the coast. The area between Eilat and the copper mining area at Timna would qualify as such a place. By describing “borders which are *nearer* the Red Sea,” Nephi would have been indicating that Lehi traveled very near the Red Sea beach—not right on the seashore (or he would have used the word *seashore*, as in 1 Nephi 17:6) but along a path perhaps a hundred meters or so inland from the beach. This desert path, very near the beach (but not right on the seashore), was still referred to as “wilderness” by Nephi, and Lehi traveled down this path for three days (1 Nephi 2:6) before coming to the valley he would call Lemuel. The valley was a wadi in the desert mountains fronting the Red Sea coast, just a few hundred meters from the seashore.

*Lehi in the Wilderness* takes a much different approach to Nephi’s “borders”; it is another case where I think the authors are “digging in the wrong place.” Their way of dealing with “borders” is to interpret the term as *mountains*. They noticed that two lines of mountains run north to south parallel to the Red Sea coast. “It was just like Nephi had written,” the authors explain. “There are two mountain ranges (borders), one near the Red Sea (Gulf of Aqaba of the Red Sea), and one nearer the Red Sea” (p. 5). In this model, their valley of Lemuel (Tayyib al-Ism) was discovered by Lehi not along the coast, but miles inland from the seashore, deep inside the westernmost of the two mountain ranges.

This borders-equals-mountains model is almost intriguing, until one realizes how Potter and Wellington arrived at it. Here we will let them state their own case, because no contextual rephrasing could do it justice:

We learned from the Arabs that the name of the mountains in northwest Arabia, the *Hejaz*, meant the “borders.” In the Semitic language, the words for *mountain* and *borders* share a common derivation. That is, the Hebrew word *gebul* means *border*. *Gebul* cognates with Arabic *jabal* (*jebel*, *djebel*), which means *mountain*. Later we read that linguist and historian Hugh W. Nibley had published this fact many years

earlier. Subsequently, Dr. Nibley informed us that also in the ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian languages the word *borders* meant *mountains*. (p. 3)

What they mean when they say “the Semitic language” is not clarified. I have some experience in ancient Near Eastern languages, but I have never heard of “the Semitic language.” As for the observation that the Hebrew term “cognates [*sic*] with Arabic,” the reference for note 1—an endnote following chapter 1—reads as follows:

Anonymous F.A.R.M.S. review notes to the author, July 1998. The author of this critique of George’s early work noted, “But the Hebrew word is used of non-mountainous areas as well, though its origin may have been in reference to mountain barriers.” Also reviewer’s notes from F.A.R.M.S./BYU to authors, 1999. (p. 12)

There does not seem to be any genuine expertise in Hebrew involved here. Certainly Potter and Wellington are not trained Hebraists. And the anonymous reviewer misled them if he/she communicated to them that the Hebrew word for *border* could somehow be translated as “mountain” in addition to “non-mountainous areas as well.”

The Hebrew term that Potter and Wellington render as “*gebul*” (it is actually pronounced *gvul*) does *not* mean “mountain.” It *never did* mean “mountain.” That the Hebrew term *gvul* is cognate to the Arabic term *jebel* is true enough. But because two words of related languages may be consonantly cognate does not require that they mean the same thing. Arabic *jebel* means “mountain,” but Hebrew *gvul* does not—it means “border” or “limit.” *Gvul* appears hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible, in both singular and plural form, and in not a single one of those contexts does the word mean “mountain.” *Gvul* is also never translated in the KJV English Bible as “mountain.” *Gvul* does *not* mean “mountain.”

In Hebrew, the term for mountain is *har*, and the plural term for “mountains” is *harim*. These terms also appear hundreds of times in the Hebrew Bible. In the Book of Mormon, when Nephi wanted to indicate a mountain he did so by saying “mountain” (see 1 Nephi 11:1;

16:30; 17:7, and “mount” in 18:3). Presumably, Nephi used the Hebrew word *har* when he wanted to say “mountain,” and he used the plural word *gvulot* (the plural of *gvul*) when he wanted to say “borders.” The two terms are not interchangeable, nor are they liable to be confused by anyone who speaks Hebrew. *Gvulot* does *not* mean “mountains.” This fact will weigh in when assessing Potter and Wellington’s candidate for the valley of Lemuel.

A different usage of the word *borders* occurs in 1 Nephi 2:8. Speaking of both the river Laman and the valley of Lemuel, Nephi reported: “the valley was in the borders near the mouth thereof.” This plainly means that the entrance to the valley of Lemuel was located on land at a point near the mouth of the river (i.e., close to where the river emptied into the sea). This indicates that the valley access was located not deep inside a mountain range (as in this model) but very close to the seashore—not right at the seashore, but perhaps within a hundred meters or so. This description, too, will be important in assessing the authors’ candidate for the valley and the nature of the river that ran in that valley.

### The Valley of Lemuel and the River Laman

Tayyib al-Ism is the crown jewel of Potter and Wellington’s discoveries in *Lehi in the Wilderness*. They lead with the story of their discovery, and they follow up with a detailed description of the site, including all the evidence they discern that assures them they have found the actual camp of Lehi. “How can we be certain that the wadi Tayyib al-Ism is the Book of Mormon’s Valley of Lemuel?” they confidently ask. “The answer is easy,” we are told. “Nephi made detailed assertions about the valley and its river.” And, we are assured, “the wadi Tayyib al-Ism matches all these characteristics perfectly” (p. 31).

But it does not. In one very specific instance—the fact that its small stream has no mouth—the wadi flatly fails to match Nephi’s description. And in other respects, such as coastal inaccessibility, its distance from the gulf’s north shore, and the difficulty of locating its inland access, the wadi presents problems when considered in the context of Nephi’s report.

From a layout and graphics perspective, *Lehi in the Wilderness* is a pleasure to read. Most chapters are enhanced not only with color photographs, but with excellent maps. The exceptions are the two chapters on Tayyib al-Isim, where no maps are provided to help the reader understand the location and nature of the wadi, its river, and its relation to the ocean and shoreline. This is a rather glaring deficit, in view of the fact that the valley is the jewel of the book.

To fill this gap, I consulted Potter's 1999 article on Tayyib al-Isim in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*,<sup>5</sup> which relates much of the same information found in *Lehi in the Wilderness*. The article featured a general map of the Gulf of Eilat (or Gulf of Aqaba) along with a close-up diagram map of the wadi and its river course. These helpful maps, or something like them, should certainly have been included in the book. Such maps would aid the reader in terms of spatially understanding the writers' valley of Lemuel candidate. On the other hand, the maps provide clues that Potter and Wellington are again "digging in the wrong place."

The difficulties of identifying Tayyib al-Isim with the valley of Lemuel include its inaccessibility from the coast and its difficult-to-find inland access. Potter and Wellington attempt to mitigate these issues with their "borders = mountains" proposition, but this approach has already been demonstrated untenable. The fact that its inland access was 74 miles from Aqaba (via their Land Rover) suggests that it was not only difficult to find, but too far for Lehi's group to have traveled in just three days.

The perennial stream Potter and Wellington found on their first trip into Tayyib al-Isim was the feature that initially convinced them they had found the valley of Lemuel (pp. 9–10). When addressing his son Laman, Lehi exclaimed: "O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness" (1 Nephi 2:9). It is easy to see why some would think this statement is describing the river Laman as a continually flowing brook. (I admit that I used to think this myself.) And it is easy to understand why Potter

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5. George Potter, "A New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 54–63, 79.

and Wellington would think they had found the river Laman when they determined that the Tayyib al-Ism stream flows perennially.

But a perennial stream is *not* required to fulfill Nephi's description or Lehi's exclamation. Lehi said "continually running," not "continually flowing." A Near Eastern wadi's streambed can run all the way to the sea whether water happens to be flowing in it or not. I have no doubt that water was flowing when Lehi made his statement (which may have been during the winter months). But whether or not water was flowing in that stream six months later does not make or break the issue in terms of identifying the site of the valley of Lemuel. The streambed itself would have been a continually running course to the ocean for the wadi's water, whether seasonal or perennial.

Winter rains begin in the Sinai and Gulf of Eilat region as early as November and continue until as late as April, so that in any given year some of the seasonal streams in the region's wadis could conceivably flow as long as five months. All of the events and travel in the story of Lehi's family at the valley of Lemuel, from their arrival in 1 Nephi 2 to their departure in 1 Nephi 16, can be easily accommodated in a four-month (nineteen-week) period.<sup>6</sup> If Lehi's party arrived at the valley in late November and departed in early April, their stay would easily fit a four-month time frame. While some commentaries have suggested that Lehi's family stayed an entire year or more at the valley (which *would* require a perennial stream for their water source), this is not demanded by Nephi's account. A winter stay of no more than nineteen weeks, utilizing a seasonal stream flow, is quite plausible.

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6. A four-month (nineteen-week) stay at the valley of Lemuel, from mid-November to mid-April, would include two weeks of initial camp setup; two weeks' travel back to Jerusalem to visit Laban; one week to go to the land of inheritance to obtain gold and silver to buy the plates, then return to Jerusalem; one week to be robbed by Laban, chased into the wilderness, and return to Jerusalem to finally take the plates; two weeks for the return trip to the valley of Lemuel; two weeks for Lehi to study the plates of brass; two weeks to return to Jerusalem a second time to visit Ishmael; one week to convince and prepare his family for departure; two weeks to return again to the valley of Lemuel; one week in which Lehi experienced his vision and related it to his family; one week in which Nephi experienced the same vision and taught his brothers; one week to prepare and perform marriages of Lehi's sons to Ishmael's daughters; and one week to break camp and depart the valley.

So the fact that the stream at Tayyib al-Ism flows perennially is certainly not proof that the wadi was the valley of Lemuel. But another aspect of that stream is certain evidence that the site could *not* have been the valley of Lemuel. The stream has no mouth into the Red Sea. Nephi reported that the river Laman “emptied into the Red Sea” and that the valley was “near the mouth” of the stream (1 Nephi 2:8). But the stream at Tayyib al-Ism terminates nearly half a mile inland from the beach, far up the canyon. This should seal the case against Tayyib al-Ism.

Potter and Wellington recognize that this is a problem. Their solution for dealing with this inconsistency is one of the more remarkable theories put forth in the entire book. They suggest that the mountainous land mass on the Gulf of Eilat’s east coast is two hundred to four hundred feet higher now than it was in Lehi’s time! An “LDS geologist” informed them that the lowest part of their wadi and the beach at its west end were actually submerged under hundreds of feet of water at the time of Lehi (pp. 38–39). The Red Sea supposedly ran inland through the wadi back then, to a point where it met the Tayyib al-Ism stream. Thus, they claim, their river actually did empty into the Red Sea anciently, when the Arabian coastal land mass was as much as four hundred feet lower than it is now (and the current beach far under water).

How is this possible? Plate tectonics. The “LDS geologist” informed them that the tectonic plate that forms the east side of the great Rift Valley (of which the Gulf of Eilat is part) has been thrusting up “one to five centimeters per year” (p. 39). Multiplying 5 centimeters by the 2,600 years since Lehi’s time results in a total of 13,000 centimeters (that is, 130 meters, or some 425 feet). Thus the current beach at their site was deep under water in Lehi’s time, and the mountain ridge that is now four hundred feet above sea level was right at sea level back then. The ocean waters, they say, ran east into the granite canyon back in 600 BC, and then turned north to meet the stream.

But this theory is problematic. It is well known that tectonic movement is not constant. There have been long periods of time when the plates of the Rift Valley did not move at all. Archaeological evidence suggests that the eastern plate of the Rift Valley has moved less than



one hundred feet since 1000 BC. And when the plate moves upward, it does not rise only in the Tayyib al-Ism area—it moves upward all along the eastern side of the Rift. But if current shorelines had been even two hundred feet lower in the Iron Age than they are now, many well-known ancient settlements along the Rift's eastern shorelines could not have existed. On the Red Sea, the ancient port settlement of Ezion Geber (whose excavated remains are found at Tell el-Kheleifeh, near the modern city of Aqaba) would have been an uninhabitable underwater site.<sup>7</sup> Further north, on the shore of the Dead Sea, the ancient site of Bab edh-Dhra would have been just beneath the lake's salty water, and the entire *lissan* or “tongue” of the Dead Sea would have been deeply submerged, making the suggested travel from Moab to Judah (see 2 Chronicles 20:2) across that partial land bridge impossible.<sup>8</sup> The settlement of Zereth-shahar would have been a submerged site.<sup>9</sup> In the Jordan River valley, sites such as Adam, Zaphon (Tell es-Sa'idiyeh), and Sha'ar ha-Golan would have been far underground. And even further north, at the Sea of Galilee, Iron Age lakeshore sites at Ein Gev, Tel Hadar, Bethsaida, and other locations would have been at the bottom of the lake, and the towns at those sites never built.<sup>10</sup> But archaeological research at these sites indicates that they were *not* submerged or subsurface and that the eastern plate of the Rift was not two to four hundred feet lower in 600 BC, as the book claims. This means that the narrow stream in Tayyib al-Ism did *not* have a mouth that met the Red Sea. In 600 BC, as today, that stream terminated beneath the sands of the high-walled granite canyon nearly half a mile inland from the ocean shore. It simply could not have been the river Laman as described by Nephi.

Let us assume, though, that Wadi Tayyib al-Ism *was* two to four hundred feet lower in 600 BC than it is today and that its stream *did* in

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7. The eighth- and seventh-century BC levels at Tell el-Kheleifeh are discussed by Amihai Mazar in *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 450–51.

8. See *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 98, map 129.

9. See *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 61, map 71.

10. See site maps on the front and back covers of volumes 1 and 2 in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Carta/Israel Exploration Society, 1993).

fact meet the Red Sea's waters inside the "granite canyon." Even if this *had* been the case, the valley itself would still have failed to meet Nephi's description. Nephi noted that the valley of Lemuel "was in the borders *near* the mouth thereof"—that is, *near* the mouth of the river Laman (1 Nephi 2:8). This means that the entrance to the valley of Lemuel was not right *at* the mouth of the river, nor was the mouth of the river *in* the valley itself. The mouth of the river, where it met the Red Sea, has to have been outside the valley, not exactly at the valley entrance or in the valley. The valley has to have been *near* the river's mouth, not right there at the mouth. There has to have been a short distance (perhaps a hundred meters or so) between the mouth of the river (where it met the sea) and the rising mountains in which the valley entrance was located. No realistic assessment of the features of Tayyib al-Isim and its stream can match Nephi's description. The site cannot have been the valley of Lemuel. Potter and Wellington's sincere and impressive efforts notwithstanding, "they're digging in the wrong place."

But there are a number of sites along the Gulf of Eilat's eastern shoreline that do meet the general description given by Nephi. My own guess is that one of the wadis near the shore at Bir Marsha would be the strongest candidate for the actual valley of Lemuel. Why Bir Marsha? Because it is the furthest point south that one can travel along the east shore of the Gulf of Eilat. About fifty miles south of Ezion Geber, along that shoreline, high mountain cliffs jut out into the sea, cutting off the coastal path just south of Bir Marsha.

It would take at least two days for Lehi's party to cover those fifty miles on camels. If they proceeded more slowly (looking for a campsite) or if any were traveling on foot, it would take the group three days to go from the Ezion Geber area to Bir Marsha. They would then have pitched their tents in a secluded canyon in the mountain face just a few hundred meters from the Bir Marsha shoreline. With a seasonal winter stream running in the wadi to provide them with water, Lehi then gave the small river and the high-walled valley the names of his two eldest sons.

Potter and Wellington actually visited Bir Marsha on one occasion. In his *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* article, Potter noted

that they could only drive forty-four miles south of Aqaba before meeting the cliffs at Bir Marsha that cut off further coastal travel.<sup>11</sup> They then turned eastward, driving their Land Rover another thirty miles through the interior mountain passes to the upper access of Tayyib al-Isim. Their total of seventy-four miles would be essentially impossible for Lehi's party to have traveled in just three days, especially along the unfamiliar and twisting inland wadis. That the authors passed by Bir Marsha on their journey is ironic. They really *did* visit a viable valley of Lemuel candidate—without realizing it.

### A Genuinely Rewarding Experience

Despite the foregoing refutations of Potter and Wellington's theories, I genuinely enjoyed reading this book. The more closely I examined it, the more I found myself pondering the miracle that is our Book of Mormon. And the more I disagreed with it, the more I grew to appreciate George Potter, Richard Wellington, and their wives, families, and friends who joined them in their research—even though I have not yet met them. The spirit of adventure and sacrifice embodied in their efforts is remarkable. I know something of the effort and expense, the time and sacrifice, and even the occasional personal danger involved in travel and research “on the ground” in the Near East. Potter and Wellington are to be congratulated on their work.

The contrasting models of scriptural events and locations posited by a first generation of explorers have peculiar ways of leading students of future generations to different but genuinely correct conclusions. Though my own observations differ from those presented in *Lehi in the Wilderness*, after reading the book I felt as I do when I have engaged in a fascinating and friendly debate with good friends and colleagues. I learned a great deal from reading the experiences and testimonies of Potter and Wellington and suspect that any intelligent reader would be similarly rewarded.

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11. Potter, “New Candidate in Arabia for the Valley of Lemuel,” 60.



## RESPONSE TO *LEAVING THE SAINTS*

Boyd Jay Petersen

**K**irkus Reviews assures us that Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith* "is not a trashy exposé but a loving, sad account of coming home again."<sup>1</sup> However, those familiar with the "trashy Mormon exposés" of the nineteenth century will find in this book all the familiar chestnuts of that genre: the horrors of polygamy, the strange secrets of the temple, the dictatorial rule of church leaders, Joseph Smith's obvious failures as a translator of Egyptian, and his strange account of Native Americans being descendents of ancient Israelites. Even the Danites make their required appearance. Like other exposés, this book's treatment of most historical events amounts to little more than caricature.<sup>2</sup> Rather

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The first part of Petersen's response to Beck's book appears at [www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200504.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200504.html) (accessed 1 November 2005). The second part, "As Things Stand at the Moment: Responding to Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints*," pp. 240–51, is a follow-up to the previous response and was presented at the 2005 FAIR Conference. The text appears at [www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200506.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200506.html) (accessed 1 November 2005).

1. Kirkus Reviews 72 (15 December 2004): 1174.

2. The one exception to this is Martha's treatment of the history of the Joseph Smith Papyri (pp. 150–60), where she does give a fairly detailed account; however, here she appears to rely mostly on Charles M. Larson's *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (1985; repr., Grand Rapids: Institute for Religious

Review of Martha Beck. *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*. New York: Crown, 2005. ix + 306 pp. \$24.95.

than investigating complicated historical events, Martha provides one-dimensional portrayals of those events to show how silly, patriarchal, and violent Mormonism really is.

There are, however, two significant differences between this exposé and its antecedents. First, this book is surely one of the best written exposés I have encountered. As a teacher of literature, I found myself admiring the way Martha weaves this narrative. The book is well-paced, the writing is lively, the descriptions are vivid, and the wit sparkles. On the other hand, Martha has an annoying habit of placing herself rhetorically above everyone else in the narrative and sneering at all that is “not-Martha”—especially all that is Mormon. As a practicing Latter-day Saint, I found this off-putting. Despite its lively prose and *Kirkus*’s claims to the contrary, *Leaving the Saints* is still, at its core, an exposé.

The second difference between this book and previous exposés is the focus of its narrative: the book recounts Martha Beck’s recovered memories of sexual abuse at the hands of her father, unnamed in the book but recognizable to most Mormons as Hugh Nibley. As Martha’s brother-in-law and Hugh Nibley’s son-in-law and biographer,<sup>3</sup> I feel compelled to respond. At the outset, however, I must make four things perfectly clear:

1. This is not and should not be read as a *review* of the book as much as a *response* to it. I make no attempt to include all the requisite elements of a standard academic or popular book review.

2. Because of my proximity to this story—I have lived with its effects on my family for over a decade now—I cannot be dispassionate; I have a stake in this debate. But I also have insights others do not have that are both relevant and, I believe, compelling.

3. This response should not be seen as the “official” position of the Nibley family. While I cannot help but be influenced by my wife

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Research, 1992), and she repeats several of Larson’s mistakes. A more responsible approach is found in both John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), and Michael D. Rhodes, *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002).

3. Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002).

and her family—and I have tried to be sensitive to their feelings—this response represents *my* opinion.

4. My goal is not to discredit or further alienate Martha. I sincerely wish her well. I have made every effort to confine myself strictly to matters of evidence from which a reasonable conclusion can be drawn about the credibility of her story.

### Martha's Claims

Picking up roughly where her previous memoir, *Expecting Adam*, left off, *Leaving the Saints* chronicles how Martha and her husband, John, retreat from the high-pressure world of Harvard to the more compassionate and supportive atmosphere of their native Utah Valley following the birth of their Down syndrome son, Adam. Both Martha and John began teaching at BYU, where, she claims, they witnessed “the Church’s ruthlessness as it silenced dissidents and masked truths that contradicted its published beliefs” (dust jacket). More disturbing is that, after beginning meditation and having a “white-light experience” while undergoing surgery, Martha began to remember sexual abuse at the hands of her father that is supposed to have occurred when she was between the ages of five and eight. Martha is quite explicit about her accusations of abuse but is mostly implicit about the details.

Among the explicit claims are (1) that she believes her father was likely a victim of sexual abuse at the hands of his mother and (2) that he was further traumatized on the grisly battlefields of World War II. In preparing my biography of Hugh, I noted that his mother and especially his grandmother were both fond of strange homemade “cures,” some of which were likely painful and frightening, but I found no evidence of abuse, either physical or sexual. World War II was no doubt painful for Hugh, but he must have worked through these issues before I began asking him questions about the war. I never noticed any symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in any of the many interviews I conducted with Hugh about his war years.

(3) Martha alleges that in 1967, when church authorities asked Hugh to translate the Joseph Smith Papyri, he was placed in a double-

bind situation that caused him to crack. He knew, Martha claims, that the church wanted him to assert that the text contained the Book of Abraham, but he also knew it to be the Egyptian Book of Breathing. As she puts it, “He could either lose his job, his livelihood, his social standing, his bully pulpit, by publicly revealing information that would undermine the very foundations of Mormonism, or he could lie flat out. In a way, I admire him for choosing the only other alternative: he went crazy” (p. 148). Martha makes these assertions in the face of facts that show just the opposite. She neglects to note that it was Hugh who first called scholarly and public attention to the fact that the papyri contained the text of the Egyptian Book of Breathing rather than the Book of the Dead.<sup>4</sup> She also fails to mention how Hugh, who confessed that for a period he was merely “skirmishing and sparring,” immediately launched into a series of monthly articles for the *Improvement Era* which ran during 1968–70 while simultaneously publishing more scholarly articles in *Dialogue* and *BYU Studies*.<sup>5</sup> She further omits mention of the fact that Hugh focused right from the start on what Klaus Baer stated was the “only” argument that “will get the Mormons out of the dilemma”—that it is not the Egyptian text but the English one that can provide evidence for its authenticity. And while Hugh did not rush into print with his own translation, in 1968 he did a translation of the papyri’s close cousin, “Book of Breathing, P. Louvre 3284,” which he circulated widely. And in 1975, Hugh included this translation with similar selections from the Joseph Smith Papyri in *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*. What is especially noticeable about this omission is that Martha herself

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4. Hugh Nibley, “Getting Ready to Begin: An Editorial,” *BYU Studies* 8/3 (1968): 245–49.

5. Hugh Nibley, “A New Look at the Pearl of Great Price,” ran in the *Improvement Era* from January 1968 through May 1970; “Phase One,” *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 99–105; “Prolegomena to Any Study of the Book of Abraham,” *BYU Studies* 8/2 (1968): 171–78; “Fragment Found in Salt Lake City,” *BYU Studies* 8/2 (1968): 191–94; “Getting Ready to Begin,” 245–54; “As Things Stand at the Moment,” *BYU Studies* 9/1 (1968): 69–102; “What Is ‘The Book of Breathing?’” *BYU Studies* 11/2 (1971): 153–87; “The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers,” *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 350–99.



helped to illustrate this book<sup>6</sup>—an odd task to undertake for someone who claims to have had a “lifelong strange reaction to all things Egyptian,” who had repeated nightmares, “one in which [she] was trapped in the two-dimensional world of an ancient papyrus drawing . . . as the corpse of a dead man scuttled along behind me, right on my heels” (p. 146). It is also clear, from both Hugh’s publications and private correspondence, that during the years in question, he was at the height of his career; there is no indication of psychological breakdown. Furthermore, Hugh never lost “his job, his livelihood, his social standing, [or] his bully pulpit” for telling the truth while simultaneously defending the church.

Martha’s book mostly hints at the details of Hugh’s alleged breakdown, but evidently she believes that her father ritually abused her while reenacting Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac, all the while wearing an Egyptian costume of Amut the Destroyer (pp. 121–22, 146–47).<sup>7</sup>

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6. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975). Martha is acknowledged for her help “drawing some of the pictures” on page xiii.

7. Since this response was first written, Martha has objected to this characterization of her memories, stating that it makes light of her allegations. But if I made this assumption, I was not alone. Many of the early reviews mentioned it. While there is nothing explicitly linking the dream sequence about Amut the Destroyer and the ritual abuse described in *Leaving the Saints*, the way Martha tells the story implies a causal chain of related events.

On page 146, Martha asks Hugh, “But I’m not at all clear how the Egyptian stuff ties in. . . . It was so bizarre. Do you remember that?” Then she says, the “peculiar details” of her memories—“they were so *weird*”—caused her to doubt herself, but “in the end, reinforced [her] conviction” that she had not made them up. She states that “the flashes of memory included hearing him mention Egypt repeatedly, and this aspect of my memories baffled me at first.” Then she discusses her nightmare of Amut the Destroyer standing outside her room. Later she talks about encountering her “nemesis” in a child’s book. Then she talks about asking her father “do you remember my alligator dreams? . . . The nightmares I had every week or two?” She says that his response was that she “was being ‘pursued by an evil spirit’” (p. 147).

As Meier Sternberg (or any Reader Response theorist for that matter) would argue, every act of reading is a process of gap filling, of putting together pieces of information that make sense of the text. And every reader is forced to make sense of a text by following the directions given by the writer. Here Martha may or may not have intentionally wanted us to believe that her father wore an Egyptian costume while he is supposed to have abused her, but the causal chain produced by juxtaposing this material together

Part of the reason it is so difficult to determine exactly what Martha believes happened is that she does not always distinguish between her memories and her dreams. In reading her book, one gets the feeling that Martha herself may not be able to distinguish where one ends and the other begins. Further, before setting out these strange memories/dreams, Martha contends that the very strangeness of these details somehow proves their truth: “The peculiar details of my memories had at first made me doubt myself—they were so *weird*—but in the end, reinforced my conviction that I hadn’t unconsciously made something up” (p. 146).

Innuendo and an apparently superdeveloped ability to read facial expressions and minute changes in skin color are among Martha’s main sources of insight. During a contrived meeting in a hotel room, when she confronts her father with the question, “What were you doing with all that Egyptian stuff? I mean, when you were performing your ‘Abrahamic sacrifices’ on me?” Martha then has her description of Hugh’s facial expression condemn him: “The blow lands right on target; my father flinches, his face flashing an expression that tells me a great deal. It isn’t just frightened. It certainly isn’t confused. It’s *knowing*, in a way that both chills and reassures me. It tells me that, while I can’t trust him, I can trust my own memory” (pp. 121–22). Could it possibly be that Hugh did not flinch at all, or if he did, that he flinched because he found Martha’s words so horribly strange and sad and alarming? Martha’s leading questions and her ability to “know” the minds of her interlocutors allow her to drive her points home with a forcefulness and conviction of “accuracy” that readers must see is just not there. Martha describes several other instances that demonstrate her ability to read the minds of others by the expressions on their faces and illustrate the precision of her personal skin-color lie detector (for example, pp. 88, 107, 127). She imagines that people turn different shades of blue, depending on the enormity of their lies: “powder blue for small lies, periwinkle for naughty fibs, cobalt for outright deception, and so on to deep navy” (p. 85). When she asks her father

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certainly leads the reader to this conclusion. If it is a misreading, it is a result of sloppy writing, not of sloppy reading.

about whether he is afraid of death, he replies, “of course not,” and “the skin all over his entire body [turns] as blue as his eyes” (p. 88). Such things may convict in Martha’s courtroom, but in the world I live in, most lies and half truths are not so easily revealed.

Another way Martha uses innuendo is by creating a causal chain of (often erroneously reported) events and then letting the reader draw a conclusion. In one instance, after leading the reader through a series of misreported events that hint that one of her sisters may be consciously or unconsciously aware of the abuse, Martha adds “but I’m trained as a social scientist, which means that I try very hard not to jump to conclusions” (p. 207). It appears, however, that she is more than happy for her readers to jump to conclusions for her.

Another frustrating methodological choice that Martha made is that she never gives the real names of anyone with the exception of herself, her husband, John, and their children. Members of her family of origin are all referred to as “my sister,” “my brother,” “my father,” or “my mother.” But everyone else gets a pseudonym, even people who were in the public spotlight and who were well-known at the time. I found this terribly frustrating, partly because it kept pulling me out of the narrative to speculate as to who each person was and partly because it made it impossible to corroborate many of the details in this book. I understand the need to use pseudonyms to protect some individuals from embarrassment or to prevent legal action against Martha or her publisher, but why use pseudonyms for everyone? Particularly since Martha makes such serious allegations, one would think she would want some witnesses to back up her words. But even her “witnesses”—her two cousins hiding in the hotel room with a tape recorder—are not named (pp. 5–6).

At one point in the book, Martha’s use of a pseudonym is downright disingenuous. After an altercation with her first therapist, Martha decided to go to another one who had been recommended to her. “Let’s call her Dr. Rachel Grant,” Martha writes on page 234. On the same page, she describes sitting in the waiting room before her first appointment with this woman and “second-guessing [her] decision” to see this therapist, “wonder[ing] if Dr. Grant was descended from former

Mormon president Heber J. Grant.” This gives Martha a narrative opening to tell a terribly funny family story about how her grandfather would accompany on the piano the tone-deaf President Grant when he sang and then change keys “in the middle of the prophet’s performances, creating excruciating discord as the prophet sang obliviously onward” (pp. 234–35). It is a good story. Almost good enough for us to forget that the name Rachel Grant is a *pseudonym* that Martha gave this therapist only a few sentences earlier. This account of her inner mind can be nothing but fiction.

A deep paranoia permeates Martha’s narrative. Granted, the events Martha describes would be harrowing, if true, but the conspiracy she describes seems to be straight out of *The X-Files* or *The History of the Saints, or An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism*. Martha begins to get threatening notes from students (p. 223); she is then called in by her unidentified department chair after a student sends an anonymous letter to the General Authorities (p. 237); she then receives threatening anonymous phone calls (p. 241); and she and John then hear a “strange, intermittent clicking sound” on their phones and “[discover] that [their] phone line had been crossed with another line inside a phone junction box at the nearby Mormon chapel” (p. 233). They have the line repaired, but it starts “clicking” again. One day, she picks up the phone to hear a strange voice threaten, “I think that people who speak out against the Gospel shouldn’t be Church members. They should be dis-membered,” the voice pausing to emphasize the “clever word play” (p. 234). Dissident Mormons worry about parking their cars near Martha’s house because they do not want their license plates to be “written down by the Strengthening the Membership Committee” (p. 251), and Martha worries about the “foul play perpetrated by Mormonism’s lunatic fringe, which [pops] up in the back pages of Utah newspapers on a regular basis” (p. 224). Her therapist tells Martha, “If you do what it takes to get over this thing [the abuse], the Mormon Church is going to ruin your life” (p. 236). After learning that Martha intended to write this book, one ex-Mormon friend from Utah responds, “without a trace of levity,” “‘They’ll kill you’” (p. 191).

The stake president who comes to visit after John has had his name removed from the church's records threatens them: "Bad things happen" to children of "apostate parents" (p. 259). Martha even resurrects the Danites, stating that "every now and then, Utah papers record murders with uniquely Mormon flavoring (death by temple-sanctioned methods, for example) and the word that goes out on the Latter-day grapevine is *Danite*" (p. 190). "I suspected that even though the Mormon powers that be might not actually threaten my life, they would probably try to ruin it," Martha intones. "Yes, these suspicions were outlandish. Yes, they were paranoid. And yes, they were completely accurate" (p. 182). While I know some of these things have happened to some individuals (for example, Hugh Nibley received threats after publishing some of his social commentary), the extreme nature of what Martha describes is truly incredible.

### Challenges to Martha's Accounts

The most serious problems with this book, however, are Martha's persistent hyperbolic assertions and outright distortions of fact. Martha's previous memoir, *Expecting Adam*, caused family members and many friends to raise eyebrows when they read events they had witnessed described in such exaggerated, often unrecognizable, ways. For example, when Martha described taking a year off from Harvard to read texts from Western philosophy and world religions after an existential crisis,<sup>8</sup> family members and close friends knew that she had taken the year off because of an anorexic breakdown, which caused her parents to make her come home and enter therapy, and that the reading assignments were all from a BYU honors colloquium she had audited during the time she was in Provo. When Martha said she was an atheist by the time she left for Harvard, these same family and friends were puzzled that an atheist had attended church regularly, married in the temple, and written an essay on maintaining faith for the *Ensign*. During this period, Martha had also coauthored a book with her husband, published by church-owned Deseret Book, on

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8. Martha Beck, *Expecting Adam* (New York: Times Books, 1999), 169.

recovering from compulsive behaviors like anorexia, drug addiction, and homosexuality by implementing gospel principles. The authors also bore their testimonies that they “accept as inspired the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, family members were shocked by the unkind way in which Martha portrayed them and their reaction to her news about Adam having Down syndrome. In that book, Martha describes her father laughing in a “loud, long, forced guffaw” and her brother commenting on how if retarded people were allowed to marry, “the half-brains in question should at least be voluntarily sterilized.”<sup>10</sup> Family members found this to be an unrecognizable and uncharitable description of their very real acceptance of her and her baby and their sincere respect for her choice not to abort. Likewise, Martha’s ex-husband states in a note to me that his father and family were offended by the way she characterized them in the book. “My Dad and Mom were *so* sensitive to Adam—my Dad went out and got books on Down syndrome as soon as he heard the diagnosis—and [Martha] made them look like fools.” Furthermore, Martha’s characterization of “Goatstroke,” the overly demanding and mean-spirited Harvard professor, cost John a wonderful friendship. The real “Goatstroke,” John writes, “got Martha into her Sociology program, and was always helpful and kind to her.” Upon reading the book, this professor “was devastated by her characterization” and “my relationship with him—which was very strong—was ruined forever as well [as was hers].”<sup>11</sup>

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9. See Martha Nibley Beck, “Cultivating Faith: LDS Students at New England Universities,” *Ensign*, July 1984, 32–36. Martha Nibley Beck and John C. Beck, *Breaking the Cycle of Compulsive Behavior* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), xi.

10. Beck, *Expecting Adam*, 243.

11. John Beck, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 8 January 2005. In fact, Martha’s paper trail of exaggeration goes back to her very first published article, Martha Nibley, “A Tale of Two Universities,” which appeared in *BYU Today*, November 1982, 3–6. There she compared the intellectual rigor and “Creeping Cynicism” of Harvard with the “safety” and intellectual indolence of BYU, where she was attending while taking her year off to get counseling for anorexia. For example, she described a comparative literature class in which overwhelmed students complained about being given a syllabus with a whole page of readings. Comparing it to Harvard, Martha lamented, “I can check out some supplementary stuff to make this feel like a class” (*ibid.*, 5). Her credibility was tweaked by a letter to the editor from George S. Tate, then chair of the Department of

Martha begins and ends *Expecting Adam* by assuring readers that the events related therein are factual. "I didn't fictionalize anything. It's all true," claims Martha.<sup>12</sup> The "author's note" at the end of the book reassures readers again that it is not a work of fiction, that she is telling the truth, that the material has come straight from her journals, that she has had others read the book to verify that the facts are straight, and that she has been trained by Harvard as a sociologist to accurately tell "just the facts."<sup>13</sup> Granted, the story told in that book is extraordinary, but few memoirs go so far to assure us of their veracity. One had to wonder whether it was the reader or Martha herself she was trying to convince. Indeed, her ex-husband later confessed that he felt troubled by that book. "She wrote it as fiction first," John writes. "It was rejected over and over again. So her editor suggested writing it as non-fiction. She changed very little in it as she transformed it to 'non-fiction.' Many parts were clearly fiction (but now with our actual names attached to them)." John continues, "So it makes me wonder about [*Leaving the Saints*] as well."<sup>14</sup>

It was 1991 when Martha first told her family that she believed she was a victim of abuse. When confronted with this charge, Martha's siblings and her mother did not dismiss it out of hand, but assessed its strengths and weaknesses and, especially as the story's details grew, came to doubt its veracity. Since that time, they have been wondering, "where did *that* come from?" After all, the Nibley's old brick home just south of BYU campus was small, packed tightly with eight children and two parents. During the years in question, Martha shared a room with two of her sisters, neither of whom had any memories of abuse. Bedroom doors were left open, the parents' bedroom was right next to the girls' room, and Phyllis was an incredibly light sleeper who

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Humanities and Comparative Literature, in the March 1983 issue of *BYU Today*. Tate confessed that Martha's essay was "delightful, reflective, and remarkably mature," but objected to Martha's "distortion of fact" since the syllabus was, in fact, four pages long, and "the teacher of the course received his training and taught at Harvard before coming to BYU, and if anything characterizes his teaching, it is a conscious effort to transplant the best of the Harvard tradition to BYU" (ibid., 49).

12. Beck, *Expecting Adam*, 7.

13. Beck, *Expecting Adam*, 327.

14. John Beck, e-mail to Petersen, 8 January 2005.

would wake at the first hint of a child in distress. Teenage children were coming and going at all hours of the day and night. There was little privacy and no chance for secrecy. No one has any memory of any inappropriate contact between Hugh and Martha. The children all know their mother was not the kind of dominated housewife to allow one of her children to be hurt while she was present. They know that differing intellectual and personal views were not only allowed in their home, but encouraged. And some of them have had regrets and anger about the way their father—obsessed with his research and writing, and constantly in demand to lecture, to write, and to travel—neglected them in their youth. Martha's siblings range from agnostics to believers. And each of them is extremely forthright about family problems. Yet each of them, on his or her own terms, came to doubt Martha's story.<sup>15</sup>

After reading *Leaving the Saints*, many in Martha's audience will likely be asking "where did *that* come from?"—the same question her family has been asking. One has to doubt the reliability of Martha's memory when confronting the internal inconsistencies in this book. Some events recounted in this memoir seem implausible but cannot be verified one way or the other. For example, Martha claims that when she was working on her dissertation, she went to the BYU library and discovered that someone had censored all the articles about Mormon dissident Sonia Johnson from the newspapers (p. 83). I cannot prove this did not happen, but it seems highly unlikely. Just by searching the library's online catalog, one gets over forty hits for information on Sonia Johnson, and Johnson's book *From Housewife to Heretic*<sup>16</sup> is located both in special collections and in the general stacks where any undergraduate can check it out. While I have not checked the micro-

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15. Furthermore, it was with the full knowledge and support of Hugh, Phyllis, and other family members that I included Martha's accusations in my *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, 400 and 400–401 n. 13. A family that feels it has something to hide does not make such revelations public. In a recent review of my biography, D. Michael Quinn stated that "including this discussion in an 'authorized biography' is an ultimate example of the dedication to honest history by Hugh Nibley, his wife, and their children," in review of *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, by Boyd Jay Petersen, *Journal of Mormon History* 30/2 (2004): 261.

16. Sonia Johnson, *From Housewife to Heretic* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981).



fiche that Martha refers to (and cannot, since she does not give specific dates and articles she could not find), I have consulted with several librarians who have been at the Harold B. Lee Library for many years, and they all tell me that no effort has ever been made to censor information from newspaper articles.

Some less important details also give one pause, such as the occasion when Martha's Utah Valley hairstylist "checked [her] left hand for a wedding ring, then reported [her] request [to have her hair cut "boy-short"] to the owner of the salon, who asked [her] to call [her] husband to ascertain that [she] had his permission to change [her] hairstyle" (p. 193). I have no idea whether this detail is true or not, but my wife has changed her hairstyle many times; most recently she got it cut extremely short, and I have never had a stylist seek my permission, nor has my wife reported such a strange request being made. Or what about when Martha says the Primary president of their LDS ward tried to lure their daughter, Katie, into getting baptized after John had left the church by bribing her with cookies and telling her about a "baptism party" at the church building (p. 274). Again, this cannot be verified, but it just does not sound right. I served as a ward mission leader for a couple of years and know that you cannot baptize a minor without his or her parents' consent.

More important, Martha describes Hugh's "episode of amnesia" and states that she "talked to the neurosurgeon who examined [her] father during the spate of forgetfulness," who told her that "there was no stroke, no brain lesion, no physiological explanation at all" and "concluded that the amnesia was psychogenic, a mental mist that rose from some psychological or emotional conflict too intense for [her] father to bear" (p. 21). I have no idea with whom Martha spoke, and unfortunately both doctors who attended Hugh at that time are now dead, but several things ring untrue about the way she describes this event. First of all, Martha distorts the events surrounding this episode by stating that Hugh was "supposed to deliver an address on certain issues related to Mormonism and Egyptology" (p. 21). However, the event in question was actually a BYU forum that took place on 21 May 1974, in which Hugh was interviewed by Louis Midgley. Hugh

was extremely nervous about this interview. It was held in the BYU Marriott Center (BYU's basketball arena) and was going to be completely spontaneous, with no note cards, no prewritten text, and no prearranged questions. Midgley's goal was to capture the spontaneity of Hugh's wit. Hugh is good with "off the cuff" comments, but when appearing before a crowd he always had note cards or a prepared text to read from. All these factors had Hugh feeling extremely anxious about the event. During the interview, all sorts of topics were discussed, including the temple, education, the environment, and politics. Hugh did briefly refer to Egyptian texts, but it was not the focus of his remarks.<sup>17</sup>

I have shared Martha's description of this event with a medical school faculty member at Indiana University who thought that the way Martha describes these events is overstatement. First, it was highly unlikely that a neurosurgeon would be consulted unless there were "some sort of surgical lesion," and family members confirm that the two doctors who saw Hugh at this time were internists, not neurosurgeons. Second, Martha is correct that the most likely prognosis for Hugh's symptoms was not a stroke since there were no other symptoms besides the amnesia, but this "amnesia" is usually brought on by stress, not some "mental mist" arising from emotional or psychological conflict. The stress of the forum was clearly sufficient to induce this condition. I also find it highly suspect that a neurosurgeon would deem it appropriate to discuss the cause of this amnesia with Martha, either at the time (she would have been only eleven) or years after the event. I tried to get information from doctors about Hugh for my "authorized" biography, and all of them told me that it would breach medical ethics to speak with me without a signed authorization from their patient. Finally, I doubt any neurosurgeon would be willing, or feel competent, to diagnose a psychological explanation as detailed and complex as Martha describes.<sup>18</sup>

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17. BYU Forum interview of Hugh Nibley by Louis Midgley, 21 May 1974. A transcript of the event has been available through FARMS as "Nibley the Scholar."

18. Dr. Russell D. Meldrum, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 20 January 2005; 21 January 2005. This doctor described a similar episode he encountered in his professional duties. The daughter of one of his patients was diagnosed with ovarian can-

Some events described in *Leaving the Saints* are disputed outright by Martha's siblings, her ex-husband, and unrelated witnesses who either were present when the events took place or were confidants of Martha's at the time. For example, Martha maintains that after she began to recover these memories of abuse, one of her "chief criteria for choosing" her first therapist, whom she names Mona, was to find someone who "didn't know [her] father from Bonzo the Chimp" (p. 162). Martha claims that she "nearly choked on [her] fibrillating heart and was hugely relieved when [Mona] actually accepted [her] memories without so much as a twitch" (p. 210). This is disingenuous. In conversations Martha had with her sisters at the time, Martha told them that she had read many self-help books, performed self-hypnosis to "discover" the hidden memories of incest, and then sought out a therapist who "specialized" in recovered memories of sexual abuse. She also tried to persuade her sisters and husband to use the same techniques to discover hidden trauma. "Martha always was hypnotizing herself and trying to hypnotize me," states John. "She tried getting me to go under on multiple occasions. I guess I was a tough subject."<sup>19</sup> The therapist that Martha calls Mona in her book (who met with Martha's sisters and a brother in a therapy session she describes in her "Gang Bang" chapter) was Lynne Finney, who had in 1990 already published her book *Reach for the Rainbow*, which claims to help survivors "recover memories" of abuse and provides "advanced healing for survivors of sexual abuse."<sup>20</sup> Clearly Martha knew she was going to someone who would be disposed to accept her stories. To say that she was shocked that Mona believed her and that her only thought was to find someone who did not know her father is not telling the whole truth.<sup>21</sup>

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cer, and the stress of this situation proved too much for the mother, so she "forgot" that she had a daughter. The situation at hand can easily bring on the symptoms of amnesia.

19. John Beck, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 17 January 2005.

20. Lynne D. Finney, *Reach for the Rainbow: Advanced Healing for Survivors of Sexual Abuse* (Park City, UT: Changes, 1990).

21. Following the "memory wars" of the 1990s, Finney is now a "retired psychotherapist" who bills herself as an "author, educator, life coach, motivational speaker, [and] lawyer." See her Web page at [lynnefinney.com/about.htm](http://lynnefinney.com/about.htm) (accessed 2 November 2005).

Two of the central points of the book are also disputed by Martha's now ex-husband. Martha describes in quite explicit detail scars that she maintains confirm her having been abused. However, John states that at the time of her premarital exam performed at Harvard, "Martha never claimed the doctor saw scars. He just asked what kind of contraception she'd been using up to that point. When she said she wasn't having sex, he gave her a disbelieving look." This could be simply because he could not believe that she was not sexually active since she was of college age and engaged to be married. And in a later exam, a Provo doctor not only did *not* notice scars, but he warned Martha to start "loosening up" so that sexual intercourse would not be uncomfortable. If the Harvard doctor saw anything to indicate previous sexual experience, John suggests it may have been caused by a neighbor boy who molested her when she was a young girl. This incident in itself could very well be the source of the memories that Martha has come to embellish with strange details and to associate with her father. While several of her sisters knew about the molestation from the time it happened, John never learned about it until the early 1990s, when Martha began having memories of abuse. "After she told me about the neighbor incident, she never doubted that memory," states John. "But she often expressed doubt about her memories of her father abusing her." He stresses Martha's reluctance to believe herself. "She literally said to me on many occasions: 'I'm such a bad person to have made up those terrible memories about my father.'" John characterizes the fact that she does not mention this incident of sexual molestation by the neighbor in the book as "a *huge* 'oversight.'"<sup>22</sup>

Another detail that John disputes is Martha's claim that she and John left the church because of their growing dissatisfaction with the way the church was silencing dissidents. Martha's presentations at the BYU Women's Conferences in 1992 and 1993, which are published in the official proceedings, certainly do not reveal any great disenchantment with the church or its leaders. In her 1993 presentation, Martha argues that Mormon women need to learn to be stronger, speak the

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22. John Beck, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 8 January 2005; 18 January 2005; and 8 February 2005.

whole truth, and listen to the Spirit of Christ. There is no sense of paranoia in the talk, no sense of Martha being disillusioned with the church or its teachings, and no hint of her being abused. Parts of the talk, where she tells the audience “anything I say might be absolutely wrong,” and where she talks about a study by Solomon Asch, sound like material mentioned in *Leaving the Saints*, but all are given a very Mormon context in the speech.<sup>23</sup>

There was, however, another reason for Martha and John’s leaving the church: their sexual orientation. Until recently, Martha has only hinted about this detail, and she does not reveal it in the book, but has outed herself on the book’s Web site. John states that, “One of the reasons we both left the Church is because we are gay.” He continues, “Martha’s leaving the Church was *very* tied up with the affair (mostly emotional affair, but some physicality involved) that she was having at that time.” John stresses that both Martha’s affair and her sexual abuse by the neighbor boy are “huge variables,” and “if she were doing a regression analysis as a sociologist, she’d have to include them in the equation to explain the correlations.”<sup>24</sup>

There are too many other events that are disputed by family and friends to cover here. But Martha’s characterizations of her mother Phyllis as “the reigning terror of [her] childhood” (p. 44), of Martha

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23. “Adult Spiritual Development: A Conversation with Francine R. Bennion and Martha N. Beck,” in *Women and Christ: Living the Abundant Life*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson, Susette Fletcher Green, and Marie Cornwall (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 145–66; Martha N. Beck, “Invincible Summer: Finding Grace Within,” in *Women in the Covenant of Grace*, ed. Dawn Hall Anderson and Susette Fletcher Green (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 79–94, especially 87 and 93.

24. John Beck, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 8 January 2005; 8 February 2005. Although Martha has not been eager to share this information, I want to be clear that I am not “outing” her. She hinted at this detail on the dust jacket to *Expecting Adam*, which states: “She lives in Phoenix with her husband, three children, and best friend, Karen.” In an article published for Salon.com, she wrote about buying a house with both John and Karen and described Karen as being “her other mother,” someone who is naturally able to nurture both Martha and Martha’s children ([www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1999/05/04/karen/index.html](http://www.salon.com/mwt/feature/1999/05/04/karen/index.html), accessed 2 November 2005). Even though Martha never discusses this in *Leaving the Saints*, the Web site accompanying the book states that Martha “lives in Phoenix, Arizona, with her three teenagers; her partner of ten years, Karen Gerdes, a professor of social work, and their two dogs” at [leavingthesaints.com/author.html](http://leavingthesaints.com/author.html) (accessed 2 November 2005).

being one of the “favorite targets” of Hugh’s “violent temper” (p. 125), of Hugh having war “flashbacks” (p. 89), of Phyllis corroborating the abuse and then denying it (pp. 130–31), of church leaders frequenting the Nibley home (p. 31), of Hugh never speaking of his near-death experience (pp. 85–86), of Phyllis never babysitting Martha’s children (p. 99), of there being a family motto of not touching any child over four (p. 119), of the Becks’ phones being tapped (p. 233), of Phyllis not liking the word *mom* (p. 139), of Hugh being afraid of death (pp. 88–89), of the church “controlling” and “owning” Hugh (p. 169), of Hugh being concerned with money (p. 148), as well as other details, are contested by siblings, colleagues, friends, parents, and her ex-husband.

Other events described in the book are disputed by the facts. For example, in chapter 24 of *Leaving the Saints*, Martha asserts that she met a man who “‘had a job for [her] dad’s publisher’” as “‘one of the flunkies who checked his footnotes’” (p. 165). This “Man in Tweed” told Martha that her father “‘makes [his footnotes] all up,’” that “‘conservatively, 90 percent of them’” are not real. “‘I helped cover it up,’” he says (p. 166). She asserts that this man gave her a list of other note checkers and that when she “‘contacted them [she] heard unanimous confirmation that a great many of the footnotes in his works were splendidly fictional’” (p. 169). I have contacted many of the note checkers and editors of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (I cannot contact “Tweedy” since I have no idea who he is, if he exists at all), and they all confirm that, while Hugh has been sloppy—at times mistranslating a text or overstating his case—he does not make up his sources.<sup>25</sup>

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25. Todd Compton, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 8 January 2005; Glen Cooper, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 25 December 2004; John Gee, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 27 December 2004; William Hamblin, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 24 December 2004; Stephen Ricks, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 9 January 2005.

Likely the most damning review of Hugh’s scholarly work has been Kent P. Jackson’s review of *Old Testament and Related Studies*, vol. 1 of the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley, which appeared in *BYU Studies* 28/4 (1988): 114–19. In that review, Jackson critiques Nibley’s “tendency to gather sources from a variety of cultures all over the ancient world, lump them all together, and then pick and choose the bits and pieces he wants” and to read into these sources things that “simply don’t seem to be there” (*ibid.*, 115). He

Martha also reports that BYU professors were told not to publish in “alternate voices” journals—which she describes as anything from “the *Christian Science Monitor* to *Hustler*” (p. 79). In fact, BYU professors are encouraged and their tenure status requires them to publish in peer-reviewed academic journals. The only places where there is any concern for BYU professors is when they publish in *Sunstone* or *Dialogue*, journals that church leaders apparently feel may undermine the mission of the church. However, BYU professors still *do* publish in

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says Hugh takes phrases out of context, does not provide sufficient documentation for some sources, provides documentation “overkill” on others, and does not give sufficient evidence for some of his assertions. Additionally, Jackson took Nibley to task for his sarcasm and name-calling, “which have no place in serious scholarship” (ibid., 116). But in all of this, Jackson never hints that Nibley simply “made up” his sources. For a further discussion of this criticism, see the review of Beck’s book by Kent P. Jackson, “Leaving the Facts and the Faith,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 119–20; and Louis Midgley, “The First Steps,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): lii–liii n. 96.

John Gee recently completed a statistical analysis of one of Hugh’s articles chosen at random to establish the accuracy of the footnotes. In looking at Hugh’s essay “Victoriosa Loquacitas: The Rise of Rhetoric and the Decline of Everything Else” as it appeared in its original form in *Western Speech* 20/2 (1956): 57–82 (reprinted in *The Ancient State* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991], 243–86), Gee discovered that “87% of the footnotes were completely correct, 8% of the footnotes contained typographical errors, 5% were wrong in some other way (e.g., frequently right author, right page, wrong title). In no case could I determine that any of the errors in the footnotes were intentional or that any of the footnotes were fabrications” (John Gee, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 13 January 2005).

In a later study, Gee analyzed the footnotes in one of Hugh’s Egyptian works, *Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*. Selecting a chapter from the book at random (chapter 3, the second-longest chapter in the book), Gee found that “94% of the citations were correct, 4% were typographical errors, and 2% were wrong.” It was Gee’s determination that “the results seem to show that Nibley was more accurate when dealing with a Mormon topic, that his Egyptian work was more accurate than his classics work, and that his work on *Message* was better than normal, not worse.” Further, Gee stated that “I have never seen any case where Hugh Nibley ever fabricated or made up a source. After looking up thousands of citations, I have seen him make just about every mistake I think one could make, but I have never seen him make up anything” (John Gee, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 14 March 2005).

Todd Compton wrote to me (e-mail, 8 January 2005): “I was very disillusioned with Nibley’s scholarship when I checked his footnotes carefully. However, I believe he was misinterpreting, not making things up. Furthermore, I believe that saying that 90% of his footnotes were wrong is a wild overstatement, based on my experience editing *Mormonism and Early Christianity*.” As William Hamblin has pointed out, “sloppiness is not dishonesty; it is not good, but it is not fraud” (William Hamblin, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 12 January 2005).

these journals. I have published in both and continue to teach part-time at BYU, and the cover story for the October 2004 issue of *Sunstone* was written by Duane E. Jeffery of the BYU Department of Biology.<sup>26</sup>

Martha also writes that BYU would “have a hard time legally firing [her] from [her] job. [She] was a known rebel, but still a member of the BYU faculty” (p. 259). This is also false. Martha was part-time faculty at BYU. As a part-time faculty member of BYU’s honors program, I know that we are hired on a semester-to-semester basis at the will of the department and university. If there are no sections to teach, I get no contract. If I say or do something in the classroom that is inappropriate, they can choose not to offer me another contract. There are no promises, no long-term contracts, no benefits, and no tenure track for part-time faculty. BYU can choose not to offer a contract to any part-time faculty member at any time, and it is perfectly legal, as it is at any other school, public or private.

Martha claims that after the Joseph Smith Papyri were acquired by the church on 27 November 1967, “the papyri were kept under lock and key, shown only to those who could be absolutely trusted to support Joseph Smith” (p. 158). This grossly distorts the truth. While few people got to see the papyri themselves (it is not uncommon for libraries not to show ancient documents to just anyone since they are usually extremely fragile), the church did publish, “with commendable promptness,” as non-Mormon Egyptologist Klaus Baer stated, sepia-tinted photographs of the papyri in the church magazine, the *Improvement Era*, in February 1968, less than three months after the church acquired them. Baer, writing to Jerald and Sandra Tanner, called the reproductions “quite good ones” and stated that the timely publication was especially impressive “when you consider that such an important Egyptological discovery as the Abusir papyri was jealously guarded by assorted public and private owners for 75 years during which they neither studied them nor let anyone else work with them.”<sup>27</sup>

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26. Duane E. Jeffery, “Noah’s Flood: Modern Scholarship and Mormon Traditions,” *Sunstone*, October 2004, 27–45.

27. Klaus Baer, correspondence to Jerald and Sandra Tanner, 13 August 1968, copy in my possession.



Martha also maintains that her father “had never studied Egyptian” and that it was only after the discovery of the papyri that he was “hustled off to study Egyptian with experts at the University of Chicago” (p. 158). It appears she got these false ideas from Charles Larson’s book, *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*.<sup>28</sup> Both of these details are wrong and unfair. It is impossible to pin down exactly when Hugh first began studying Egyptian; he maintained he first started dabbling in the language in 1927 at the age of seventeen. It is clear, however, that Hugh was working with Egyptian texts in his PhD dissertation in 1938 and in articles he published in 1945, 1948, 1949, and 1956.<sup>29</sup> He spent a sabbatical during the 1959/60 academic year teaching at Berkeley and studying Egyptian with Klaus Baer. And his 1966/67 sabbatical at the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago was actually completed before the papyri had been discovered.<sup>30</sup>

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28. Larson, *By His Own Hand Upon Papyrus*, 54, states falsely that Hugh studied Egyptian only after he learned about the papyri. While Martha does not name the sources she used for her research, Martha recommends Larson’s book on the book’s accompanying Web page at [leavingthesaints.com/bboard.html](http://leavingthesaints.com/bboard.html) (accessed 2 November 2005).

29. See Hugh Nibley, “The Roman Games as a Survival of an Archaic Year-Cult” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1939); “Sparsiones,” *Classical Journal* 40/9 (1945): 515–43 (reprinted in *Ancient State*, 148–94); “The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East,” *Improvement Era*, April 1948, 202–4; 249–51 (essentially reprinted as “Men of the East,” in *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988], 25–42); “The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State,” *Western Political Quarterly* 2/13 (1949): 328–44 (reprinted in *Ancient State*, 1–32); and “Egypt Revisited,” which ran in the *Improvement Era* from March through June 1956 (reprinted in *Lehi in the Desert*, 308–49). Thanks to John Gee for his research on Hugh’s use of Egyptian, which he published in his review of Larson’s book, “A Tragedy of Errors,” *FARMS Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 93–119.

30. While it is unclear exactly when Hugh first learned for certain of the papyri’s existence, the first time he discussed rumors of the papyri’s existence is when he wrote to Klaus Baer that “recent evidence has been claimed that [the Joseph Smith Papyri] escaped the [Chicago] fire and are still kicking around somewhere” (10 August 1962); by March 1963, Hugh wrote Baer, “Somebody here has just located a pile of unpublished and unknown Egyptian manuscripts that were in the possession of Joseph Smith. I haven’t seen them yet, but there may be something significant” (29 March 1963). Baer was, at the same time, apparently aware of the papyri’s existence. Baer later stated that he saw photographs of the papyri as early as 1963 (Klaus Baer, correspondence to Jerald Tanner, 13 August 1968). So it is very likely that by the time his 1966/67 sabbatical rolled around, Hugh was aware that the papyri existed and that the church might acquire them.

The most amusing disputable “fact” Martha provides is her claim that men at BYU are required to wear socks “on the premise that the hair on human ankles can be thought of as an extension of pubic hair” (pp. 77–78). While socks were part of the BYU dress and grooming standards between 1982 and 1992 (they are no longer mentioned), the only official justification for the rule was to “reflect the language” of the church’s *For the Strength of Youth* pamphlet. The pubic-hair justification is nothing more—at most—than BYU folklore that Martha presents as fact.<sup>31</sup>

Martha states that her “family’s code” prevents her siblings from believing her, that she is “the traitor to our family’s code of conduct, the enemy of everything we once stood for together. [Their] father was [their] claim to fame, [their] saving glory. Turning against him in such a shocking way was like using a burning flag to set fire to our supreme commander” (p. 217). I find this to be a grossly unfair accusation. I came from a family that *did* keep secrets—nothing major, but my parents cared deeply that the neighbors not know that they did not live by “cookie-cutter Mormon” codes. I was absolutely shocked when I married into the Nibley family because if there is anything bad to be said about the family, it is the Nibley family that will say it. They will tell you exactly which members are disenchanted with or have left the church; they will tell you that they grew up in a messy house where Hugh’s idea of yard work consisted of mowing carefully around the dandelions; they will tell you that their father would add yeast to the apple cider to make it “virtuous”; and they will wax eloquent about their own neuroses and personal hang-ups. They will tell you very

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However, Baer later wrote that he doubted “very much that [Hugh’s] stay in Chicago had anything to do with purchasing the papyri” (Klaus Baer, correspondence to Wesley P. Walters, 29 August 1967, my private collection). Regardless, to suggest that Hugh’s interest in and study of Egyptian began after the papyri were acquired is completely incorrect. See my treatment of the events surrounding the discovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri in *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, 314–24.

31. See Kallee Nielsen, “Modesty a Given for Most Students,” *BYU Newsnet*, 15 March 2002, [newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/37652](http://newsnet.byu.edu/story.cfm/37652) (accessed 28 November 2005). Just to be certain, I spoke with Gordon Daines, the university archivist at BYU, about this allegation. He went through all the relevant official papers from the period on the Honor Code and found nothing about pubic hair and socks.

openly about every dysfunction of their family—and their efforts to overcome them. The fact that none of Martha's siblings support her claims of incest is the result, not of some family code, but of her siblings finding her claims simply unbelievable.

Martha's "desperate thirst for data in any area related to [her] father" (p. 3) is also disingenuous since she quite obviously never read any of her father's correspondence, never interviewed any of his colleagues and friends, never watched the documentary made by her brother, and read only one page—the one referring to her allegations, which she also misrepresents—of my biography of her father. In addition to distorting details of Hugh's Egyptian studies and episode of amnesia, she gets most of the details of Hugh's life wrong, including his war stories, near-death experience, and "five o'clocks" (which were prescient moments, not flashbacks). And Martha's lack of familiarity with Hugh's writings and thought is simply astounding (although one is tempted to believe she used her father's satirical "How to Write an Anti-Mormon Book [A Handbook for Beginners]" as a writing manual).<sup>32</sup> Martha writes about a man she knows only through her own, very muddled, memories. And, given her unreliability on so many fronts, I would suggest that her accusations are of things that only happened in her very troubled mind.

## Conclusions

Martha describes herself in several places as one committed to solid scholarship and hence persuaded only by evidence: "Thus began my love affair with evidence" (p. 5); "I followed the Baconian model of believing nothing until it was proven true" (p. 9); "I became almost maniacally committed to . . . precise wording and conditional assertion" (p. 209); "[My] strict sociological education served me well in investigating the return of my repressed memories" (p. 209). Throughout this book, as with her other books, it is obvious that she

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32. Found in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 474–580. For such a comparison, see the review of Beck's book by Gregory Taggart, "How Martha Wrote an Anti-Mormon Book (Using Her Father's Handbook as Her Guide?)," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 123–70.

distorts the record as much as or more than she reports it, jumps to conclusions more than provides evidence leading to conclusions, and blurs fact and fantasy. But to stick to the facts requires more than simply assuring readers that you do. You actually have to stick to them—something, it seems, that Martha seldom does.

Considering the nature of her allegations, it seems strange that Martha is not more careful in recounting her story. As readers confront the hyperbolic language, the inaccurate characterizations of Latter-day Saints, the factual errors, and the distortions in this book, I believe they will be forced to conclude that Martha Beck is not a reliable narrator. She is, however, a fabulous storyteller. Perhaps we can learn something from Fawn Brodie, who once wrote that, “A man’s memory is bound to be a distortion of his past in accordance with his present interests, and the most faithful autobiography is likely to mirror less what a man was than what he has become.”<sup>33</sup> Martha has a very different life now than she did when she and her now ex-husband collaborated on *Breaking the Cycle of Compulsive Behavior*. To retell her past in such a distorted way may be nothing more than a heart-breaking attempt to justify her leaving the Saints.

### **As Things Stand at the Moment: Responding to Martha Beck’s *Leaving the Saints***

I find myself in a strange predicament today. I had not intended to discuss Martha Beck’s book *Leaving the Saints: How I Lost the Mormons and Found My Faith*. FAIR did not ask me to speak about it, and, personally, I would rather talk about something—*anything*—else. I knew that some might want to hear what I have to say on the topic, that others might prefer not to hear what I have to say. I also believe that, even though my position is obviously biased, I have access to information that others do not have that documents the factual distortions in Martha’s book. I understand this apologetic need to respond to Martha’s allegations and feel it keenly. But as a family member, I

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33. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 275.

also share with my wife, her mother, and her brothers and sisters frustration and resentment that all but one of the newspapers ran obituaries about Hugh Nibley in which his significant life and legacy were overshadowed by the hideous lies from Martha's book. Furthermore, the timing of this whole ordeal has made it horribly painful to us all. *The New York Times* brought Martha's allegations to national attention on 24 February 2005, the very day Hugh Nibley passed away.<sup>34</sup> So please understand that I harbor great resentment about both the book and the timing of its release.

Furthermore, I feel like most of what I have to say I have already said in my response to her book. So I wanted to move on, to focus on Hugh's life and legacy, and to get beyond the shadow cast upon it by his treacherous daughter. However, on 16 July, the *Deseret News* published an article about the *Sunstone* Symposium and FAIR's conference, which said there would be sessions at *Sunstone* discussing Martha's book and that I would be speaking about Martha's accusations here at FAIR's conference.<sup>35</sup> The article went on to note that *Sunstone's* editor, Dan Wotherspoon, had "considered inviting Beck to the conference but decided against it, opting rather for a variety of panelists to offer their assessments from praise to criticism." It is true that Wotherspoon decided against inviting Martha. His reasoning was that she did not meet the criteria of the *Sunstone* mission statement, which calls for a "responsible interchange of ideas that is respectful of all people and what they hold sacred."<sup>36</sup> While *Sunstone* has had critical voices at its symposium, Wotherspoon felt that Martha's book is not just critical of Mormon culture, but that the book mocks that culture and its temple rituals in a mean-spirited way.

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34. Edward Wyatt, "A Mormon Daughter's Book Stirs a Storm," *New York Times*, 24 February 2005, E1. The following day, the same reporter wrote the obituary for the *Times*. Edward Wyatt, "Hugh Nibley, Outspoken Mormon Scholar, Dies at 94," *New York Times*, 25 February 2005, A21. Although the obituary was very respectful, Martha's claims were front and center.

35. Carrie A. Moore, "Smith is Focus of 2 Annual Gatherings: Sunstone and FAIR Conferences Plan Variety of Topics," *Deseret News*, 16 July 2005, E1.

36. Found at [www.sunstoneonline.com/sunstone/sun-history.asp](http://www.sunstoneonline.com/sunstone/sun-history.asp) (accessed 20 November 2005).

As to my speaking about Martha here, I do not have a clue where the reporter got that idea since the official conference program said I would be speaking about Hugh Nibley. What makes this all so difficult is that immediately following the publication of the *Deseret News* article, both FAIR and *Sunstone* received threatening letters from an attorney representing Martha Beck and her partner Karen Gerdes, admonishing them that my response to Martha's book should not be discussed. It is not the first threatening letter FAIR and *Sunstone* have received from this attorney, nor is it the only threatening letter he has sent out in an effort to silence critics. When my response first appeared on *Sunstone's* Web site, Beck and Gerdes threatened *Sunstone*. Martha's ex-husband, John Beck, whom I quote in my response, received a similar letter. To avoid any legal entanglements, I personally asked *Sunstone* to remove my response from their Web site, and I asked FAIR if they would be interested in it. Not long after my response went up on FAIR's Web site, FAIR received a letter similar to the one *Sunstone* had received. John Beck and FAIR have both, admirably, stood their ground. Evidently, there is material in my response that deeply bothers both Martha Beck and Karen Gerdes. But I want to assure you that there is nothing in that response that I know to be untrue. I believe it is, in the end, the truth they do not like.

I find it deeply ironic that in her book Martha claims that Latter-day Saints silence dissenters since Martha keeps trying to silence those critical of her book. I find it equally curious that it is somehow all right to trash the reputations of Hugh Nibley, the Nibley family, and the Church of Jesus Christ with lies and unsubstantiated allegations, but it is not all right to take issue with those lies by revealing the truth. Incidentally, at the July 2005 *Sunstone* Symposium, Martha sent her cousin Sylvia (in Martha's book, she is the cousin in the closet—it is nice to know she has finally come out of the closet). Sylvia passed out a press release stating that Martha was not invited to attend either of these conferences because both *Sunstone* and FAIR are “‘faith affirming’ for Mormons and apologist [*sic*] in nature.”<sup>37</sup> I think this may

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37. “Best-Selling Author Responds to Conferences’ Panel Discussions and Sessions Based on Her Controversial Book, *Leaving the Saints*,” 27 July 2005. Distributed at

come as a surprise to some, but I think it illustrates just how out-of-touch Martha is. Furthermore, I am fairly confident that Martha could have walked through those doors at *Sunstone* just as easily as her cousin did. But perhaps she was afraid of those *Sunstone* Danites.

I also want to mention that Martha's legal threats have not been reserved only for those who respond to her in writing. We, as the Nibley family, also received a threatening letter from Martha's attorney warning us not to contact Martha or Karen directly, but only through their lawyer. I want everyone to know that it is not the Nibley family that has cut off Martha, but Martha who has cut off her family. Despite this controversy, I do not want to spend my time here rehashing the significant and numerous inconsistencies in Martha's book. But since Martha has thrown down the gauntlet, I do not want it to appear that I am caving in to her demands. So let me take a few minutes to analyze how this whole story seems to have played out to this point and to clear up a few misconceptions that some readers of Martha's book have had. Before I do, however, let me state that my views are mine alone. They do not represent the Nibley family nor do they represent FAIR. I alone am responsible for what I have to say. Second, I do not want this to be part of my other talk. That will be a completely separate matter.<sup>38</sup>

There was a silver lining to the cloud created by *Leaving the Saints*. We were thrice blessed: First, Martha waited ten years after she recovered these memories before publishing her exposé. To get a feel for how things might have played out if she had written this book in the early or mid-1990s, one should read Massimo Introvigne's talk from the 1994 conference of the Mormon History Association, in which he documents the paranoia, fear, and wounds these kinds of recovered memories created.<sup>39</sup> Let me share with you just one account from a

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Sunstone panel #162 "How Reliable Are Our Memories? Memory Creation and Retrieval in Relation to Martha Beck's *Leaving the Saints*," 28 July 2005.

38. "What I Learned about Life, the Church, and the Cosmos from Hugh Nibley" at [www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2005PetB.html](http://www.fairlds.org/pubs/conf/2005PetB.html) (accessed 16 December 2005).

39. Massimo Introvigne, "A Rumor of Devils: Allegations of Satanic Child Abuse and Mormonism, 1985–1994"; see [www.cesnur.org/2001/archive/mi\\_mormons.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/2001/archive/mi_mormons.htm) (accessed 2 November 2005).

woman who experienced the type of therapy that was rampant during those days:

I saw a therapist in 1991 who was convinced that I had been molested as a child and who insisted I do work to “re-cover” memories of the abuse. I told her I knew very well that I’d never been molested because of my gynecological history, but she insisted there was some horrible trauma that I was repressing and that it had already happened by the time I was five. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be suffering from such profound depression as an adult (as if adolescence and puberty couldn’t be reason to become depressed). So I dutifully sent myself into a trance, and, as she directed, walked down the street of the house where my five-year-old self lived. My young self stood on the front porch wearing red shorts and a red gingham shirt appliquéd with a sailboat. The big self greeted the little self, hugged her, and said, “I love you. I care about you. How are you? If something’s wrong, you can tell me.” The five-year-old self looked at her skeptically and said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I’m very happy. I think you should come back later.”

I thought that was really funny but the therapist got really mad and told me I’d done it wrong, at which point I said, “You’re a crackpot and this is not helping me at all and I’m not coming back,” which also made her mad. But thinking about it now I feel rather lucky, when I consider what might have happened had I had a weaker mind or a reason to want the hypnosis to produce something.<sup>40</sup>

This is the “therapeutic” social context for Martha’s recovered memories. As silly as this sounds, in the early to mid-1990s, there were many people “discovering” memories of abuse that never happened and many people who experienced the real repercussions for those accusations. The accused suffered alienation of their children’s affection, embarrassment and shame when these false allegations

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40. Holly Welker, e-mail correspondence to Boyd Petersen, 16 July 2005.



were made public, family disintegration, and, for some, time in jail for crimes they never committed. Had Martha made these claims public ten years earlier, it would have been a very different scenario than the one that has played out in 2005 when a decade of scientific evidence has shown these induced “memories” to be fictions created through hypnosis.

The second blessing was that Martha wrote a very bad book. Please do not get me wrong—Martha is a fine writer. She is witty, clever, and sassy. She knows how to turn a phrase, how to make a reader laugh and cry. In short, she can tell a tale. But here we had a narrative presented as history that was so full of internal and external inconsistencies that readers had a hard time believing her. This is quite a stroke of luck, because, as Tzvetan Todorov has argued, readers implicitly trust a first-person narrative.<sup>41</sup> But *Leaving the Saints* had Mormons, former Mormons, non-Mormons, and even anti-Mormons shaking their heads in bewilderment. The sheer number of problems with this book caused me to wonder if maybe somewhere in Martha’s psyche she actually wanted to get caught, for the truth to be revealed. I just do not know why she felt that she could get away with this. Without the inconsistencies, the hyperbole, and the distortion, her story, even though false, could have been compelling. But most readers have come away from this book expressing the feeling that “if I can’t trust her in the small details, how can I trust her in the big ones?”

Finally, we were blessed that the negative response to this book came initially from the very place where it might have gained acceptance. Whether this was because of the numerous inconsistencies in Martha’s book or because of the status Hugh Nibley holds within the Mormon community—that he is revered for his social criticism as well as his apologetics—it was a significant departure from the past for the criticism to originate first from Signature Books, *Sunstone*, and Affirmation. The first negative response came from the marketing

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41. Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1973), 84: “The first-person narrator most readily permits the reader to identify with the character, since as we know the pronoun ‘I’ belongs to everyone.”

director of Signature Books, Tom Kimball, who called the book “problematic” and “most likely heavily laced with fiction.”<sup>42</sup> *Sunstone’s* reviewer, Tania Lyon, gave the book a fair trial; at the end of the first reading, she admitted she was “persuaded.” But by applying the analytical tools of her trade, pitting her Princeton sociology PhD against Martha’s Harvard sociology PhD, she came to the conclusion that “Martha’s case against Mormonism is . . . exaggerated and shallow, the accuracy of her narrative style . . . suspect, and her use of hyperbole in such a devastating accusation . . . misplaced.”<sup>43</sup> Even Affirmation, the Gay Mormon alliance, objected to the book. Stung by the hypocrisy of Martha’s homosexual lifestyle in light of her previous characterization of homosexuality as a “compulsive behavior” that can be changed and “cured,” Affirmation posted a news story on their Web page declaring that “Martha Beck’s credibility as an author is now in question” as *Leaving the Saints* “is being criticized for its alleged inaccuracies.”<sup>44</sup> I have even seen some people on an anti-Mormon board lament that any one of them could have written a better book than did Martha. My perception is that *Leaving the Saints* has been received favorably by only three groups of people: (1) those who know nothing about either Mormonism or false memory syndrome, (2) those whose rage against the Church of Jesus Christ has blinded them to the irrational content of this book, and (3) those who have been abused and cannot separate Martha’s false victimhood from their own very real, very legitimate victimhood.

I would also like to clear up a few details that have confused some readers of *Leaving the Saints*. First, to make claims is not the same as offering evidence. Allegations are not proof. Martha has claimed a lot of things, but she has proven none of them. To say something hap-

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42. Tom Kimball’s review is available at [www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200501.html](http://www.fairlds.org/Reviews/Rvw200501.html) (accessed 2 November 2005).

43. Tania Rands Lyon, “An Exhausted Memoir of Reading *Leaving the Saints*,” *Sunstone*, March 2005, 62–67, specifically 63 and 67.

44. One of the three central case studies in her book *Breaking the Cycle of Compulsive Behavior* is a homosexual. See Jason Clark, “LDS Couple Who Dubbed Homosexuality ‘Addiction’ Come Out,” 27 February 2005, at [www.affirmation.org/news/2005\\_08.asp](http://www.affirmation.org/news/2005_08.asp) (accessed 2 November 2005).

pened does not prove it happened; to say one has physical evidence is not to show that evidence. Martha, to date, has offered no evidence and has proven nothing. We are still at the level of he-said/she-said. But Martha has given us a lot of evidence with which to judge who is the most reliable witness. Hugh Nibley's footnotes have held up much better than her shoddy memoir.

Second, Martha has changed her story considerably, not only between the time when she first began to recover her "memories" and when she published the book, but even since the book was published. Back in the 1990s, she was fairly open about her use of hypnosis. She tried to convince her sisters and her then husband to try self-hypnosis, and she fully admitted using hypnosis herself. In the book she makes it sound as if the memories just "popped out." Since the book came out, however, she told a reporter for the *New York Times* that she "practiced self-hypnosis once under Ms. Finney but that it did not play a part in her memory recovery."<sup>45</sup> Then on her Web site Martha claimed that when her first therapist "proposed a hypnosis session, [she] refused, for the very reason that [she] didn't want [her] experiences tainted by any suggestive or leading methods."<sup>46</sup> This is only one example of how Martha has had a really hard time keeping her story straight.

Third, even though many have recognized that Martha is an unreliable narrator, they still do not always recognize that when she reports the words of others, she is equally unreliable. I have interviewed dozens of the people Martha quotes in her book, and in every single instance they have said Martha got it wrong—and not just a little wrong. No, she got things glaringly, unrecognizably, completely wrong. So those reading *Leaving the Saints* should remember that when Martha gives the words of her parents, they are really words invented by Martha; when Martha gives the words of her brothers and sisters, they are really words invented by Martha; when Martha gives the words of her former BYU colleagues, her bishop, or her stake president, they are really words invented by Martha; and even when Martha gives the

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45. Wyatt, "A Mormon Daughter's Book Stirs a Storm."

46. Martha Beck, "Setting the Record Straight: Physical Evidence and Memories from My Childhood" [leavingthesaints.com/settingrecord.htm](http://leavingthesaints.com/settingrecord.htm) (accessed 2 November 2005).

words of her ex-husband, they are really words invented by Martha. To wit, Martha's mother did not admit that the abuse happened and then later deny it, as Martha reports in her book. Martha's brothers and sisters do not believe she was physically abused, as Martha reports in her book; and Martha's father's last words were not "she was my favorite," as Martha has reported to the press.

Let me also say that my response to Martha's book was not something I enjoyed writing; I did not want to smear her or attack her. I had much better things—my family, my teaching, and my dissertation—that needed my attention. But I also felt that her allegations needed a response; as her father's biographer and a family member, I had access to information to which others were not privy. I also admit that I felt somewhat responsible that Martha's book included these allegations since I published them first in the biography of her father, albeit in a very short sentence and a very long footnote, and with, of course, a very different perspective. I struggled over how to handle this episode of Hugh's life for months—if I should include it, how I should include it, and what the repercussions would be either way. But I felt that the only real choice I had was to put it in so readers would not think I was covering things up. The Nibley family was in consensus about this too. All of them felt that it needed to be addressed. The response to the open way I addressed this and other issues in the book has been overwhelmingly positive. As I mentioned in my written response to Martha's book, D. Michael Quinn reviewed my book and stated that he felt "all readers will agree that including this [candid] discussion in an 'authorized biography' is an ultimate example of the dedication to honest history by Hugh Nibley, his wife, and their children."<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, I still felt somehow responsible, that perhaps if I had not mentioned this episode, Martha might not have felt the need to write this book.<sup>48</sup> So it was partially out of a desire to do penance that I took on the challenge to respond.

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47. Quinn, review of *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*, 261.

48. Martha told a reporter from the *Arizona Republic* that "I only decided to publish after my family put their account out there. Two years ago my brother-in-law (Boyd Jay Petersen) wrote a biography (*Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life*) that deified my father." Susan Felt, "Tale of Abuse Draws Fire from Church and Family," *Arizona Republic*, 16 March

Writing my response was maddeningly frustrating. Hugh Nibley once told me that writing *Sounding Brass*, his response to anti-Mormon literature, was the hardest, most negative thing he ever had to do—this coming from a man who survived the Great Depression, World War II, and teaching for several decades in the Religion Department! At the time I could not understand why he felt writing *Sounding Brass* was such an awful experience since the book is, I believe, clever, satirical—in short, hilarious. But after responding to Martha, I think I understand. I found it so difficult trying to discern where the truth ended and the lies began that I felt as if I were descending into some kind of personal hell. The lack of names made it impossible to figure out who all the people were. The chronology of her life was so different from the book's chronology that it was easy to get disoriented (for example, the book has the September Six excommunications occurring before the Spring Women's Conference where she allegedly made her revelation public). I got so frustrated while trying to respond to her book that I literally broke three teeth; it was not until the third that I realized I was holding in a lot of anger and grinding my teeth—"if I had my teeth, I would bite," as Shakespeare says.

Yet I expressly did not want to attack Martha—I do not hate her. I just hate what she has chosen to do. Nor did I want to be accused of a personal attack. But how does one tell the true story of Martha's life without revealing the truth, which is not terribly flattering? What has surprised me is that, to date, the only people who have told me that they found my response to be a personal attack on Martha have been men. I had assumed that women would be more sensitive to personal attacks than men. I do have a theory about why it is men rather than women who think I was attacking Martha: I think men tend to want to stick up for the little guy when they see one being attacked. But I would like to remind listeners that this is exactly what I was doing. I was sticking up for a 94-year-old man who could not stick up for himself; I was defending my wife who is portrayed as a simple-minded

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2005. If my book "deifies" her father, that is not the sense most readers have come away with, since they have unanimously told me that they were surprised by the "warts-and-all" way I told the story. But then I suspect Martha only read one page of the book.

nutcase in Martha's book; I was defending my children who do not deserve to have their fine heritage stained with these terrible lies; and I was defending my church, which was depicted in her book as a cult just to the right of Jonestown.

Further, I was responding to a woman who has the bully pulpit of Random House and Oprah's Harpo media conglomerate behind her. This is also a woman who was trained in the martial arts; who kidnapped her aging father when he was only days out of the hospital suffering from chest pains; who held him hostage in a hotel room for over five hours with three other women watching guard; who left her mother unattended after she had just been released from the hospital with an infection that we all thought might take her from us; who, when Hugh asked permission to leave, confesses in her book, "I'm sure any patient, high-minded, enlightened person would let him go right now. Me, I'm just getting started" (p. 111). Let me just ask, what if the genders in that hotel room were reversed—what if four young men took a 90-year-old woman into a hotel room, kept her there against her will, and tried to make her confess to a sexual crime she did not commit? This is not a poor defenseless woman I am up against; this is a poor defenseless man I was defending.

I am now more confused than ever about how to respond to the works of anti-Mormons without attacking the person. I sincerely believe that *ad hominem* has no place in scholarly circles and certainly no place in religious circles, but I am also more aware that a writer's personal background, often unknown to the public, can and often does motivate anti-Mormon attacks and can be very relevant to the discussion. This seems to be especially true when addressing a personal memoir, as with this book.

I have learned a few things as this episode has played out in the press, discussion boards, chat rooms, and reviews. First, apologists need to support each other. There were times when I felt so lonely while writing my response, and no one in my ward could possibly understand what I was going through. Responding to anti-Mormon attacks is nasty business, and we need to support each other emotionally as we do this. Second, I believe we should reach out where

we can to the broader spectrum of Mormonism. My sense is that we can disagree with people and still be polite. One can be supportive of the church and still be respectful to those who may be critical. In this particular case, I believe, the reviews attacking *Leaving the Saints* that originated with these less apologetic sources had greater credibility in the press and with the general public. And they appeared, I believe, because Hugh Nibley, despite his apologetic work, was loved by a broad spectrum of the Mormon public. Finally, I learned that the truth ultimately triumphs. Even though Hugh Nibley's life story was tarnished by these false allegations, his life was not. He died peacefully, knowing that he had committed no evil. And, ultimately, most of the public is coming to realize the same thing.





# OUT OF NOTHING: A HISTORY OF CREATION *EX NIHILLO* IN EARLY CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Blake T. Ostler

In their contribution to *The New Mormon Challenge* entitled “Craftsman or Creator? An Examination of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation and a Defense of *Creatio ex nihilo*,” Paul Copan and William Lane Craig assert, among other things, that the notion of creation *ex nihilo*—creation out of nothing—is biblical.<sup>1</sup> For good

1. The first section of their essay, dealing with scriptural arguments, is essentially the same as Copan’s article “Is *Creatio ex Nihilo* a Post-Biblical Invention? An Examination of Gerhard May’s Proposal,” *Trinity Journal*, n.s., 17 (1996): 77–93. Stephen D. Ricks deals with creation *ex nihilo* in “Ancient Views of Creation and the Doctrine of Creation *ex Nihilo*,” in *Revelation, Reason, and Faith: Essays in Honor of Truman G. Madsen*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 319–37. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Does the Qur’an Teach Creation *Ex Nihilo*?” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 584–610, since at several points his argument is analogous to mine.

Review of Paul Copan and William Lane Craig, “Craftsman or Creator? An Examination of the Mormon Doctrine of Creation and a Defense of *Creatio ex nihilo*.” In *The New Mormon Challenge: Responding to the Latest Defenses of a Fast-Growing Movement*, ed. Francis J. Beckwith, Carl Mosser, and Paul Owen, 95–152. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002. 535 pp., with glossary and indexes. \$21.99.

Review of Paul Copan and William Lane Craig. *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004. 280 pp., with glossary and indexes. \$19.99.

measure, they also assert that this doctrine was not an invention of the philosophers but has always been the well-established “Christian” belief. In so doing, they argue against the vast majority of biblical and classical scholars. I contend that their arguments on these points are seriously flawed, that there are compelling reasons to support the view of the majority of biblical scholars that the Bible teaches creation out of a preexisting chaos, that Copan and Craig have seriously misrepresented the biblical data to read into it their doctrine of absolutist creation, and that their argument that the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* was not a philosophical development is uninformed and fails to grasp the essential distinctions necessary to make sense of the doctrine as it developed in patristic theology. I present good reasons why the vast majority of scholars agree that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* was first formulated around AD 200 in arguments with the Gnostics, Stoics, and Middle Platonists.

In both publications being reviewed here, Copan and Craig deal with texts from the Old Testament, philosophical arguments from the supposed impossibility of the actual infinite, and evidence from big bang cosmology that they argue supports creation out of nothing. In this review I will focus only on the New Testament and the rise of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in first- and second-century Christianity. I will review their article in *The New Mormon Challenge*, as well as their recently published book *Creation out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical, and Scientific Exploration*, which expands upon their article. I have chosen to review the book together with the article for two reasons. First, the book plugs many gaping holes that exist in the article, and it does no good to respond to a weaker argument when a stronger argument has been made. Second, I believe that dialogue among Latter-day Saints and evangelicals calls for charity—even when the evangelicals do not reciprocate that charity.

There is a central problem with these works by Copan and Craig. They make no bones about the fact that they are *not* engaging in an attempt to provide a balanced exegesis of the scriptures and documents that they discuss. Rather, their article and book are like a lawyer’s

defense brief for the view that the scriptures teach *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>2</sup> A careful reading reveals that they are presenting their case as if they were debaters with no interest in giving a balanced assessment of the evidence. Such a debater's stance is easily discerned in their defensive position that "even if" the evidence did not support creation out of nothing, still their position dictates that we should read the texts as teaching that doctrine. To defend their position, they explicitly adopt a prior theological commitment that determines what the evidence must show: "And even if, as many of [the Jewish and Christian writers] believed, God did create out of primordial matter, these Jewish and Christian thinkers held that this matter itself was *first* created by God and then at a later stage shaped by him into an orderly cosmos. They uniformly held that God alone is unbegotten and uncreated; everything else is begotten and creaturely" (*Creation out of Nothing [CON]*, p. 27, emphasis in original). This passage displays clearly the two key assumptions that dictate the outcome of discussion by Copan and Craig: (1) the word *create* is assumed to mean creation *ex nihilo*; and (2) even if a text says that God created by organizing unorganized matter, we must still see the text as teaching *creatio ex nihilo* because implicitly it adopts the view that God first "created" everything out of nothing. While I doubt that there is such a thing as a presuppositionless or "objective" stance in reading texts, nevertheless, their attempt to defend the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is vitiated by the fact that the texts do not support their view unless these two assumptions are adopted. Yet these very assumptions are themselves what is at issue. Thus the basic premise of their discussion begs the question in their favor and often causes them to ignore more convincing readings of the

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2. They say: "In *defending* the doctrine of creation out of nothing, we do not delve into many of its theological implications and ramifications. . . . This book offers reasons for claiming that creation out of nothing is a *biblical* concept. The biblical data are not ambiguous, as some contend; indeed, creation *ex nihilo* is the most reasonable inference to make in light of biblical texts. Even if the doctrine of creation out of nothing is not explicitly stated, it is an obvious inference from the fact that God created everything distinct from himself. 'Implicit' should not be watered down to 'ambiguous'" (*CON*, pp. 26–27, first emphasis added). Their view that they are engaging in some debate in which there are winners and losers is expressly stated: "The view proposing creation from preexistent matter would not win even if the Bible were silent on the matter" (*CON*, p. 91).

key texts. They cite several texts that do not discuss *how* God created, but merely that he did, and Copan and Craig argue that the text *must* mean creation out of nothing even though they admit that the text doesn't expressly address the issue as to *how* God created because it is supposedly "implicit" in the text.

### Creation as Described in the New Testament

Copan and Craig contend that Joseph Smith's reading of Genesis 1—that it expressly teaches creation from a prior chaos—is contrary to the biblical text. However, it is Joseph Smith's interpretation that enjoys the support of the majority of biblical scholars.<sup>3</sup> Copan and Craig also assert that several passages of the New Testament expressly teach *creatio ex nihilo*. In so arguing they once again swim against the tide of contrary conclusions reached by the vast majority of scholars who have treated this issue.

2 Peter 3:5–6. Several New Testament passages are cited by Copan and Craig that supposedly support creation out of nothing. Their treatment of 2 Peter 3:5 is typical of the way they force the text with assumptions contrary to the text throughout their book (see *The New Mormon Challenge [NMC]*, p. 427 n. 136, and *CON*, pp. 87–91). Second Peter 3:5–6 presents a New Testament text that clearly refers back to an Old Testament teaching that God created the heaven and the earth by organizing preexistent chaos. Genesis 1:1–2 states: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth, and the earth was without form, and void; and *darkness was upon the face of the deep*. And the Spirit of God moved *upon the face of the waters*" (Genesis 1:2 King James Version [KJV]). The waters represented the primordial chaos already present when God created the earth in Genesis 1:2 (and there

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3. See for example, Shalom M. Paul, "Creation and Cosmogony: In the Bible," in *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 5:1059–63; David Winston, "The Book of Wisdom's Theory of Cosmogony," *History of Religions* 11/2 (1971): 187–91; Frances Young, "'Creatio Ex Nihilo': A Context for the Emergence of the Christian Doctrine of Creation," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 44 (1991): 139–51; Gerhard May, *Creatio ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation Out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought*, trans. A. S. Worrall (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994); Keith Norman, "Ex Nihilo: The Development of the Doctrines of God and Creation in Early Christianity," *BYU Studies* 17/3 (1977): 291–318.

is no indication in the text that the waters are ever created). In fact, the scripture in 2 Peter seems to have been directed to people like Copan and Craig: “They [sarcastic scoffers] deliberately ignore the fact that long ago there were the heavens and the earth, formed out of water and through water by the Word of God, and that it was through these same factors that the world of those days was destroyed by the flood-waters” (2 Peter 3:5–6 New Jerusalem Bible [NJB]). This text rather clearly teaches the creation of heaven and earth by verbal fiat out of waters that existed *before* the heavens and the earth and that this pre-existing chaos eventually provided the water for the great flood. In essence, the flood represents a return of the world to chaos because the people that God had created had not obeyed his commands.<sup>4</sup>

There are five crucial points in 2 Peter 3:5 that support the view that the author of this scriptural passage believed that everything was organized from a preexisting chaos. First, the text addresses the formation of “heaven and earth,” or all that is said to be created by God in Genesis 1:1–2. Indeed, the parallel with Genesis 1:1 is unmistakable and clearly signifies that 2 Peter speaks of the same creation spoken of there. Second, the heaven and earth are said in 2 Peter 3:5 to be formed ἐξ ὕδατος καὶ δι’ ὕδατος (*ex hydatos kai di hydatos*), both “out of water” and also “through water.” The double reference to water as the material substrate used in creation “out of” and “from” which the heaven and earth are formed appears to be an intentional emphasis. Third, the fact that we are dealing with the entire scope of creation is indicated by reference to God’s Word as the power by which the heaven and earth are formed from water—τῷ τοῦ θεοῦ λόγῳ (*tō tou theou logō*). The text is referring to Genesis 1:1–2, which states that God spoke and heaven and earth were created, and also to John 1:1, which mentions that God creates all that there is by the power of his Word. Fourth, the heaven and earth are formed from water, which is recognized in the very next verse as the principle of chaos causing the flood or the deep in Genesis 1:2. The earth was created from water,

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4. See Richard J. Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter* (Waco: Word, 1983), 297–302. Bauckham is an evangelical who admits that 2 Peter draws upon the worldview of the ancient Near East and Genesis to form a concept of creation of the world out of water.

and it was destroyed by water through the flood because water represents the unformed and chaotic—the deep that is never said to be created in the Genesis account of creation but is presented as already present at the time God undertakes to create the heaven and the earth. Fifth, the verb used in 2 Peter 3:5, *συνεστῶσα* (*synestōsa*), is a form of the verb *συνίστημι* (*synistēmi*), meaning to organize by combining together and not by creating out of nothing.<sup>5</sup>

In an endnote to their article, Copan and Craig claim that in 2 Peter 3:5 there is a “two-step” creation, with an initial creation *ex nihilo* and a second creation from chaotic water. They claim that 2 Peter 3:5 “focuses on the second stage” dealing with creation by chaos (NMC, p. 427 n. 136). However, their *ad hoc* explanation consists of imposing an assumption on the text for which there is no textual support at all. Second Peter 3:5 gives no indication of any prior creation *ex nihilo*. This interpretation is a good example of how Copan and Craig are willing to gerrymander texts and read into them their own theological demands in a way that is contrary to the text. They admit that many biblical scholars, such as J. N. D. Kelly and evangelical Richard Bauckham, interpret this text to teach precisely that water is the “sole original existent” and the “elemental stuff out of which the universe was formed” as the Greek philosopher Thales had taught (and as Genesis 1 presupposes in equating the “deep” or the waters with the uncreated chaos).<sup>6</sup> This is where their prior theological assumption supposedly comes to their rescue. The fact that the text says absolutely nothing about some prior creation of water from nothing doesn’t deter Copan and Craig from seeing this belief as the key to interpreting the text. In their book they assert:

This would imply a two-step creation process (already noted in the previous chapter) involving God’s creating the universe and its elements. This is supported by the fact that the verb “formed [*synestōsa*]” is used rather than the verb

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5. See “συνίστημι,” in Joseph H. Thayer, trans., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 605.

6. J. N. D. Kelly, *A Commentary on the Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 358, 359.

*ktizein* (create). In Proverbs 8:24, we read that “the deep” did not always exist. God creates the waters and then uses them in the process of creation. Thus, water is the *material* from which the sky is created and *instrument* (*dia*) to create the sky. (CON, p. 88, brackets and emphasis in original)

So Copan and Craig suggest that the statement in 2 Peter 3:5 that God created “the heaven and earth” by “forming” them out of water really means that God first created water out of nothing and that he then used that water to create the “heavens and the earth.” They cite Proverbs 8:24 as a supposed instance of such creation of water out of nothing and then using that water to create the earth. Their eisege-sis of Proverbs, however, is no more convincing than their attempt to read creation out of nothing into a text that teaches creation out of chaos. Proverbs doesn’t teach that God created the waters or “deep” out of nothing; rather, it expressly states that before God created the earth and thus before there was water anywhere on earth, God “prepared the heavens” and he organized the waters *not* by “creat-ing” them, but by setting “a compass upon the face of the depth”—and this *before* he created the earth (Proverbs 8:26–27). “While as yet he had not made the earth. . . . When he prepared the heav-ens, I was there: when he set a compass upon the face of the depth” (עַד-לֹא עָשָׂה אֶרֶץ וְחוֹצוֹת . . . בַּחֲכִינוּ שָׁמַיִם שֶׁם אֲנִי בַחֲקָן חוּג עַל-פְּנֵי תְהוֹם).

Thus, the waters are never said to be created in Proverbs 8 (or anywhere else in the Old Testament for that matter), contrary to the assertion by Copan and Craig. Rather, God prepares the already existent waters by organizing them through the process of measur-ing them and plumbing their depths. The verb used in Proverbs 16:12 and translated as “prepared,” יָכִין (*yikkôn*), indicates a preparation and establishing of something already existent and mirrors the state-ment in 2 Peter that “the heavens and earth were *formed* out of water” (author’s translation).

*Hebrews 11:3.* Copan and Craig next turn to Hebrews 11:3, which says in the KJV: “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.” According to another translation

of the same passage: “It is by faith that we understand that the ages were created by a word from God, so that from the invisible the visible world came to be” (NJB). What this text says is that God created visible things literally “from” invisible things (εἰς τὸ μὴ ἐκ φαινόμενων τὸ βλεπόμενον). But the invisible things are not nothing; they already exist. Copan and Craig wrongly assume that invisible things can be equated with absolute nothing. They cite Paul Ellingworth in arguing that creation of the world by the “word” of God “would ‘conflict’ with any idea that the visible world was made out of materials in the invisible world” (NMC, p. 116).<sup>7</sup> However, 2 Peter 3:5–6 teaches that God created *from the waters* by his word or command. The notion that creation by God’s command or word must assume creation *ex nihilo* is simply false. Moreover, Hebrews 11:3 states that the worlds were “framed by the word of God,” not that they were created out of nothing. The verb used here, καταρτίζω (*katartizō*) refers to organizing, framing, or putting together what is not yet organized or to mend, repair, or put in order something that has become disorganized.<sup>8</sup>

Citing William Lane, Copan and Craig also argue that the reference to those “things which are not seen” teaches *creatio ex nihilo* because it “denies that the creative universe originated from primal material or anything observable” (NMC, p. 116).<sup>9</sup> Yet this is simply argument by assertion without any evidence or reasoning to back it up. Moreover, it is demonstrably wrong. For example, Copan and Craig also cite 2 *Enoch* (a document very likely dating to about AD 70–100 and thus contemporaneous with New Testament texts such as Hebrews and probably the Gospel of Matthew),<sup>10</sup> which uses very similar language about God’s command and things visible created from the invisible. Arguing that this text too “reflects the doctrine of

7. Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 569.

8. See “καταρτίζω,” in Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 336, and “καταρτίζω,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 1:476.

9. Quoted from William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9–13* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 332.

10. This date is debated by some scholars but is supported by F. I. Andersen in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 1:94–97.



creation out of nothing” in a couple of places, they cite *2 Enoch* 25:1–2 as follows: “I commanded . . . that visible things should come down from invisible” (*NMC*, pp. 123–24). However, the entire relevant text reads: “Before anything existed at all, from the very beginning, whatever exists I created from the non-existent, and from the invisible the visible. . . . For, before any visible things had come into existence, I, the ONE, moved around in the invisible things, like the sun, from east to west and from west to east.”<sup>11</sup>

It is also well known that the Septuagint (LXX) translates the text of Genesis 1:2 referring to the “desolate and empty” (תהו ובהו) world in its precreation state as ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος—which means “invisible and unformed.” This same word *invisible* is similar to Hebrews 11:3 μὴ ἐκ φαινομένων (*mē ek phainomenōn*), meaning “out of unseen things” the world was created. However, just as in LXX Genesis the unformed and lifeless world that is invisible or unseen is not “nothing at all” but, rather, chaotic and unformed matter that cannot be seen because it does not yet have form impressed upon it by God.<sup>12</sup>

In the context of *2 Enoch*, it is clear that the “invisible things” are not absolute nothing; rather, they are things that are not visible to mortal eyes. That these invisible things already exist in some sense is demonstrated by the fact that God moves among them. The translator F. I. Andersen explains: “The impression remains that God was not the only existent being or thing from the very first. . . . God made the existent out of the non-existent, the visible out of the non-visible. So the invisible things coexisted with God before he began to make anything. . . . Vs. 4 is quite explicit on this point: Before any of the visible things had come into existence, God was moving around among the invisible things.”<sup>13</sup> Not only does this text not teach *creatio ex nihilo*,

11. *2 Enoch* 2–4, from F. I. Andersen’s translation in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:142.

12. Lane, *Hebrews* 9–11, 332; Arnold Ehrhardt, “*Creatio Ex Nihilo*,” *Studia Theologica* 4 (1951–52): 27–33; and P. E. Hughes, “The Doctrine of Creation in Hebrews 11:3,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 2 (1972): 64–77.

13. *2 Enoch*, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:142 n. f. Copan and Craig point out that, later in the text, it states that God “created” both the visible and the invisible. However, they fundamentally misconstrue *2 Enoch*. See below.

but it teaches the very opposite. This reading of “invisible things” as already existing realities is also very strongly supported by Romans 1:19–20 KJV: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the *invisible things* of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power.” Note that the invisible things already exist and can be seen through the power of God. This scripture fits well with the Latter-day Saint view that before God created the earth out of matter that is visible to us, he had already created a world out of spirit that is not visible to us (see Moses 6:36). This same view is expressed in Hebrews—things that are not visible or are unseen are still things that already exist. As James N. Hubler observes in his excellent doctoral dissertation on the emergence of the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*: “the notion of creation  $\mu\eta\ \epsilon\kappa\ \phi\alpha\iota\upsilon\omicron\mu\epsilon\lambda\omega\nu$  was comfortable for Platonic dualists or Stoics, because it lacked all qualities.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, both the Platonic dualists and the Stoics could easily see the reference to “things invisible” as a type of formless matter that lacks any qualities of individuation but is matter nonetheless.

The view that the “invisible things” are not absolute nothing is also supported by Colossians 1:16–17:

For in him were created all things  
in heaven and on earth:  
everything visible and everything invisible,  
thrones, ruling forces, sovereignties, powers—  
all things were created through him and for him.  
He exists before all things. (NJB)

In this scripture it seems fairly evident that the “everything invisible” includes things that already exist in heaven, such as thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Further, the invisible things are also created by God; yet the fact that they are invisible means only that they are not seen by mortal eyes, not that they do not exist. The

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14. James N. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo: Matter, Creation, and the Body in Classical and Christian Philosophy through Aquinas” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1995), 108.

reference to invisible things does not address whether they were made out of preexisting matter. However, 2 Corinthians 4:18 states that “the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal” (KJV). It is not difficult to see that Hebrews 11:3 neither expressly mentions creation out of nothing nor implicitly assumes it. The argument that the text must somehow implicitly assume creation of out nothing misinterprets the text and forces it with assumptions that are contrary to the meaning of “invisible things.” If anything, Hebrews 11:3 implicitly assumes creation of the earth out of a pre-existing substrate not visible to us.

*Romans 4:17.* Copan and Craig next cite Romans 4:17 KJV: “even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were (καλοῦντος τὰ μὴ ὄντα ὡς ὄντα).” There are two possible translations of Romans 4:17. The majority translation does not entail creation out of nothing: “[Abraham] is our father in the presence of God whom he believed—the God who makes the dead alive and summons the things that do not yet exist as though they already do.”<sup>15</sup> Another translation indicates that God “calls into existence the things which do not exist” (New American Bible, NAB). The first translation is preferred for several reasons. First, Keith Norman has pointed out that it is contradictory for God to call to that which does not exist.<sup>16</sup> Second, as Moo stated, “this interpretation fits the *immediate* context better than a reference to God’s creative power, for it explains the assurance with which God can speak of the ‘many nations’ that will be descended from Abraham.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the preferred

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15. Author’s translation; Douglas J. Moo, trans., *The Epistle to the Romans*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 279, translated the passage: “Even as it is written, ‘I have appointed you as the father of many nations’ before the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls those things that are not as though they were.”

16. Norman, “Ex Nihilo,” 291–318.

17. Moo, *Epistle to the Romans*, 282, emphasis in original; so also William Sanday and Arthur C. Headlam, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1977), 113. Further, this view is in line with a Pauline idiom—namely, verb followed by ὡς plus participle (of the same verb or, in certain contexts, its antonym) to compare present reality with what is not a present reality (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:7; 5:3; 7:29, 30 [three times], 31; Colossians 2:20 [similarly, 2 Corinthians 6:9, 10]).

translation merely states that God summons the future reality of the resurrection as if it already existed. This seems to me to be a far better fit with the context.

Third, as Hubler comments: “The verse’s ‘non-existent’ need not be understood in an absolute sense of non-being. μή ὄντα (*mē onta*) refers to the previous non-existence of those things which are now brought into existence. There is no direct reference to the absence or presence of a material cause.”<sup>18</sup> In other words, the Greek text suggests the view that God has brought about a thing that did not exist *as that thing* before it was so created. For example, this use of μή ὄντα is logically consistent with the proposition that “God called forth the earth when before that the earth did not exist.” However, the fact that the earth did not exist *as the earth* before it was so created does not address the type of material that was used to make it.

Note also that Romans 4:17 uses the negative μή, which refers to merely relative nonbeing and not to absolute nothing, as required by the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. At this point it is important to understand a bit about the ancient concept of matter in the Greek-speaking world and the distinction between relative nonbeing (Greek μή ὄντα) and absolute nothing (Greek οὐκ ὄντως). Platonic philosophy—both Neoplatonism and Middle Platonism—posited the existence of an eternal substratum that was material but was nevertheless so removed from the One Ground of Being that it was often said to not have “real” existence. As Jonathan Goldstein observes: “Platonists called pre-existent matter ‘the non-existent.’”<sup>19</sup> This relative nonexistence is indicated by the Greek negative μή, meaning “not” or “non-,” in conjunction with the word for existence or being.<sup>20</sup> When the early Christian theologians speak of creation that denies that there was any material state prior to creation, however, they use the Greek negation οὐκ, meaning “not in any way or mode.” As Henry Chadwick explained the usage in Clement’s *Stromata*: “In each case the phrase

18. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 109.

19. Jonathan A. Goldstein, “The Origins of the Doctrine of Creation Ex Nihilo,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 35/2 (1984): 127.

20. Young, “Christian Doctrine of Creation,” 146.

he employs is *ek me ontos* not *ex ouk ontos*; that is to say, it is made not from that which is absolutely non-existent, but from relative non-being or unformed matter, so shadowy and vague that it cannot be said to have the status of 'being', which is imparted to it by the shaping hand of the Creator."<sup>21</sup> Edwin Hatch explained that, for Platonists, "God was regarded as being outside the world. The world was in its origin only potential being (το μὴ ὄν)."<sup>22</sup> He explains more fully:

The [Platonic] dualistic hypothesis assumed a co-existence of matter and God. The assumption was more frequently tacit than explicit. . . . There was a universal belief that beneath the qualities of all existing things lay a substratum or substance on which they were grafted, and which gave to each thing its unity. But the conception of the nature of this substance varied from that of gross and tangible material to that of empty and formless space. . . . It was sometimes conceived as a vast shapeless but plastic mass, to which the Creator gave form, partly by moulding it as a potter moulds clay, partly by combining various elements as a builder combines his materials in the construction of a house.<sup>23</sup>

Aristotle wrote that: "For generation is from non-existence (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) into being, and corruption from being back into non-existence (εἰς τὸ μὴ ὄν)."<sup>24</sup> Generation is the act of a new animal being derived from an existing one, or a plant deriving from an existing plant. It is new life from life. He used the phrase *from non-existence* in a sense of relative nonbeing, where "things" do not yet exist and there is only a formless substratum that has the potential or capacity to receive definite form. This substratum is not absolutely nothing but is not yet a thing. It is "no-thing." Thus, to say that God called

21. Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 46–47. See Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 300–308.

22. Edwin Hatch, *The Influence of Greek Ideas on Christianity* (Gloucester, MA: Smith, 1970), 178.

23. Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas*, 194–95.

24. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* B5, 741 b 22f, ed. H. J. Drossaart Lulofs (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 74f.

to existence that which does not exist, as in Romans 4:17, actually assumes a preexisting substrate that God, by impressing form upon it, organizes into a thing that exists. Copan and Craig simply fail to note this important distinction, and thus their exegesis is critically flawed.

In their book, Copan and Craig cite a number of evangelical scholars who share their theological presuppositions and who opine that this verse refers to creation out of nothing (CON, pp. 75–78). Yet none of these authors provide any analysis or exegesis beyond asserting that the “non-existent” must mean that which does not exist in any sense. For example, Copan and Craig quote James Dunn’s commentary on Romans 4:17, which reads in the relevant part: “As creator he creates without any precondition: he makes alive where there was only death, and he calls into existence where there was nothing at all. Consequently that which has been created, made alive in this way, must be totally dependent on the creator, the life-giver, for its very existence and life” (NMC, p. 117).<sup>25</sup> However, it is easy to see that the scriptural analogy of God bringing the dead to life in the same way that he creates “things which are not” does not support *creatio ex nihilo*. Resurrection does not presuppose that the dead do not exist in any way prior to their resurrection, nor does it presuppose that previously they did not have bodies that are reorganized through resurrection. Just as God does not create persons for the first time when he restores them to life through resurrection, so God does not create out of absolute nonbeing.

Moreover, note that Romans 4:17 doesn’t expressly address whether things are created out of nothing or from some material substrate. It simply says that God “calls” things into existence that are not. Moreover, such a statement in no way entails or requires creation out of nothing implicitly. If I create a table then I create a table that did not exist before I created it, but it doesn’t mean that I create it out of nothing. In this text, the word *create* is not even used. Rather, what God does is to “call forth” the non-existent. The verb καλέω means

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25. Quoted from James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* (Dallas: Word, 1988), 237, omitting emphasis added by Copan and Craig.

to call out loud to something, or to invite.<sup>26</sup> It presupposes something there to be called to or invited. God calls out to the non-existent by his Word, an act described by a verb used elsewhere in Paul's writings (Romans 9:11; 1 Corinthians 12:3; Galatians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:24). Thus, the most natural reading of this text is that the "non-existent" or *μη ὄντα* refers to a preexisting reality that does not yet exist as God calls it to be. Such a reading has nothing to do with creation out of absolute nothing.

*John 1:3.* Copan and Craig also argue that John 1:3 supports the idea of creation out of nothing (here given in KJV): "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made" (πάντα δι' αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν). Copan and Craig assert of this verse: "The implication is that all things (which would include preexistent matter, if that were applicable to the creative process) exist through God's agent, who is the originator of everything" (pp. 117–18). But this verse says nothing about the creation of "preexistent matter." One must assume beforehand that the word *create* must mean to create *ex nihilo* in order to arrive at this conclusion, for this verse says only that if something was made, then it was made through the Word. It does not address anything that may not have been made. More important, it does not address *how* those things were made, its point being *through whom* the creation was made. Anything that was made was made by Christ. Since the translation one reviews is so critical to interpretation, I will provide another translation: "All things came about through him and without him not one thing came about, which came about."<sup>27</sup> The question in this case is whether the final phrase *which came about* is part of this verse or the beginning of the next verse. Hubler explains:

The punctuation of [John 1:3] becomes critical to its meaning. Proponents of *creatio ex materia* could easily qualify the creatures of the Word to that "which came about," excluding matter. Proponents of *creatio ex nihilo* could place a period

26. See "καλέω," in Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 321.

27. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 108.

after “not one thing came about” and leave “which came about” to the next sentence. The absence of a determinate tradition of punctuation in New Testament [Greek] texts leaves room for both interpretations. Neither does creation by word imply *ex nihilo* (contra Bultmann) as we have seen in Egypt, Philo, and Midrash Rabba, and even in 2 Peter 3:5, where the word functions to organize pre-cosmic matter.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, the reality of this text is that it does not consciously address the issue of creation *ex nihilo* at all. It states *who* accomplished the creation, not how it was done.<sup>29</sup> A person who accepts creation from chaos can easily say that no “thing” came about that is not a result of the Word’s bringing it about but agree that there is a chaos in which no “things” exist prior to their creation as such. Copan and Craig hang

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28. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 108.

29. There is a major punctuation problem here: Should the relative clause “that was made” go with verse 3 or verse 4? The earliest manuscripts have no punctuation (P<sup>66, 75\*</sup> K\* A B D and others). Many of the later manuscripts that do have punctuation place it before the phrase, thus putting it with verse 4 (P<sup>75c</sup> C D L W<sup>s</sup> 050\* and a few others). Nestlé-Aland placed the phrase in verse 3 and moved the words to the beginning of verse 4. In a detailed article, K. Aland defended the change. K. Aland, “Eine Untersuchung zu Johannes 1, 3–4: Über die Bedeutung eines Punktes,” *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* 59 (1968): 174–209. He sought to prove that the attribution of ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἔν ὃ γέγονεν to verse 3 began to be carried out in the fourth century in the Greek church. This came out of the Arian controversy and was intended as a safeguard for doctrine. The change was unknown in the West. Aland is probably correct in affirming that the phrase was attached to verse 4 by the Gnostics and the Eastern Church. It was only after the Arians began to use the phrase that it became attached to verse 3. But this does not rule out the possibility that, by moving the words from verse 4 to verse 3, one is restoring the original reading. Understanding the words as part of verse 3 is natural and adds to the emphasis which is built up there, while it also gives a terse, forceful statement in verse 4. On the other hand, taking the phrase ὃ γέγονεν with verse 4 gives a complicated expression. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 2nd ed. (London: SPCK, 1978), 157, says that both ways of understanding verse 4 with ὃ γέγονεν included “are almost impossibly clumsy”: “That which came into being—in it the Word was life; That which came into being—in the Word was its life.” The following points should be noted in the solution of this problem: (1) John frequently starts sentences with ἐν as verse 4 begins; (2) he repeats frequently (“nothing was created that has been created”); (3) 5:26 and 6:53 both give a sense similar to verse 4 if it is understood without the phrase; (4) it makes far better Johannine sense to say that in the Word was life than to say that the created universe (what was made, ὃ γέγονεν) was life in him. In conclusion, the phrase is best taken with verse 3.



their hat on the connotations of the word πάντα, meaning “all” in an inclusive sense. They argue that because “all” things that come about are brought about by the Word, there is no possibility of an uncreated reality that has not been brought about by God. However, the final phrase, ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν, translated “nothing made that was made,” limits the scope of the creative power to the order of the created and implies that whatever is not made was not made by him. If it is created, he created it; if it is not, then it is not within the scope of “what is made.”

### Assessing New Testament Statements about Creation

Copan and Craig end their treatment of those New Testament texts that, in their opinion, imply *creatio ex nihilo* with this charge:

In light of the above discussion, it is a serious distortion to portray the doctrine of creation out of nothing as a purely postbiblical phenomenon, as some Mormon apologists have done. *Where in the relevant scholarly references to which LDS scholars point is there rigorous exegetical treatment of the relevant biblical passages on creation?* The silence is deafening. (NMC, p. 118, emphasis in original)

Such an assertion by Copan and Craig seems to be mere bravado. Keith Norman and Stephen Ricks have provided at least an initial start to such an exegesis, which I take up here.<sup>30</sup> Even so, there is really no need for Latter-day Saints to provide such an analysis at all because it has already been provided by non-Mormon Christians who believe that there is more justification for belief in a creation *ex materia*—and, indeed, by some who accept the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* but are honest enough to admit that they cannot find such a doctrine in the Bible.<sup>31</sup> Hubler’s dissertation engages in a fairly rigorous exegesis of the relevant biblical passages. He reaches a conclusion radically different from that of Copan and Craig:

30. Norman, “Ex Nihilo,” 294–301; Ricks, “Ancient Views of Creation,” 319–37.

31. Frances Young and Bruce Waltke are excellent examples of such brave traditional Christians.

Several New Testament texts have been educed as evidence of *creatio ex nihilo*. None makes a clear statement which would have been required to establish such an unprecedented position, or which we would need as evidence of such a break with tradition. None is decisive and each could easily be accepted by a proponent of *creatio ex materia*.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, in his extensive study of the origin of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in Christian thought, Gerhard May explains why he does not believe that the New Testament texts can be taken to refer to *creatio ex nihilo*.

The passages repeatedly quoted as New Testament witnesses for the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* are Romans 4:17, where Paul says that God “calls into being the things that are not,” and Hebrews 11:3, where it says that “the visible came forth from the invisible.” But these formulations fit in with the statements of Hellenistic Judaism . . . about the creation of non-being, or out of non-being, and mean, no more than those, to give expression to creation out of nothing, in the strict sense, as a contradiction in principle of the doctrine of world-formation.<sup>33</sup>

May explains that *creatio ex nihilo* is a metaphysical doctrine that requires conscious formulation, and that such an approach was completely foreign to any of the biblical writers: “The biblical presentation of the Almighty God who created the world . . . possessed for early Christianity an overwhelming self-evidence and was not perceived as a metaphysical problem. This new question first concerned the theologians of the second century, deeply rooted in philosophical thinking, and wanting consciously to understand the truth of Christianity as the truth of philosophy.”<sup>34</sup>

Hubler and May feel that a “rigorous” exegesis is not needed to show that these biblical passages do not address the issue of *creatio*

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32. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 107–8.

33. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 27.

34. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 29–30.

*ex nihilo* because it is fairly obvious on the face of such passages that they do not consciously formulate such a metaphysical doctrine. The argument that these texts must *assume* the doctrine of creation out of nothing simply begs the question—especially where the text does not address the issue *and does not engage in the type of philosophical analysis necessary to formulate the doctrine*. Asserting that a view is “implicit” in the text without explaining why the implication is necessary to the text amounts to simply reading one’s own view into the text. I believe that is precisely what Copan and Craig have done. An approach that resists reading *creatio ex nihilo* into the text unless it is expressly formulated is especially appropriate because, as we shall see, the earliest Christian philosophers assumed that the doctrine of creation from preexisting chaos was *the* Christian view. The issue had not been addressed or settled prior to the end of the second century, when the adoption of a Middle Platonic view of God and matter as a background assumption of discourse made adoption of *creatio ex nihilo* the only rational doctrine to adopt.

Copan and Craig also assert that Latter-day Saints have failed to address the biblical evidence:

One wonders what LDS scholars would take as unambiguous evidence for creation out of nothing in Scripture (or even extrabiblical sources). It seems that they would not be satisfied with any formulation in a given text other than “creation out of absolutely nothing” or the like before admitting to the possibility of finding clear evidence of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. Apart from the strong case just made for the biblical doctrine of creation out of nothing, we must note that even if the biblical evidence *were* ambiguous and the biblical writers took no position on this issue, the LDS view would not win by default. . . . On the one hand, Mormons have neglected to interact with biblical scholarship on this subject; on the other, they have put forth no significant positive exegetical evidence for their own position. (NMC, p. 119)

Well, I can't speak for other Latter-day Saint scholars, but what I would like to see as "unambiguous evidence" in scripture of *creatio ex nihilo* is evidence that truly *is* unambiguous and is not better explained as teaching the contrary doctrine of *creatio ex materia*. I would like to see a text that directly addresses the issue of *creatio ex nihilo* in a conscious way and not a reading of the text that merely assumes the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. I would like to see a discussion of the biblical text that does not ignore the background assumptions of the world out of which the text arises.

If a text is truly taking a polemical position, then it should make clear that it is rejecting one position and espousing another. To see the New Testament text as teaching *creatio ex nihilo* when it comes out of a religious and cultural context that, up to that time, had universally accepted *creatio ex materia* requires that it actually formulate, discuss, probe, and evaluate the kinds of philosophical distinctions that underlie the doctrines in the first place. Not only do the New Testament texts not make such distinctions consciously, but they in fact show every evidence of maintaining the position prevalent within their historical context.

So intent are Copan and Craig on reading *creatio ex nihilo* into any text that says that God "created that which is from that which is not" that they have blinded themselves to the many and genuinely convincing textual and historical evidences for *creatio ex materia*. They ignore the arguments in favor of seeing Genesis 1 and 2 Peter 3:5–6 as texts teaching creation out of chaos. They ignore the fact that in the ancient world "invisible things" are still things that are simply not seen. And finally, they ignore the work of fellow evangelicals, such as Bruce K. Waltke and William R. Lane, who have already done a fine job of arguing the very position that Latter-day Saints assert.<sup>35</sup> These

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35. Bruce K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland, OR: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974); Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1–3. Pt. III: The Initial Chaos Theory and the Precreation Chaos Theory," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 132/527 (1975): 222–28. See also William R. Lane, "The Initiation of Creation," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 64–65. For a response, see Mark F. Rooker, "Genesis 1:1–3: Creation or Re-creation?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 149/595–596 (1992): 316–23, 411–27.

omissions have serious implications for the strength of the arguments Copan and Craig propose.

### Creation as Described in Extrabiblical Texts

*The Dead Sea Scrolls.* Copan and Craig suggest that texts from the Dead Sea Scrolls, produced around the time of Christ, assume creation out of nothing (CON, pp. 105–7). For example, they quote the *Rule of the Congregation* (1QSa) found among the scrolls: “From the God of Knowledge comes all that is and shall be. Before ever they existed He established their whole design, and when, as ordained for them, they come into being, it is in accord with His glorious design that they accomplish their task without change.”<sup>36</sup> They also quote 1QS XI, 11:

By his knowledge everything shall come into being,  
and all that does exist  
he establishes with his calculations  
and nothing is done outside of him. (NMC, p. 122)

They assert that in these texts they see an *ex nihilo* understanding of creation during this period (pp. 122–23). Such a reading forces the text with assumptions that simply are not addressed in it. These texts do not address whether God used prior material or how God created the earth. All the texts from the scrolls cited by Copan and Craig address only the fact that God has predestined the course of the world and has knowledge of all things before they occur. Nothing happens without God having a knowledge before it happens or “comes to be.” The mere assertions that God knew of something before he brought it about and that he brought it about through his power are not inconsistent with *creatio ex materia*. Latter-day Saints believe that before God created the earth he knew its whole design, that by his knowledge he created all things that came into existence, and yet that he created them by organizing a chaos. In other words, there is nothing asserted in these texts that is inconsistent with what Latter-day Saints believe

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36. Geza Vermes, *The Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1968), 75.

(except that they reject the all-pervasive predestination that the Dead Sea covenanters believed in).

*Rabbi Gamaliel.* Copan and Craig next refer to a statement by the first-century rabbi Gamaliel as support for *creatio ex nihilo*:

A philosopher asked Rabban Gamaliel, "Your God was a great artist, but he found himself good materials which helped him." Rabban Gamaliel replied, "What are these?" The philosopher said, "Chaos, darkness, waters, wind, and depths" (see Genesis 1.2). Rabban Gamaliel replied, "May the breath go forth from this man. It is written concerning each of these. Concerning the creation of chaos, 'Who made peace and created evil' (Isaiah 45:7). Concerning darkness, 'Who formed the light and created darkness.' Concerning the waters, 'Praise him, heavens and the waters, etc.' (Psalm 148:4). Why? Because, 'He commanded and they were created' (v. 8). Concerning the wind, 'For behold he forms the mountains and creates the wind' (Amos 4:13). Concerning the depths, 'When the depths were not, I danced'" (Proverbs 8:24).<sup>37</sup>

However, Gamaliel does not adopt the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. David Winston and Hubler both argue that Gamaliel denies that any of these cosmic forces aided God in creation. He does not deny that there was a passive material, merely that there was any material that aided God in the construction of the cosmos.<sup>38</sup> Hubler places this text in the context of other rabbinic texts that strictly prohibit any speculation about what there may have been prior to the creation in Genesis. In this context, it seems fairly evident that Gamaliel is actually teaching that God did not have any helpers in the creation—but, in good rabbinic fashion, that he refuses to go beyond that principle and speculate about what might have existed before the creation.<sup>39</sup>

37. *Bereshit Rabbah* 1.9, in Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 100, emphasis deleted.

38. See David Winston, "Creation Ex Nihilo Revisited: A Reply to Jonathan Goldstein," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 37/1 (1986): 88–91; Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 101.

39. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 94–101. However, May believes that Gamaliel "denies that Genesis 1:2 refers to unformed matter and thereby implicitly asserts *creatio ex nihilo*." May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 23. Similarly, Goldstein accepts Gamaliel's statements as

*2 Enoch*. Copan and Craig also argue that *2 Enoch* (Slavonic, probably dating from the first century) teaches creation out of nothing. In their book, they correct a critical mistake in their understanding of *2 Enoch* in the article, where they argued that the assertion that God made “the visible from the invisible” teaches creation out of nothing. There they argue that what is invisible (as in Hebrews 10:3) is “nothing” and that *2 Enoch* teaches that “visible things are created from invisible things” (see *NMC*, p. 124). In their book, however, they recognize that it is clear that the invisible things are not “nothing” but rather are things that exist, though unseen. Nevertheless, they extend their argument to insist that *2 Enoch* teaches a two-stage creation: first the invisible things are created from nothing and then the visible things are created from the invisible things (*CON*, pp. 100–102). *Second Enoch* 24:2 asserts: “Before anything at all existed, from the very beginning, whatever exists I created from the non-existent, and from the invisible the visible.” Thus, Copan and Craig claim that *2 Enoch* teaches creation out of nothing.<sup>40</sup>

However, Copan and Craig miss the schema of creation presented in *2 Enoch*. First, the assertion in *2 Enoch* that God created all that exists “from non-being” (recension A) or “from the non-existent” (recension J) appears to use the term “non-being” as a reference to the underlying, formless substrate. It is clear that the invisible from which the visible things are created is not absolutely nothing, because “before any visible things had come into existence, I, the ONE, moved around in the invisible things” (*2 Enoch* 24:4). God cannot move around in what does not exist in any way. Moreover, *2 Enoch* says that God himself is invisible among the invisible things (*2 Enoch* 24:4 [A]).

The Lord is the one who *laid the foundations upon the unknown things*, and he is the one who spread out the heavens

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an express adoption of creation *ex nihilo*. See Jonathan A. Goldstein, “Creation Ex Nihilo: Recantations and Restatements,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38/2 (1987): 187. Nevertheless, Gamaliel is not asserting that these realities were not created out of a prior chaos, for he is not addressing that issue; rather, he is asserting that they are not helpers to God any more than the clay is a helper to the potter.

40. See *2 Enoch* 24, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:140–43.

above the visible and the invisible things. And the earth he solidified above the waters, and waters he based upon the unfixed things; and he (alone) created the uncountable creatures. . . . From the invisible things and the visible he created all the visible things; /and/ he himself is invisible. (2 *Enoch* 47:3–5 [J]; 48:5, emphasis added)

This passage makes it clear that the invisible things are indeed things and that the uncreated God is counted among the invisible things. Moreover, in creating, God sets the foundations for the creation (the first thing used in creating) upon the already existent “unknown things.” Copan and Craig point out in their book that 2 *Enoch* asserts that God created the invisible things as well as the visible. *Second Enoch* 65:1[J] states: “Before ever anything existed, and before ever any created thing was created, the LORD created the whole of his creation, visible and invisible.” They take this passage to teach creation *ex nihilo* (CON, p. 102). However, it is clear that God did not create *all* the invisible things out of nothing because the text expressly states that God is uncreated (2 *Enoch* 33–25)—and God is also one of the invisible things. Moreover, the language used is very precise: “before ever *any created thing was created*.” The text carefully limits the scope of God’s creation to what is created, implying that there is something uncreated. Moreover, the text expressly speaks of the “light” as the uncreated reality. As F. I. Andersen noted: “Out of the original invisible things, God calls two beings: Adoil, from whom is born the great light, and Arukhas, from whom comes the darkness. Water is made by thickening a mixture of light and darkness. But light, if anything, is the great elemental substance.”<sup>41</sup>

Copan and Craig are correct indeed that a multistage creation is presented in 2 *Enoch*, but 2 *Enoch* does not accept creation *ex nihilo*. Several Jewish texts and Romans 4:17 state that God creates by calling to or giving commands to “non-being.” *Second Enoch* explains what it is that God calls to: he calls to the light and the darkness as if they were two sentient beings—Adoil, from whom light issues, and

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41. 2 *Enoch* 24, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:142 n. g.



Arukhas, from whom darkness issues (2 *Enoch* 25:1–5). As Andersen affirms: “The dualism of light and darkness arises from two primal beings, Adoil and Ar(u)khas. 2En does not say that God created them, but they are clearly under his control.”<sup>42</sup> From these two invisible things the rest of creation is created. *Second Enoch* thus expressly teaches creation from a preexisting substrate of invisible things that do not have form and thus are referred to as “non-being.” The process of creation, according to 2 *Enoch*, is (1) God commands “the lowest things” (or the most fundamental)—Adoil (to disintegrate into light) and Arukhas (to disintegrate into darkness); (2) light solidifies into the upper foundation (25:4) and the darkness solidifies into the lower foundation (26:2); and (3) water is created from the mixture of light and darkness (27:2). In any event, Copan and Craig have misconstrued 2 *Enoch* and once again taken a text that teaches creation from preexisting realities as if it were evidence of creation out of nothing. Second Enoch is also a crucial example of the use of the term *create* to refer to commanding already existing realities and organizing a cosmos out of formless light.

*The Shepherd of Hermas*. Copan and Craig next cite the Shepherd of Hermas, a Christian text from the middle of the second century (about AD 140). They begin by citing a text from the Mandates: “First, one must believe that God is one and that he has created and organized and made them from the non-existence into existence, and contains all, but alone is uncontained” (πρῶτον πάντων πίστευσον ὅτι εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, ὁ τὰ πάντα κτίσας καὶ καταρτίσας, καὶ ποιήσας ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος εἰς τὸ εἶναι τὰ πάντα, καὶ πάντα χωρῶν, μόνος δὲ ἀχώρητος ὢν).<sup>43</sup> Copan and Craig take this passage to be a clear reference to creation out of nothing because God alone is uncontained whereas matter is contained (CON, p. 128). But such language only means that the scope of God’s power is not limited to or contained by his physical presence, whereas matter is so contained. This text carefully uses language that indicates relative non-being, the ἐκ τοῦ

42. 2 *Enoch* 26, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:144–45 n. d. The name *Adoil* probably refers to either the light or the sun (which is never said to be created in 2 *Enoch* and is assumed to be uncreated).

43. Shepherd of Hermas, Mandates, 1.1.1, in PG 2:913, author’s translation.

μὴ ὄντος (*ek tou mē ontos*), rather than absolute negation. Georg Schuttermayr has presented a very detailed study of the use of οὐκ ἐκ ὄντων in early Christian authors and Philo and concluded that one must be careful not to read the notion of creation out of nothing from such language.<sup>44</sup> As Hubler commented,

Once again, ἐκ μὴ ὄντος alone cannot be taken as an absolute denial of material substrate. By itself this phrase is insufficient to carry the burden of a decisive and well-defined position both because ἐκ and ὄν are notoriously equivocal. Ἐκ does not necessarily designate material cause, but it can be used temporally. Ὅν does not necessarily refer to absolute non-being, but the non-existence of what later came to be. To read *creatio ex nihilo* in *Hermes* [sic] goes far beyond the warrant of the text, which makes no clear claim to the presence or absence of material and provides no discussion of the position.<sup>45</sup>

Copan and Craig also cite the Visions: “God, who dwells in heaven, and created that which is out of non-existence (κτίσας ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος).”<sup>46</sup> Once again, the technical phrase for relative non-being is used: ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος. As we have seen, Aristotle used the phrase ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος (*ek tou mē ontos*) to refer to relative non-being generating new life from parents already existing. Incidentally, it is extremely significant that the first “scriptural” arguments in history to support the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*—formulated by Irenaeus (about AD 185) and Origen (AD 220)—did not cite scriptures from the canon accepted by evangelicals and Latter-day Saints. Rather, Irenaeus and Origen cited the Shepherd of Hermas and 2 Maccabees 7:28.<sup>47</sup> The reason they cited these texts is obvious—these writers did not know

44. Georg Schuttermayr, “‘Schopfung aus dem Nichts’ in 2 Makk. 7,28?” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 17 (1973): 203–28.

45. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 110.

46. Shepherd of Hermas, Visions, 1.1.6, author’s translation; cited by Copan and Craig as “1.6” (*NMC*, p. 429 n. 166) and corrected as 1.1.6 (in *CON*, p. 127).

47. See Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.20.2; and Origen, *De Principiis* 1.3.3 for references to the Shepherd of Hermas.

of any scriptures within the canon that supported the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. It is ironic, therefore, that even these two texts do not teach the dogma of *creatio ex nihilo*. It is also significant that the Shepherd of Hermas adopted the technical language for creation from the term that describes relative nonbeing—ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος—which makes it fairly clear that God created what is from potential being, not from absolute nothing, or *ex nihilo*.<sup>48</sup>

*Joseph and Aseneth*. Copan and Craig next cite the Jewish pseud-epigraphical book *Joseph and Aseneth*, written sometime between the second century BC and the second century AD: “Lord God of the ages, . . . who brought the invisible (things) out into the light, who made the (things that) are and the (ones that) have an appearance from the non-appearing and non-being” (p. 123).<sup>49</sup> However, once again Copan and Craig do not note that God’s “making to appear those things which are invisible” (cf. Hebrews 11:3) actually imputes an existing status to those things that are not seen. Just as in 2 *Enoch* and Colossians, the assertion that God made visible things “from the non-appearing and non-being” simply refers to the already existing, invisible substrate out of which God created visible things. Invisible things are still things; they simply have not been made visible by God. Indeed, this view is strongly supported by the fact that the phrase “he brought the invisible (things) out into light” relies on the Septuagint, Genesis 1:2, and thus refers to bringing light out of the already existing darkness of the abyss. The same thought is expressed again in 8:10, which also relies on the Septuagint text of Genesis 1:2: “Lord God of my father Israel, the Most High, the Powerful One of Jacob, who gave life to all (things) and called (them) from the darkness into the light” (author’s translation). The statement that God calls forth invisible things into the light to be seen posits the invisible things as already existing in the darkness of unformed matter.

*Odes of Solomon*. Copan and Craig also cite the *Odes of Solomon*, which were probably composed about AD 100:

48. See Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas*, 197.

49. *Joseph and Aseneth* 12:1–3.

And there is nothing outside of the Lord,  
because he was before anything came to be.  
And the worlds are by his word,  
And by the thought of his heart. (NMC, p. 124)<sup>50</sup>

Again they read the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* into a text that does not address the issue. This text stresses that, before the world was created, God existed, and that God created the world by his Word. However, such beliefs are not inconsistent with *creatio ex materia*. In particular, this Ode is a poetic expression of Genesis 1. Copan and Craig do not note that, earlier in this same Ode, God is said to investigate “that which is invisible,” and it thus posits an already existing reality prior to God’s creation. Before the creation of the world, God began his creative activity by investigation of the substrate of invisible things:

For the word of the Lord investigates that which is invisible,  
and perceives his thought.  
For the eye sees his works,  
and the ear hears his thought.  
It is he who spread out the earth,  
and placed the waters in the sea. (*Odes of Solomon* 16:8–10)

As Mario Erbetta notes in his commentary on the *Odes of Solomon*: “The poet, taking up again the theme of the word of the creator, finds that it examines that which up until now does not appear; it does not yet exist, but it still unveils the divine thought. This thought is nothing other than the divine plan before being realized in being.”<sup>51</sup> These invisible things which have not yet been created are not absolute nothing, for they have the power to reveal themselves to God in their potential being and to bring about the thought that gives rise to God’s plan to create. The Lord investigates “that which is invisible,” and thus, once again, the “invisible things” are not absolute nothing

50. *Odes of Solomon* 16:18–19, in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 2:749. Copan and Craig did not quote the relevant text regarding God’s being among the invisible things, just as they did not acknowledge similar language in 2 *Enoch*.

51. Mario Erbetta, *Gli Apocrifi del Nuovo Testamento* (Turin: Marietti, 1975), 634.

but potential existence ready to have form impressed upon it by God. What does not exist in any sense could not have such creative causal powers. As such, the invisible things from which God creates the visible things already exist as a potentiality. This passage is actually contrary to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

*Second Baruch.* Copan and Craig next cite 2 *Baruch* 21:4 as evidence for *creation ex nihilo*: “You who created the earth, the one who fixed the firmament by the word and fastened the height of heaven by the spirit, the one who in the beginning of the world called that which did not yet exist *and they obeyed you*.”<sup>52</sup> However, this text clearly does *not* express *creatio ex nihilo*, for God calls to “that which did not yet exist,” and it obeys him. Ironically, this text seems almost identical to Joseph Smith’s expression in the *Lectures on Faith*: “God spake, chaos heard, and worlds came into order by reason of the faith there was in HIM.”<sup>53</sup> This text is an especially poignant reminder that the phrase *that which did not exist* refers to something that exists already in potentiality and has capacities to receive yet greater being from God. In particular, “that which [does] not yet exist” has the capacity to obey God’s command and to be given form by God’s word.

*Aristides of Athens.* Copan and Craig also assert that perhaps the earliest philosophical apologist for Christianity, Aristides of Athens, expressly taught the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Their analysis is seriously flawed and, indeed, borders on being irresponsible. Aristides reportedly delivered an apology to the Roman emperor Hadrian about AD 130. Copan and Craig fail to inform the reader that the textual sources vary and are quite questionable.<sup>54</sup> There are three recensions of Aristides’ *Apology*: a shorter Greek version, a

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52. A. F. J. Klijn, trans., “2 (Syriac Apocalypse of) Baruch,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, 1:628, emphasis added. Copan and Craig did not quote the relevant text regarding not-being obeying God’s word.

53. Lecture 1:22, in Joseph Smith, *Lectures on Faith Delivered to the School of the Prophets in Kirtland, Ohio 1834–35* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 5.

54. For the textual history and recent discovery of the Syriac text and the very late textual evidence for the Greek recension, see Edgar Hennecke, ed., *Die Apologie des Aristides* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1893); and J. Rendel Harris, ed. and trans., *The Apology of Aristides on Behalf of the Christians* (Cambridge: University Press, 1891).

much longer Syriac version, and Armenian translations of the Syriac. Aristides reportedly stated:

Let us come now, O king, also to the history of the Jews and let us see what sort of opinion they have concerning God. The Jews then say that God is one, Creator of all and almighty: and that it is not proper for us that anything else should be worshipped, but this God only: and in this they appear to be much nearer to the truth than all the peoples, in that they worship God more exceedingly and not His works.<sup>55</sup>

They also cite a passage found only in the shorter Greek recension: “O King, let us proceed to the elements themselves that we may show in regard to them that they are not gods, but perishable and mutable, produced out of that which did not exist (ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος) at the command of the true God, who is indestructible and immutable and invisible, yet he sees all things and, as He wills, modifies and changes things.”<sup>56</sup> Copan and Craig argue that these statements imply creation out of nothing because Aristides claims that God is both “Artificer and Creator.” They thus claim that the text asserts: (1) “there is an ontological distinction between Creator and creature . . . ; and (2) God created in stages, first bringing into being the elements and then shaping them into a cosmos” (CON, p. 131).

Neither of these assertions is supported by the text. There is not a word about a two-stage creation in Aristides’ *Apology*. There is a distinction between creator and creature, but it is not an ontological distinction as claimed by Copan and Craig. Rather, the text merely states that God is incorruptible and unchangeable, whereas “the elements” (not “matter”) are subject to decay and change. The elements were always seen as created from a preexisting substrate that the Greeks called the τοῦ μὴ ὄντος (*tou mē ontos*) or “non-being.” Those who believed in creation *ex materia* never claimed that matter should be worshipped or that it is somehow equal with God. It was lifeless and

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55. Aristides, *Apologia* 14, in Harris, *Apology of Aristides*, 48.

56. Aristides, *Apology* 4 (Greek), in Harris, *Apology of Aristides*, 101, author’s translation.

liable to fall into chaos, whereas God is the source of life and order. Moreover, those who accept creation from preexisting matter also saw a distinction between the creator who organizes everything that is created and the created, which would be no-thing, completely devoid of order and form, in the absence of God's creative activity. Thus, merely recognizing that God is creator and that he created all that is created does not imply or logically require creation out of nothing.

More important, this analysis shows very clearly that Copan and Craig have failed to grasp the essential distinction between relative non-being, which refers to a material substrate without form, and absolute nothing in these texts. Aristides (if he said it at all) uses the exact phrase used by Aristotle to refer to generation of life "out of non-being" ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος. The technical language used shows that this text actually refers to the creation from the preexisting material substrate of relative non-being without form. Thus, May concludes quite accurately that: "Aristides means that the elements are created by God; but it does not appear from his book that he consciously distanced himself from the philosophical model of world-formation and . . . creation."<sup>57</sup>

*Second Maccabees.* The "poster-child" scripture to support *creatio ex nihilo* in Jewish sources prior to the time of Christ has always been 2 Maccabees 7:28, a text found in the Apocrypha and considered scripture by the Catholic Church but not by either Latter-day Saints or Protestants. Copan and Craig assert that it "states clearly the traditional doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*" (NMC, p. 122). It reads: "I pray you son, look to heaven and earth and seeing everything in them, know that God made them from non-being [οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων ἐποίησεν αὐτα], and the human race began in the same way [καὶ τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων γένος οὕτω γίνεταί]." <sup>58</sup> This text is quite unclear, however, as to whether creation from absolute nothing is intended. Many scholars believe that 2 Maccabees teaches creation *ex nihilo* because it uses the phrase οὐκ ἐξ ὄντων (*ouk ex ontōn*), which in the much later Christian apologetic of the late second century was a technical term of art signifying

57. May, *Creatio ex Nihilo*, 119–20.

58. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 90, emphasis added.

*creatio ex nihilo*. In this context, however, it is inappropriate to see the phrase as a philosophical term of art—after all, it is a mother speaking to her son, not a philosopher addressing learned interlocutors. The text is probably best read as creation from nonbeing in the sense that “an artist who, by impressing form on matter, causes things to exist which did not exist before.”<sup>59</sup> An artist creates something completely new by using preexisting materials. Werner Foerster quotes Scharbau, who maintains that in 2 Maccabees “the non-existent is not absolute nothing but . . . the metaphysical substance . . . in an uncrystallized state.”<sup>60</sup> May continues:

The best known text, constantly brought forward as the earliest evidence of the conceptual formulation of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, is 2 Maccabees 7:28. The need for caution in evaluating this is apparent from the context in which there is talk of creation “out of nothing.” There is here no theoretical disquisition on the nature of the creation process, but a parenthetical reference to God’s creative power: . . . A position on the problem of matter is clearly not to be expected in this context. The text implies no more than the conception that the world came into existence through the sovereign creative act of God, and that it previously was not there.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, May suggests that the words οὐκ ἔξ ὄντων in 2 Maccabees should be translated “not out of things being, i.e. already existent individual things.”<sup>62</sup> Hubler is in agreement: “Non-being [in 2 Maccabees] refers to the non-existence of the heavens and earth before God’s creative act. It does not express absolute non-existence, only the prior non-existence of the heavens and earth. They were made to exist after not existing.”<sup>63</sup> More important, the text of 2 Maccabees 7:28 immediately

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59. Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas*, 197 n. 3.

60. Werner Foerster, “Ktizo,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1965), 3:1001 n. 6.

61. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 6, 7.

62. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 7 n. 27.

63. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 90.



follows the assertion that God created the world “out of non-being” by saying that “the human race began the same way.” This phrase suggests that creation of humanity is parallel to creation of the heavens and earth. Yet “mankind” was not created from nothing but by organizing the dust of the earth (Genesis 2:7). Verse 7 of 2 Maccabees 28 is a mother’s expression of faith that since God created the world in the first place, he can bring her dead son back to life. Thus, the context suggests very strongly that she is speaking of re-creating what has been. The mother is not making a claim about creation out of nothing, but about God’s ability to reorganize what had previously existed in the same way that he had originally organized it. She sees that God can bring back her son because he created all things in the first place. Yet the act of bringing a person back to life certainly does not require creation where there was absolutely nothing before. Further, we have already seen that Aristotle also stated that generation of life is from relative non-existence (τοῦ μὴ ὄντος)—and it is probable that 2 Maccabees has in mind the same notion of relative nonbeing as a preexisting substrate.<sup>64</sup>

In their book, Copan and Craig attempt to counter the assertion that God created man “in the same way” that he created the world. They retreat once again to their two-stage theory of creation: first out of nothing and then from the chaotic materials to an organized creation. They admit that it is true that humans were not created out of nothing in the biblical text, but since humans are created from the dust of the earth, and the earth is created (they claim out of nothing), they claim that it is the same in 2 Maccabees where reference to creating man refers to a two-stage creation out of nothing (CON, p. 98). Yet there is absolutely no evidence of a two-stage creation theory in 2 Maccabees. Their *ad hoc* two-stage theory of creation is imposed

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64. Aristotle, *De Generatione Animalium* B5, 741, b 22f. J. C. O’Neill, “How Early Is the Doctrine of *Creatio ex Nihilo*?” *Journal of Theological Studies*, n.s., 53/2 (2002): 449–53, argues that 2 Maccabees reflects a well-established Jewish view of creation *ex nihilo*. However, he fails to note the parallel use of Aristotle’s phrase, which shows that “non-being” used in the context of generation means relative non-being from an already existing substrate. Almost all of O’Neill’s arguments are anticipated by Craig and Copan—and my response to them also answers O’Neill.

on the text as a maneuver to rescue their interpretation from what the text expressly states. Moreover, just a few verses earlier, the text states: “It is the creator of the universe who moulds man (πλάσας ἀνθρώπου) at his birth and plans the origin of all things (γένεσιν καὶ πάντων). Therefore, he, in his mercy, will give you back life and breath again” (2 Maccabees 7:23). The text expressly states that in creating man, God “moulds” or shapes man in his creation (πλάσας), in the sense of shaping a pre-existing clay or matter (see Romans 9:20; 1 Timothy 2:13). Thus, when 2 Maccabees 7:28 affirms that the heavens and earth are created “in the same way” that God moulded man, the text presupposes formation from a preexisting matter.

### Jewish and Christian Texts Teaching *Creatio ex Materia*

As demonstrated, it is quite certain that several Jewish texts expressly teach the doctrine of creation out of preexisting matter or a substrate of potential matter (potential matter is sometimes called “non-being” or “that which does not exist”—τὸ μὴ ὄν). As shown, 2 *Enoch* and *Joseph and Aseneth* taught that God created visible things from already existing invisible things.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, 2 Peter 3:5 teaches that God created the world from the already existing waters, and Hebrews 11:3, written by a Jew expressly to Jews, teaches creation from invisible things.

*The Wisdom of Solomon.* To these texts can be added the Wisdom of Solomon, a Jewish work dated by David Winston to AD 37–41,<sup>66</sup> which expressly teaches the doctrine of creation from matter: “For not without means was your almighty hand, that had fashioned the universe from formless matter” (Οὐ γὰρ ἡπόρει ἡ παντοδύναμός σου χεὶρ καὶ κτίσασα τὸν κόσμον ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης) (Wisdom of Solomon 11:17 NAB). Amazingly, Copan and Craig ignore this text altogether in their article but cite it in their book as a possible example of creation out of nothing! They assert:

65. 2 *Enoch* 25:1–2 and *Joseph and Aseneth* 12:1–3.

66. David Winston, *The Wisdom of Solomon: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1979), 3.

At first glance, the apocryphal book of Wisdom of Solomon (11:17) appears to posit a formless archmatter: God created “out of formless matter [*ex amorphou hylēs*]” (NRSV). This may be true, but even here, we should proceed with caution. In Wisdom 1:14, there could be in view a two-stage creation: “he created all things [*ektisen . . . ta panta*] that they might have being [*to einei*]” (NEB). . . . It is plausible to argue that the *hylē* (primal matter) out of which the cosmos was made was the uninhabited “earth [*gē*],” which was already created in Genesis 1:1. God shaped the world out of material he previously created. (CON, p. 97)

Hubler appropriately expresses his contempt for such reading into the text of one’s own preconceived theology. He claims of that argument that “*Wisdom of Solomon* must have tacitly held that a *creatio ex nihilo* occurred before the stated *creatio ex materia* because the author could not have accepted the Greek notion of eternal, formless matter. At best this begs the question. At worst it ignores the evidence of *creatio ex materia* found in Midrash and Philo.”<sup>67</sup> In fact, the text of the *Wisdom of Solomon* makes clear that creation out of unformed matter was seen by Jewish authors as consistent with assertions that God is all-powerful (παντοδύναμος) (11:17), that he creates the entire cosmos or universe (κτίσασα τὸν κόσμον) (11:17), and that he creates “the all” or the entirety of all there is (ἐκτίσεν . . . τὰ πάντα) (1:14) out of unformed matter (ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης) (11:17). Thus, this text undercuts all of Copan and Craig’s exegetic arguments. They continually argue that if God is all-powerful and creates all there is, then creation out of nothing must be the conclusion (see, for example, CON, pp. 43, 74–75, 84–87, 105–6, 127–28). These terms are all used in *Wisdom of Solomon*, however, which expressly teaches creation out of formless matter.

To assert, as Copan and Craig do, that this text must have a two-stage creation in view, where the creation of the cosmos out of formless matter must be preceded by creation out of nothing, imposes on

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67. Hubler, “*Creatio ex Nihilo*,” 89–90 n. 25.

the text a notion that not only does not appear there but is expressly contrary to what it does state. In light of their eisegesis of the Wisdom of Solomon, we have to ask: *What kind of evidence would be sufficient to show creation out of formless matter if a text that expressly states that God created the entire cosmos using unformed matter and says absolutely nothing about a creation out of nothing doesn't suffice?* Copan and Craig finally retreat to their debater's stance and a weak concession:

For the sake of argument, however, let us assume that Wisdom holds to this Greek hylomorphism (i.e., an eternally preexistent substrate is given form) and that a two-stage *ex nihilo* creation is completely excluded. We can still make a contrast here in that "the Palestinian [perspective] (II Mac. vii. 28) insists that all was made by God 'out of nothing.'" (CON, p. 97)

Their claim that the Hellenistic Jews believed in creation out of pre-existing material, whereas Palestinian Jews believed in creation out of nothing, is based upon a very questionable reading of 2 Maccabees 7:28, as we have seen.

*Philo Judaeus.* These texts also offer some understanding of the context of the writings of Philo Judaeus, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, and the Christian writers contemporary with him who referred to the creation in their works. Writing in the first century, Philo expressly taught that God created from already existing matter: "This cosmos of ours was formed out of all that there was of water, and air and fire, not even the smallest particle being left outside."<sup>68</sup> Elsewhere, Philo stated that "when the substance of the universe was without shape and figure God gave it these, when it had no definite character God molded it into definiteness."<sup>69</sup> Philo also asserted that, in the creation of the world, God

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68. Philo, *De Plantatione* 2.6.

69. Philo, *De Somniis* 2.6.45. However, it has long been debated whether Philo taught *creatio ex nihilo*. See, generally, Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 91–93; and May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 10–21.

summoned what had previously no being into existence, creating order out of disorder, and distinctive qualities out of things which had no such qualities, and similarities out of things dissimilar, and identity out of things which were different, and intercommunion and harmony out of things which had previously no communication nor agreement, and equality out of inequality, and light out of darkness; for he is always anxious to exert his beneficent powers in order to change whatever is disorderly from its present evil condition, and to transform it so as to bring it into a better state.<sup>70</sup>

Philo's statement that God "summons what previously had no being into existence" must be seen as asserting only that the underlying chaos did not have existence in the form of an ordered reality such as God creates of it by impressing form onto the formless. Copan and Craig suggest that in Philo's writings perhaps the matter organized by God was itself created at a prior instant *ex nihilo*. Frances Young has demonstrated why such a reading of Philo's texts forces an unstated and contrary assumption into the text, attributing to it something that it does not address at all.<sup>71</sup> Copan and Craig rely heavily on the 1966 study of Harry Wolfson in which he argued that Philo ultimately teaches that the chaotic and unformed matter referred to in Genesis 1:2 is created and that the chaos relies on Platonic ideas for its form and creation.<sup>72</sup> They also rely on the 1970 study by Ronald Williamson to argue that Philo's view of creation diverged from Plato's view of an eternal preexistent substratum of existence from which all else was created by the Demiurge imposing Form upon it.<sup>73</sup> However, they virtually misrepresent the much more complete and

70. Philo, *De Specialibus Legibus* 4.187, in *The Works of Philo*, trans. C. D. Yonge (n.p.: Hendrickson, 1995), 634.

71. Young, "Christian Doctrine of Creation," 139–51.

72. Harry A. Wolfson, "Plato's Pre-existent Matter in Patristic Philosophy," in *The Classical Tradition*, ed. Luitpold Wallach (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, University Press, 1966), 414–16. See also Henry A. Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 1:172.

73. Ronald Williamson, *Philo and the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Leiden: Brill, 1970), 374–76.

better-reasoned studies of David T. Runia. They cite Runia in support of the view that Philo taught creation out of nothing (CON, p. 110). But Runia expressly rejects their two-stage theory of creation from nothing. Rather, he asserts that, in Philo's writings, "God the creator bears a definite resemblance to the Platonic Demiurge, who creates order out of an already existing chaos. Philo nowhere explicitly indicates that God himself first created the primordial matter, as would later be formulated in the classic doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*."<sup>74</sup> Runia (whose dissertation addressed the relation between the thought of Philo and Plato) corrects the mistakes made by Wolfson and Williamson. As Runia observed:

Although in the *Timaeus* Plato explicitly declines to elaborate on the ultimate principles of reality, the cosmological dialogue was extensively used in order to formulate precisely such a doctrine. The influence of such attempts can be strongly felt in the Jewish exegete and philosopher Philo and the early Christian thinkers Justin and Clement. All three appear to espouse what one might call a "monarchic dualism." There is but one first cause or principle, but beside it a shadowy passive or negative matter is assumed, which is given form in the act of creation. This line of thinking is abandoned by Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus, who for the first time develop a reasonably clear doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>75</sup>

Copan and Craig make a fundamental assumption about Philo that turns out to be critically erroneous: they assume that if Philo believed that God creates the Ideas or Forms, and these in turn give form to the chaotic matter, then it follows that God also creates the chaotic matter out of nothing. Philo, however, held that God in fact eternally creates the Forms and (unlike Plato) that these Forms reside within God or his Logos rather than independently of God. Still, it

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74. David T. Runia, *Exegesis and Philosophy: Studies on Philo of Alexandria* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990), 8.

75. Web abstract of David T. Runia, "Plato's *Timaeus*, First Principle(s), and Creation in Philo and Early Christian Thought," in *Plato's Timaeus as Cultural Icon*, ed. Gretchen J. Reydam-Schils (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003), 133–51.

does not follow, if the Forms are eternally created and they give form to the chaotic substrate, that the underlying chaos is itself created. All that follows is that the Forms give form to an underlying preexisting chaos—which was Philo’s view. As Philo famously stated:

But Moses, who had early reached the very summits of philosophy . . . , was well aware that it is indispensable that in all existing things there must be an active cause, and a passive subject; and that the active cause is the intellect of the universe, thoroughly unadulterated and thoroughly unmixed, superior to virtue and superior to science, superior even to abstract good or abstract beauty; *while the passive subject is something inanimate and incapable of motion by any intrinsic power of its own, but having been set in motion, and fashioned, and endowed with life by the intellect, became transformed into that most perfect work, this world.*<sup>76</sup>

In this passage we see clearly the distinction between God’s intellect as the active cause of creation and the “passive subject” (τὸ δὲ παθητὸν) that is given form in the act of creation. This passive substrate already exists to receive form from the divine intellect. Philo also expressly denies that anything can come into being from absolute non-being or, having once existed, pass into non-being.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, Philo is very clear that unformed matter is not among the realities created by God:

But there is no material which has any value in the eyes of God, because he has given all materials an equal share of his skill. In reference to which it is said in the sacred scriptures, “God saw all that he had made, and, behold, it was very Good.” [Gen. 1:31.] But the things which receive an equal degree of praise, are by all means held in equal estimation by him who confers the praise; *and what God praised was not the materials which he had worked up into creation, destitute*

76. Philo, *De opificio mundi* 2.8–9, in *Works of Philo*, trans. Yonge, 3.

77. Philo, *De aeternitate mundi* 2.5, in *Works of Philo*, trans. Yonge, 707.

*of life and melody, and easily dissolved, and moreover in their own intrinsic nature perishable, and out of all proportion and full of iniquity,* but rather his own skillful work, completed according to one equal and well-proportioned power and knowledge always alike and identical. In reference to which all things were also accounted equal and similar by all the rules of proportion, according to the principles of art and knowledge.<sup>78</sup>

Thus Philo could not allow God to be involved in the creation of matter because it is evil and Philo is crystal clear that God does not bring about anything that is evil. It is true that Philo believed that time had a beginning when God ordered the world and the heavenly bodies began their revolutions.<sup>79</sup> But it appears that Philo believed that the eternal material substrate was perfectly inactive and passive, and thus it would have existed as motionless and outside of a time unmeasured by movement.<sup>80</sup> It seems to me that Philo's view is best seen in light of his view of creation proceeding from the dividing of opposites. God begins by dividing "the essence of the universe," from which he organizes the four essential elements of earth, air, water and fire. This "essence of the universe" is a formless and motionless substrate that is capable of receiving form from the divine Ideas through the action of the Logos. Philo stated:

For as the Creator divided our soul and our limbs in the middle, so also, in the same manner, did he divide the essence of the universe when he made the world; for, having taken it, he began to divide it thus: in the first instance, he made two divisions, the heavy and the light, separating that which was thick from that which was more subtle. After that, he again made a second division of each, dividing the subtle part into air and fire, and the denser portion into water and earth; and,

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78. Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres* 32.159–60, in *Works of Philo*, trans. Yonge, 289, emphasis added. See also, David Winston, "Philo's Theory of Cosmogony," in *Religious Syncretism in Antiquity*, ed. Birger A. Pearson (Missoula, MT: Scholars, 1975), 157–71.

79. Philo, *De aeternitate mundi* 10.52, in *Works of Philo*, trans. Yonge, 712.

80. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 92–93.



first of all, he laid down those elements, which are perceptible by the outward senses, to be, as it were, the foundations of the world which is perceptible by the outward senses.<sup>81</sup>

Thus, the order of creation according to Philo seems to be: (1) God eternally generates the ideas that constitute forms perceptible only to the mind or invisible things (the κόσμος νοητός); (2) God imposes order upon a passive and motionless, eternally preexisting substrate by impressing form upon it and dividing it into equal opposites; (3) God first creates water, air, earth, and fire; (4) from these four elements God creates the remainder of the creation; (5) the world or cosmos thus has a beginning because it is created from “what is not” and time begins with the creation of the cosmos.

1 *Clement*. Clement, bishop of Rome, shared the same worldview as Philo of an eternal fabric or constitution of the world from which the world was created. Clement stated: “Thou . . . didst make manifest the everlasting fabric of the world. Thou, Lord, didst create the earth.” The terms used here by Clement are significant. He asserts that God did “make manifest” (ἐφανεροποίησας) the “everlasting fabric of the world” (Σὺ τὴν ἀέναον τοῦ κόσμου σύστασιν).<sup>82</sup> He is referring to an eternal substrate that underlies God’s creative activity. Clement is important because he is at the very center of the Christian church as it was then developing. His view assumed that God had created from an eternally existing substrate, creating by “making manifest” what already existed in some form. The lack of argumentation or further elucidation indicates that Clement was not attempting to establish a philosophical position; he was merely maintaining a generally accepted one. However, the fact that such a view was assumed is even more significant than if Clement had argued for it. If he had presented an argument for this view, then we could assume that it was either a

81. Philo, *Quis rerum divinarum heres* 27.133–34, in *Works of Philo*, trans. Yonge, 287.

82. 1 *Clement* 60, in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. J. R. Harmer (1891; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book, 1956), 1:176. Lightfoot translates this text as: “Thou through Thine operations didst make manifest the everlasting fabric of the world” (1:303). See Oscar de Gebhardt and Adolphus Harnack, *Patrium Apostolicorum Opera: Clementis Romani* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1876), 1:100.

contested doctrine or a new view. But because he acknowledged it as obvious, it appears to have been a generally accepted belief in the early Christian church.

*Justin Martyr.* There are at least four late second-century Christian philosophers who believed that creation out of matter was the established Christian doctrine. It must be noticed that as we pass from the biblical texts into the patristic writings of the late second century, the scope of discourse passes from a nontechnical devotional and revelatory literature to the technical discussions of philosophy. By this time, philosophical distinctions and assumptions are used to make sense of the received doctrine. The importance of these philosophers, however, is not found in their arguments or philosophies but in the fact that they accepted the background assumption of creation from already existing matter precisely because they thought it *was* the received Christian doctrine.

For example, Justin Martyr, writing about AD 165, taught that Plato had received his doctrine of creation from Moses's writings:

And that you may learn that it was from our teachers—we mean the account given through the prophets—that Plato borrowed his statement that God, having altered matter which was shapeless, made the world, hear the very words spoken through Moses, who, as above shown, was the first prophet, and of greater antiquity than the Greek writers; and through whom the Spirit of prophecy, *signifying how and from what materials God at first formed the world* (ἐδημιούργησεν ὁ Θεὸς τὸν κόσμον), spake thus: “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was invisible and unfurnished, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God moved over the waters. And God said, Let there be light; and it was so.” So that both Plato and they who agree with him, and we ourselves, have learned, and you also can be convinced, that *by the word of God the whole world was made out of the substance* (Ὡστε λόγῳ Θεοῦ ἐκ τῶν

ὑποκειμένων . . . γεγενῆσθαι τὸν πάντα κόσμον) *spoken of before by Moses*.<sup>83</sup>

Like Philo, Justin Martyr thought that there was no problem in interpreting Genesis in Platonistic terms—God had created by organizing matter. Yet Justin’s statement that this is a doctrine “we . . . have learned” gives pause, for he is speaking to Greeks who agree with Plato. He is claiming that he has learned in the Christian tradition that via his Word, God created all things by organizing matter and that this view is older than Plato’s. The verb used by Justin to indicate that God created by “altering matter” is στρέψαντα (*strepsanta*), meaning “rotating or turning.” Such language echoes Plato’s view, taught in the *Timaeus*, that the Demiurge created the cosmos by setting the world soul in rotation and that by the same act matter is ordered.<sup>84</sup> Further, Justin uses the Platonic term for creation, ἐδημιούργησεν (*edēmiourgēsen*), “to fashion or form.” Note also that it is the entire world—τὸν πάντα κόσμον (*ton panta kosmon*)—that is formed out of the amorphous matter. Moreover, Justin gives this explanation in light of the statement in Genesis 1:1 that “In the beginning, God created the world.” What God did in Genesis 1:1, according to Justin, was to give form and shape to the underlying material substrate through the action of his Word.

Earlier in his *First Apology*, Justin declared: “God, in the beginning, in His goodness made (δημιουργῆσαι) everything out of shapeless matter (ἐξ ἀμόρφου ὕλης) for the sake of men.”<sup>85</sup> Again, Justin signals that he is referring to the opening statement in the Genesis creation account, “in the beginning God made” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ Θεός). Justin is quoting the Septuagint text of Genesis 1:1. Moreover, the scope of what God organized from shapeless matter is “everything” (τὰ πάντα). Once again he uses the Platonic term for creation,

83. Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 59.1–5, in *The Writings of Justin Martyr and Athenagoras*, trans. Marcus Dods, George Reight, and B. P. Pratten (Edinburgh: Clark, 1867), 57.

84. Plato, *Timaeus* 34a–b, 36e. Copan and Craig claim that Justin believed in a prior creation *ex nihilo* that is not mentioned in the text—but if it isn’t mentioned in the text then there is no evidence to support their view.

85. Justin Martyr, *1 Apology* 10.

*demiurgesai*, the act of the Demiurge in Plato's thought. These statements leave little doubt that Justin has embraced Middle Platonism and that he views everything created as having been fashioned out of a material substrate and that this mode of creation is the meaning of the Genesis creation account.

Nevertheless, Copan and Craig once again insist that Justin adopts a two-stage creation in which Justin believed that the formless matter was first created *ex nihilo* (CON, pp. 131–34).<sup>86</sup> Their primary argument is that God is referred to by Justin as the only “unbegotten” (ἀγεννήτος) and “incorruptible” (ἀφθαρτος) (CON, pp. 132–34).<sup>87</sup> They equate being unbegotten and incorruptible with being uncreated, and being begotten and corruptible with being created out of nothing. Yet it is an equation that is not found in Justin's writings. He never connects these terms with creation at all. Their argument will not bear the weight they place on it in light of Justin's explicit statements to the contrary. Once again, we see Copan and Craig forcing their preconceived view onto the text even against explicit and clear statements to the contrary. It seems to me that Copan and Craig have highlighted a problem that begins to manifest itself in Justin's works. The notion of God adopted by Middle Platonists was not consistent with the earlier Christian views and was inconsistent with Justin's views about creation. His adoption of Middle Platonic terms to describe God placed a gulf between the created and God just as it did for Philo. It is no mistake that Justin also adopts the Logos as half-way between God and creation. He did not realize this inconsistency, of course. Justin continued to hold to the view that God created out of a preexisting substrate that was not created by God. He states clearly that “everything” is created by giving order to this unformed matter. He is crystal clear that he is referring to the entire creation recounted in Genesis 1. It is only with Tatian and Theophilus that we first see a

86. They rely heavily on the conclusions of Eric Osborn, *Justin Martyr* (Tubingen: Mohr/Siebeck, 1973); and Eric Osborn, *Irenaeus of Lyons* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Osborn takes issue with Gerhard May's conclusion that Justin Martyr did not teach creation out of nothing but expressly adopted creation out of unformed matter.

87. Citing Justin Martyr, *2 Apology* 13, in PG 6:465; and *Dialogue* 5, in PG 6:488.

clearly articulated statement as to why the Middle Platonic view of God that they all adopted was inconsistent with creation out of a pre-existing, material substrate.

*Athenagoras of Athens.* Athenagoras of Athens, writing about AD 170, also taught that God created by crystallizing an already existing substrate: the *Logos*, or Word, “came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things, which lay like a nature without attributes, and an inactive earth, the grosser particles being mixed up with the lighter.”<sup>88</sup> However, Copan and Craig believe that Athenagoras adopted a two-stage creation where the “inactive earth” from which all things were created was itself created *ex nihilo*. Athenagoras, of course, never says that there is a two-stage creation, but Copan and Craig maintain that Athenagoras implicitly adopted creation out of nothing in the following passage:

But to us, who distinguish God from matter, and teach that matter is one thing and God another, and that they are separated by a wide interval (for that the Deity is uncreated and eternal, to be beheld by the understanding and reason alone, while matter is created and perishable), is it not absurd to apply the name of atheism? . . . But, since our doctrine acknowledges one God, the Maker of this universe, who is Himself uncreated (for that which is does not come to be, but that which is not) but has made all things by the *Logos* which is from Him. (CON, p. 134)<sup>89</sup>

Copan and Craig assert that “unquestionably,” Athenagoras teaches creation out of nothing here (CON, p. 144). Here they seriously misrepresent Athenagoras’s teachings. Once again we have a text that explicitly and repeatedly states that God creates by organizing an underlying material substrate, and yet Copan and Craig wrest the text in an attempt to make it conform to their two-stage

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88. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 10, trans. B. P. Pratten, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers* (hereafter ANF), ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 2:133.

89. Quoting Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 4 (ANF 2:131).

theory of creation *ex nihilo*. It is undeniable that here Athenagoras *does not assert* that all things are created “out of nothing,” but merely that, unlike God, they are “created.” Copan and Craig assume that if Athenagoras says that everything is created, that means they are created *ex nihilo*. However, Athenagoras did not use the word *create* to mean creation out nothing. His statement is consistent with the view that God organized the material substratum in creating and that all things are therefore created whereas God is not organized by himself. So I agree that Athenagoras distinguishes between creator and the created, but it is not the ontological distinction between the absolutely non-existent and self-existent, but between what can fall apart and perish because it has been organized and given form and that which is eternal and imperishable.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, Copan and Craig cite another passage (p. 135) that they believe supports creation out nothing; but in reality it supports the view that Athenagoras thinks of creation as organized unformed matter:

Because the multitude, who cannot distinguish between matter and God, or see how great is the interval which lies between them, pray to idols made of matter, are we therefore, who do distinguish and separate the uncreated and the created, that which is [τὸ ὄν] and that which is not [τὸ οὐκ ὄν], that which is apprehended by the understanding and that which is perceived by the senses . . .<sup>91</sup>

It is clear that Athenagoras distinguishes between the creator and the created, yet Copan and Craig fail to acknowledge that this assertion is followed by an explanation that undercuts their entire argument. First, the phrase τὸ οὐκ ὄν refers to the underlying material substrate and not to absolute nothing.<sup>92</sup> More important, and decisively, Athenagoras is explicit that his view of creation is organization

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90. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 8 (ANF 2:132–33).

91. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 15 (ANF 2:135).

92. May, *Creation Ex Nihilo*, 163.

and framing and that God is like an artist who stands in relation to the matter he has created as a potter stands to the clay:

But if they [God and matter] are at the greatest possible remove from one another—as far asunder as the artist and the materials of his art—why are we called to account? For as is the potter and the clay (matter being the clay, and the artist the potter), so is God, the Framer of the world, and matter, which is subservient to Him for the purposes of His art. But as the clay cannot become vessels of itself without art, so neither did matter, which is capable of taking all forms, receive, apart from God the Framer, distinction and shape and order. And as we do not hold the pottery of more worth than him who made it, nor the vessels or glass and gold than him who wrought them; but if there is anything about them elegant in art we praise the artificer, and it is he who reaps the glory of the vessels: even so with matter and God—the glory and honour of the orderly arrangement of the world belongs of right not to matter, but to God, the Framer of matter. So that, if we were to regard the various forms of matter as gods, we should seem to be without any sense of the true God, because we should be putting the things which are dissoluble and perishable on a level with that which is eternal.<sup>93</sup>

So God is one who organizes matter in the same way that a potter forms the clay—and such an analogy certainly is inconsistent with creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>94</sup> In fact, Athenagoras is explicit that his view of creation is the same as Plato's, who also says that God creates all things:

93. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 15 (ANF 2:135).

94. This view of God as artist and artificer because he creates by molding matter is further expressed in Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 16: "Whether, then, as Plato says, the world be a product of divine art, I admire its beauty, and adore the Artificer; or whether it be His essence and body, as the Peripatetics affirm, we do not neglect to adore God, who is the cause of the motion of the body, and descend 'to the poor and weak elements,' adoring in the impassible air (as they term it), passible matter; or, if any one apprehends the several parts of the world to be powers of God, we do not approach and do homage to the powers, but their Maker and Lord. I do not ask of matter what it has not to give, nor passing God by do I pay homage to the elements, which can do nothing more

But, inasmuch as it is impossible to demonstrate without the citation of names that we are not alone in confining the notion of God to unity, I have ventured on an enumeration of opinions. Plato, then, says, "To find out the Maker and Father of this universe is difficult; and, when found, it is impossible to declare Him to all," conceiving of one uncreated and eternal God. And if he recognises others as well, such as the sun, moon, and stars, yet he recognises them as created: "gods, offspring of gods, of whom I am the Maker, and the Father of works which are indissoluble apart from my will; but whatever is compounded can be dissolved." If, therefore, Plato is not an atheist for conceiving of one uncreated God, the Framers of the universe, neither are we atheists who acknowledge and firmly hold that He is God who has framed all things by the Logos, and holds them in being by His Spirit.<sup>95</sup>

It is transparent that Athenagoras believed that his views of God as the uncreated creator were the same as Plato's. He states that, just as Plato believed that one God framed the universe, so Christians also believe that God framed all things through the Logos or Word of God. He expressly states that Plato makes the same distinction between creator and created that Christians do. Yet it is clear that Plato believed that the universe had been created by organizing a preexisting material substrate. Thus, Copan and Craig have failed to read Athenagoras within the context of his own statements about the creator/creature dichotomy and have imposed their own theological agenda on him. Athenagoras is very clear that when he refers to "created things" he means those things that have forms or "patterns": "for created things

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than what they were bidden; for, although they are beautiful to look upon, by reason of the art of their Framers, yet they still have the nature of matter. And to this view Plato also bears testimony; 'for,' says he, 'that which is called heaven and earth has received many blessings from the Father, but yet partakes of body; hence it cannot possibly be free from change.' If, therefore, while I admire the heavens and the elements in respect of their art, I do not worship them as gods, knowing that the law of dissolution is upon them, how can I call those objects gods of which I know the makers to be men?" (ANF 2:136).

95. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 6 (ANF 2:131–32).



are like their patterns; but the uncreated are unlike, being neither produced from any one, nor formed after the pattern of any one.”

It must be recognized that Athenagoras’s doctrine is thoroughly Platonic, notwithstanding the fact that he seeks to defend Christian doctrine. He posits a vast chasm between the created and the creator such that an intermediary is necessary for God to have contact with the world. He presents a thoroughly Middle Platonic view of God. His view of the *Logos*, in particular, is derived from Stoicism and Platonism. The *Logos* is the energizing instrument of God through whom the underlying substrate of matter is given form from the Ideas of God:

But if, in your surpassing intelligence, it occurs to you to inquire what is meant by the Son, I will state briefly that He is the first product of the Father, not as having been brought into existence (for from the beginning, God, who is the eternal mind [νοῦς], had the *Logos* in Himself, being from eternity instinct with *Logos* [λογικός]); but inasmuch as He came forth to be the idea and energizing power of all material things, which lay like a nature without attributes, and an inactive earth, the grosser particles being mixed up with the lighter.<sup>96</sup>

*Hermogenes.* The writings of Tertullian tell of Hermogenes, another Christian philosopher writing around the end of the second century who believed in creation *ex materia*. Hermogenes wrote after Tatian and Theophilus had formulated the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. By this time, all parties discussing the issue were working from Middle Platonic assumptions about God and matter. Tertullian tells us that Hermogenes argued for the existence of eternal matter based on the Middle Platonic assumption that matter is evil and therefore cannot be created by a good God:

But we find evil things made by him, although not by choice or will. Because if they were made by his choice or will,

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96. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 10 (ANF 2:133, brackets in original).

he would have made something inconsistent or unworthy of himself. What he does not make by his choice, must be understood to be made by the fault of another thing: from matter without doubt.<sup>97</sup>

*Clement of Alexandria.* Finally, Clement of Alexandria, writing about AD 220, also adopted the view that matter is eternal and that God created by organizing a chaotic substratum. Indeed, Clement used the phrase made *out of nothing* three times in the *Stromata*, but each time he used the technical term ἐκ μὴ ὄντος, which shows that he was discussing creation from relative nonbeing rather than *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>98</sup> Clement clearly favored creation *ex materia* in a poem:

O King . . .  
 Maker of all, who heaven and heaven's adornment  
 By the Divine Word alone didst make;  
 . . . according to a well-ordered plan;  
 Out of a confused heap who didst create  
 This ordered sphere, and from the shapeless mass  
 Of matter didst the universe adorn.<sup>99</sup>

These texts are significant because they show that creation out of matter was still the accepted view. Further, as Young indicates, these texts show that *creatio ex nihilo* was not an inheritance from either the Jewish or the earliest Christian tradition during the apostolic period. Young's reasons for rejecting the assumption of a Jewish origin for the doctrine include:

- (i) the sparsity of reference to the doctrine in Jewish texts, and indeed in the earliest Christian material, and the problem of interpreting those references that do exist . . . ;
- (ii) the contrary evidence of the *Wisdom of Solomon* and the works of Philo, and in early Christianity, of Justin, Athenagoras, Hermogenes and Clement of Alexandria. All

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97. Tertullian, *Adversus Hermogenes* 2.5.

98. Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 308.

99. Clement, *The Instructor* 3.12, as quoted in Norman, "Ex Nihilo," 308.

these authors seem quite happy to adopt without question the Platonic view of an active and passive element, namely God plus matter. The fact that Philo can even so speak of things being created *ex ouk ontōn* shows that the term could be understood as consistent with the notion of pre-existent matter which he takes for granted elsewhere. Middle Platonism was married with Jewish tradition without any sense of tension;

(iii) the lack of interest in *creatio ex nihilo* in Jewish tradition prior to the Middle Ages: the Rabbis condemn speculation about creation as much as about the chariot-throne of God!<sup>100</sup>

### The Creation out of Nothing of the Doctrine of Creation *ex Nihilo*

The significance of these texts for Latter-day Saints is not that they teach a Latter-day Saint view of matter and of God—they do not. Rather, they show that the view that God created *ex nihilo* was an innovation that occurred around the end of the second century AD. They show that a wholesale adoption of Middle Platonist views had overrun the Christian apologists. As Hubler puts it:

*Creatio ex nihilo* marked a major redefinition of the material cosmos by the Christian apologists of the late second century, Tatian and Theophilus of Antioch. . . . For Stoic, Platonist, and Peripatetic alike matter imposed the natural necessity of corruption upon the body. The moral limitations imposed by matter made a bodily resurrection seem offensive. Christian hopes for a resurrection seemed misguided both intellectually and morally. The Christian apologists of the late second century struck back by redefining matter as a creature of God, which he directed to his purpose. The religious claims

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100. Young, "Christian Doctrine of Creation," 141.

of the Christian apologists signaled a major philosophical change.<sup>101</sup>

It must be noted, however, that the position adopted by Justin, Athenagoras, Hermogenes, and Clement of Alexandria that God created by organizing matter was inherently unstable within the context of their theology because each of them had espoused a thoroughly Middle Platonic view of God. The early Christians had been accused of being atheists (much the same way Latter-day Saints are now accused of not being Christian) because they did not accept the Greek view of the gods. Instead of responding by defending the Christian view of a God who could reveal himself in flesh, Athenagoras argued that Christians believed in the same God as the Greeks:

I have sufficiently shown that they are not atheists who believe in One who is unbegotten, eternal, unseen, impassible, incomprehensible and uncontained: comprehended by mind and reason alone, invested with ineffable light and beauty and spirit and power, by whom the universe is brought into being and set in order and held firm, through the agency of his own *Logos*.<sup>102</sup>

As we shall see, the adoption of the Middle Platonic notion of God by Christian apologists in the late second century was a major motivating factor behind the invention of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*. In particular, God was conceived as being completely beyond and independent of the world. Given the Middle Platonist view of God, creation out of nothing became a logical extension of God's otherness and transcendence.

Copan and Craig argue that *creatio ex nihilo* did not develop in the late second century as a result of the interaction between Greek philosophy and Christian philosophers, that the doctrine was already well established prior to that time. Once again, though, in taking this position, Copan and Craig are departing from virtually every other

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101. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," v.

102. Athenagoras, *Legatio pro Christianis* 10.

scholar who has carefully treated the issue—except the group of conservative, evangelical writers that they rely on in their book—and thus they arrive at a contrary conclusion.<sup>103</sup> In the extensive investigation regarding the origin of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* in his 1995 doctoral dissertation, Hubler concludes:

*Creatio ex nihilo* appeared suddenly in the latter half of the second century C.E. Not only did *creatio ex nihilo* lack precedent, it stood in firm opposition to all the philosophical schools of the Greco-Roman world. As we have seen, the doctrine was not forced upon the Christian community by their revealed tradition, either in Biblical texts or the Early Jewish interpretation of them. As we will also see it was not a position attested in the New Testament doctrine or even sub-apostolic writings. It was a position taken by the apologists of the late second century, Tatian and Theophilus, and developed by various ecclesiastical writers thereafter, by Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Origen. *Creatio ex nihilo* represents an innovation in the interpretive traditions of revelation and cannot be explained merely as a continuation of tradition.<sup>104</sup>

Hubler explores at length why the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* suddenly appears at the end of the second century. The answer is that Christian philosophers accepted two key Middle Platonist doctrines that made *creatio ex nihilo* the only acceptable position to them. First, they confronted the Middle Platonic view that “matter imposed the natural necessity of corruption upon the body.”<sup>105</sup> The doctrine of bodily resurrection seemed offensive to the Greeks because it implied

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103. See May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*; Winston, “Philo’s Theory of Cosmogony,” 157–71; Winston, *Wisdom of Solomon*, 3, 38–40; Ian G. Barbour, *Religion in an Age of Science* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1990), 144–46; Young, “Christian Doctrine of Creation”; Goldstein, “Recantations and Restatements,” 187–94. Goldstein argues that Rabban Gamaliel II taught the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* but admits that no Jewish text adopted it before or after his time until about the mid-ninth to mid-tenth centuries. However, Young and Hubler disagree with Goldstein and hold that not even Gamaliel taught *creatio ex nihilo*.

104. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 102.

105. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” v.

that persons would be eternally embodied in corruptible material forms. The first Christian philosophers to adopt *creatio ex nihilo* attacked this view of matter by redefining the matter of which the body was made as a creation *ex nihilo* of God, which he directed to his purposes.<sup>106</sup> Second, these same philosophers also adopted the Middle Platonic view that whatever is eternal is absolutely immutable or unchangeable. They reasoned (fallaciously) that if God is immutable in this sense, then matter cannot be unchanging like God. However, given Platonic and Middle Platonist views that everything that is eternal is immutable and that matter cannot be immutable, it followed that matter must be created *ex nihilo*.<sup>107</sup> May reaches a similar conclusion in his extensive study:

If one reviews only the orthodox line of the development that leads to the formation of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, there emerges a picture unambiguous in its main outline. For the primitive Christian thinkers the origin of the world does not yet present a problem. Even in the early second century, after the intensive concern of gnosticism with cosmology had set in, the spokesmen for church Christianity still stand by the traditional statements about the creation of the world and do not allow themselves to get involved in controversy over the new questions. At the same time philosophically educated teachers like Justin interpret the creation as world-formation and establish a relationship between the “cosmogony of Moses” and the myth of world-creation in the *Timaeus*. . . . Then in the controversy, partly conducted in parallel and partly overlapping with both the gnostic and the philosophical cosmologies, the world-formation model is overcome and the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* formulated as a counter-proposition, which as early as the beginning of the third century is regarded as a fundamental tenet of Christian theology.<sup>108</sup>

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106. See Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 117–21, referring to Tatian’s writings.

107. Hubler, “Creatio ex Nihilo,” 121–22, quoting Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.4.

108. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, 179.

Thus, it is not just Latter-day Saints who argue that the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is essentially a philosophical innovation dating from the end of the second century AD that was not contained in scripture—it is the accepted view of virtually every scholar who has reviewed the evidence at length, except Copan and Craig.

Though Tatian was a pupil of Justin, his views were quite different from those of his teacher. He began by defining a new view of God: “Our God has no origin in time, since he alone is without beginning and himself is the beginning of all things.”<sup>109</sup> The Middle Platonists had adopted a view of God as transcendent and utterly independent while limiting his involvement with the world to creation by matter and the necessities inherent in matter. Tatian created a new view of God, who is alone in his power and able to create matter out of nothing. Apparently, Tatian is the first person in history to expressly teach the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.<sup>110</sup> The reason that matter had to be created *ex nihilo*, according to Tatian, is that otherwise it would be equal to God:

Neither is matter without cause as is God, nor is it equal in power to God because it is without cause. It was generated and it was not generated by anyone else, but it was expressed only by the demiurge of all. Therefore, we believe that there will be a resurrection of bodies after the consummation of everything, not as the Stoics who dogmatize about cycles of things becoming and the same things becoming again without purpose. When the ages are once completed for us at the

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109. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 4.2, in Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments*, ed. and trans. Molly Whittaker (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 9.

110. May, *Creatio Ex Nihilo*, ch. 3, argues that Basilides, a Gnostic writing about AD 160, was the first person to develop a notion of *creatio ex nihilo*. Basilides stated: “There was a time . . . when there was nothing; not even the nothing was there, but simply, clearly and without sophistry, there was nothing at all. When I say ‘there was’, . . . I do not indicate a Being, but in order to signify what I want to express I say. . . that there was nothing at all.” Hippolytus, *The Refutation of All Things* 7.20.2. While I am open to this view, I tend to agree with Young and Hubler that Basilides is not expressing the concept of *creatio ex nihilo* but speaking of the limits of language regarding nonbeing. See Young, “Christian Doctrine of Creation,” 147–50.

end, there will be a resurrection of humans alone for ever for the purpose of judgement.<sup>111</sup>

Tatian adopted the notion of the necessity of creation of matter to address two problems: first, he sought to avoid the theory of eternal cycles of matter taught by the Stoics; and second, he sought to establish the concept of God transcending a world caught in such an eternal cycle of material necessity. Tatian argued that matter is not an ultimate principle (*ἀναρχον*)—it is not uncaused—countering the Stoic view that a personal resurrection makes no sense because everything is bound by the necessity of an eternal recurrence in a never-ending cycle (*ἐκπύρωσις*). Tatian's rejection of eternal matter as an *ἀρχή*, or uncaused principle, like God, removed matter from the eternal cycle of never-ending recurrence and the necessity of *ἐκπύρωσις*.<sup>112</sup> Tatian also argued that it is not impossible for God to restore the dead to life through resurrection because he can create individuals out of nothing initially: "God the regent (*μοναρχία*), when he wills, will completely restore the substance which is visible alone to him to its original state."<sup>113</sup> For Tatian, matter is the sensible expression of the rational *Logos*, derived from the Middle Platonic doctrine of internal reason that gives form to matter through verbal expression.<sup>114</sup> As Hubler concludes in his section on Tatian:

The coincidence of *μοναρχία*, the need to defend the resurrection and the *Logos* theology, conspired to produce an entirely new understanding of the material cosmos and its dependence upon God in Tatian's work. His new vision was seized upon almost immediately by other Christian writers and soon became the new orthodoxy.<sup>115</sup>

So far as we can see, Tatian never considered the alternative of simply rejecting the Stoic view of eternal recurrence as a necessary prop-

111. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 5–6, in Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 118–19.

112. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 119.

113. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 6, in Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 119.

114. Tatian, *Oratio ad Graecos* 5, in Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 120.

115. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 121.



erty of matter. Yet he could easily have done so without adopting an entirely new doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*.

Theophilus was the second person in history to expressly adopt the view of *creatio ex nihilo*. He wrote shortly after Tatian, around AD 180. However, Theophilus's reasons for adopting this new dogma went beyond Tatian's. Rather than addressing the Stoics, as Tatian had done, Theophilus argued directly against the Middle Platonists. His argument accepted the basic premises of the Middle Platonists about matter and then attempted to reduce them to absurdity by showing that they led to an anthropomorphic view of God—which Middle Platonists rejected. Thus, it is clear that both Theophilus and the Middle Platonists had a common nonanthropomorphic concept of God; they differed over a concept of matter that they believed was necessitated by a view of God as absolutely immutable in the Platonic sense. Whereas the biblical authors had thought of God as unchanging in character and commitment to justice, the Middle Platonists and Theophilus thought of God as unchanging in a metaphysical sense. Theophilus argued:

Plato and those of his school agree that God is ungenerated and the father and maker of all. Then, they suppose matter is divine and ungenerated and they say that it was flourishing with God. If God is ungenerated and all matter is ungenerated, no longer is God the maker of all as the Platonists say, neither is the sovereignty of God shown, by their own account. Further, just as God is changeless because he is ungenerated, so also, if matter is also ungenerated, it is also changeless and equal to God. For that which is generated is mutable and changeable. The ungenerated is immutable and unchangeable.

For how is it great, if God made the cosmos from subject matter? For even the human artisan when he receives matter from someone, can make what he wants from it. The power of

God is made manifest in this, that he made what he wanted from the non-existent (ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων).<sup>116</sup>

Theophilus's use of the expression ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων expressed rejection of the idea that matter is in any sense eternal. It is a clear expression of *creatio ex nihilo*. Theophilus thought that the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* was necessary to adopt for three reasons. First, if God were limited to creating by organizing matter in the same way as humans, then the way in which God manifests his power would not be unique. Such a view of creation was contrary to a principle adopted by Middle Platonists themselves that God is *not* anthropomorphic. The Middle Platonists had adopted a program of ridiculing the common anthropomorphic view of God expressed in the poetic and popular writings of the Greeks.<sup>117</sup> Theophilus argued that the common view of God that both he and the Middle Platonists adopted entailed the view that God cannot create in the same manner as mere humans by organizing already existing matter; rather, God's mode of creation must be utterly different and unique.<sup>118</sup> Theophilus had thoroughly imbibed the Middle Platonic view of God, for he argued that God is "ineffable . . . inexpressible . . . uncontainable . . . incomprehensible . . . inconceivable . . . incomparable . . . unteachable . . . immutable . . . inexpressible . . . without beginning because he was uncreated, immutable because he is immortal."<sup>119</sup> Theophilus backed this argument for *creatio ex nihilo* with another common argument adopted by the Middle Platonists, that God must be self-sufficient:

And first they [the prophets] taught us in harmony that he made all things from non being [ἐξ οὐκ ὄντων τὰ πάντα ἐποίησεν], for nothing is as ancient as God, but he is his own

116. Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 2.4, in Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 121–22.

117. Celsus, writing about AD 177, and Porphyry, writing a century later, were among the leading antagonists to ridicule Christian views of God and resurrection; see Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 115–17. For a sample of the Christian philosophical response, see Origen, *Contra Celsum* 5.14, ed. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

118. See Apuleius, *De Platone et Eius Dogmate* 45.

119. Theophilus, *Ad Autolycum* 1.3–4, quoted in Robert L. Wilken, *The Christians as the Romans Saw Them* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 151.

locus and without need and existing before the ages, he wished to make the human so that he would be known by him. For him he prepared the cosmos. For the generated is needy, the ungenerated needs nothing.<sup>120</sup>

Second, Theophilus argued that God would not be the creator of all things if some things existed without God's having created them. Yet if God were not creator of all, then the divine monarchy (μοναρχία) would not be preserved. Thus God's omnipotence required creation out of absolute nothing. Given the Middle Platonist view of matter as something evil and recalcitrant, it was unthinkable that God's power could be so limited as to require matter from which to create. I have argued elsewhere that such a position is not necessary to all views of God's relation to eternal matter, for the Latter-day Saint concept of uncreated matter in particular does not adopt the view that matter is either inherently evil or recalcitrant; rather, in the Latter-day Saint view, matter is entirely subject to God for any expression of its causal and lawlike properties.<sup>121</sup> Of course, such a view of uncreated matter wholly subject to God was quite foreign to Theophilus and the Middle Platonists.

Third, Theophilus argued that matter cannot be eternal because what is eternal must be immutable in the Platonic sense, and matter is subject to change. In the Platonic view, what is real and eternal is absolute and unchanging in every respect, and those things that change are real only to the extent that they participate in these unchanging ideas or forms. In effect, Theophilus's reasons for adopting the new doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* were based on his adoption of the Middle Platonic view of God, which was also a radical innovation in Christianity—a God who is seen as immutable, self-sufficient, and utterly unlike humans in every respect. Platonists, both Middle and Neo-, assumed as a given fact the view that humans inhabit the lowest realm of reality, furthest from the one ground of actual being. Only God inhabited this ideal realm. Thus, anything embodied was not pure and real.

120. Theophilus, *Ad Autolyicum* 2.10, in Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 123.

121. See Blake T. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought: The Attributes of God* (Salt Lake City: Kofford, 2001), 105–35.

Christians had been repeatedly attacked by Platonists for their childish view of a God who could be embodied and could change in this realm of crass matter, so far removed from the pure realm of being. Hubler concludes his discussion of Theophilus by writing:

Theophilus used the Platonist doctrine of God not only to attack their view of matter but to develop a new view. In choosing the Middle-Platonist doctrine of God over their view of nature, he left nature entirely subject to God. As a result, although his doctrine is Middle-Platonist in its expression, it is steadfastly non-Middle Platonic in its outcome, both in its monism and in the radical dependence of nature upon God. Theophilus foreshadows the coming of monism to Platonist philosophy in the next century in the work of Plotinus.<sup>122</sup>

Of course, Theophilus's resolution of the problems posed by Middle Platonic philosophy created additional problems for Christian theology. Because it reinterpreted the biblical concept of creation within the scope of a Middle Platonic view of God, the new concept generated all kinds of new problems about how God was described in the biblical documents—but that issue was not addressed by Theophilus and had to wait for Origen and Augustine, who created a thoroughly Neoplatonic view of God within the Christian tradition.<sup>123</sup> As May concludes:

Theophilus did not of course fully realise what a radical break with the theological tradition the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* constituted. He can even himself still talk of creation out of nothing in the older undifferentiated sense: as a proof of the possibility of the resurrection he points out that God created man out of nothing, in that he formed him from a tiny drop of seed which did not exist before. Theophilus takes no account of the question whether in that case one can talk of a *creatio ex nihilo* in the real sense at all. He simply wants to exalt the

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122. Hubler, "Creatio ex Nihilo," 124.

123. See May, *Creation Ex Nihilo*, 160–63.

miraculous factor in the process of begetting and developing human beings, while in his statements about the creation of the world out of nothing the decisive factor is the idea of absolute unconditionality.<sup>124</sup>

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* found its most developed formulation among early Christians of the late second century in the writings of Irenaeus, bishop of Lyon. Irenaeus battled the gnostic myths that had infiltrated Christianity almost since its beginning. However, Irenaeus himself had been influenced by the very philosophies he battled. May describes the situation: “Irenaeus is a clear thinker and by no means uneducated. His concept of God is, like that of the Apologists, strongly marked with popular philosophical ideas. God is unoriginate, eternal, needs nothing, is self-sufficient, and confers existence on everything that is. . . . As the Unoriginate he stands over against every originate being.”<sup>125</sup> Irenaeus also taught that God is simple in the sense that one cannot divide his being into a series of effects that proceed from another—a doctrine that marked the simplicity of God in the then-emerging precepts of Neoplatonism:

For He is Himself uncreated, both without beginning and end, and lacking nothing. He is Himself sufficient for Himself; and still further, He grants to all others this very thing, existence; but the things which have been made by him have received a beginning. But whatsoever things had a beginning, and are liable to dissolution, and are subject to and stand in need of Him who made them, must necessarily in all respects have a different term [applied to them] . . . so that He indeed who made all things can alone, together with His Word, properly be termed God and Lord: but the things which have been made cannot have this term applied to them, neither should they justly assume that appellation which belongs to the Creator.<sup>126</sup>

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124. May, *Creation Ex Nihilo*, 163.

125. May, *Creation Ex Nihilo*, 165.

126. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 3.8.3 (ANF 1:422).

Elsewhere, Irenaeus claimed: “While men, indeed, cannot make anything out of nothing, but only out of matter already existing, yet God is in this point preeminently superior to men, that He Himself called into being the substance of His creation, when previously it had no existence.”<sup>127</sup> The same argument, claiming that God’s mode of creation must be unique and utterly unlike human modes of creation, had been used by Theophilus. This doctrine created problems for Irenaeus’s soteriology (theory of salvation), which taught that salvation consisted in persons becoming perfect like God and, indeed, gods themselves: “For we cast blame upon Him, because we have not been made gods from the beginning, but at first merely men, then at length gods.”<sup>128</sup> He explained that “God had power at the beginning to grant perfection to man; but as the latter was only recently created, he could not possibly have received it, or even if he had received it, could he have contained it, or containing it, could he have retained it.”<sup>129</sup> But it then appears that God cannot, after all, create persons perfect and must be responsible for having created something imperfect. However, Irenaeus argued that even though God can create man perfect; he nevertheless cannot create man capable of accepting perfection because man is only recently created: “For from the very fact of these things having been created, [it follows] that they are not uncreated; but by their continuing in being throughout a long course of ages, they shall receive a faculty of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon them by God.”<sup>130</sup> Irenaeus thus claims that God will bestow the “faculty of the Uncreated” on humans, even though they are created. Yet Irenaeus’s claim here seems simply incoherent, for God cannot give the status of being uncreated to created things. Nor can God create man with the capacity for perfection and deification if what he creates is incapable of receiving perfection, when it is given, because of man’s status as a contingent creature. In the end,

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127. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 2.10.4 (ANF 1:370).

128. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.38.4 (ANF 1:522).

129. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.38.2 (ANF 1:521).

130. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* 4.38.3 (ANF 1:521).

being gods and divine means nothing more for Irenaeus than becoming immortal through resurrection.

Of course, the tension between the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* and the view that human nature must be created became the central issue only later, during the Arian dispute. Arius held that Christ, as a begotten son, must have been a created being and thus ontologically contingent in his being, whereas the Father was uncreated, or ontologically necessary. Thus, the divide between creator and creature became so pronounced that it is logically impossible that they both be found in the same person, Christ. I have argued elsewhere that the attempt to resolve this basic logical contradiction at the very center of creedal beliefs is not resolved by the two-nature theory of Christology adopted at Chalcedon in AD 421.<sup>131</sup> This central dispute also divides creedalists from Latter-day Saints, for it is precisely this ontological gulf between creator and created that makes it impossible for creedalists to accept the early Christian doctrine that we, mere humans, can nevertheless “be partakers of the divine nature,” as 2 Peter 1:4 KJV affirms. It is the central conundrum that plagued Irenaeus’s theology, which also shows why the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* is pivotal to theological and philosophical issues dividing Latter-day Saints from conservative Protestants like Copan and Craig.

The apologists of the late second century adopted *creatio ex nihilo* primarily because it was required by the Middle Platonic view of God, which they had also adopted. They were quite correct to point out that God, as conceived by the Middle Platonists, had to be completely independent of the world and stand over against it. But this is not a Christian view of God that they are defending. Rather, it is the adoption of the God of Greek philosophy that required them to modify the biblical doctrine of creation so radically. The eminent historian Robert Wilken notes:

Since the time when the Apologists first began to offer a reasoned and philosophical presentation of Christianity to pagan intellectuals, Christian thinkers had claimed that they

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131. See Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 409–50.

worshipped the same God honored by the Greeks and Romans, in other words, the deity adored by other reasonable men and women. Indeed, Christians adopted precisely the same language to describe God as did pagan intellectuals. The Christian apologist Theophilus of Antioch described God as “ineffable . . . inexpressible . . . uncontainable . . . incomprehensible . . . inconceivable . . . incomparable . . . unteachable . . . immutable . . . inexpressible . . . without beginning because he was uncreated, immutable because he is immortal.” This view, that God was an immaterial, timeless, and impassible divine being, who is known through the mind alone, became a keystone of Christian apologetics, for it served to establish a decisive link to the Greek spiritual and intellectual tradition.<sup>132</sup>

The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* followed from the adoption of the Middle Platonic view of God’s transcendence of the created order. It was the doctrine of God that, above all, heralded the shift from the biblical view of God, whom persons may encounter in sacred experience, to the God of the philosophers, who is grasped by reason alone. Hatch summarized the difference between the transcendent God of the Middle Platonists and the God of faith:

From the earliest Christian teaching, indeed, the conception of the transcendence of God is absent. God is near to men and speaks to them: He is angry with them and punishes them: He is merciful to them and pardons them. He does all this through His angels and prophets, and last of all through His Son. But he needs such mediators rather because a heavenly Being is invisible, than because He is transcendent. . . . There was no taste for metaphysical discussion: there was possibly no appreciation of metaphysical conceptions.<sup>133</sup>

Tertullian, writing near the beginning of the third century, also adopted the dogma of *creatio ex nihilo*. Employing an argument that

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132. Wilken, *Christians as the Romans Saw Them*, 151.

133. Hatch, *Influence of Greek Ideas*, 251–52.



was later adopted by Augustine and still later by Aquinas, albeit in a different form, Tertullian reasoned that the idea of *creatio ex nihilo* followed from God's unconditioned power: "He cannot be known as God and be called Almighty, save that He is no longer almighty, if His might did not extend to this also—to produce all things out of nothing! . . . He cannot say that it was as its Lord that God made use of matter for the work of <creating> the world, for He could not be Lord of a substance which was coequal with Himself."<sup>134</sup>

It was this argument that won the day for *creatio ex nihilo* more than anything else. I think that the earliest Christians would not have been open to the notion of *creatio ex nihilo* if it had not captured at least a flavor of the biblical doctrine of creation and God's power. This new doctrine embodied the sense that God was completely sovereign in every respect. Nothing could oppose him. There is no threat of a primeval chaos rushing into God's creation from above the vault or firmament that God had created, as appeared in Genesis 1:6–8. There is no sense that God consulted with other divine beings in the creation, as in Genesis 1:26–27 and Psalm 82. There is no sense that God might confront a real evil that he could not simply wipe out at will, at any time he wanted. Yet even this sense of unconditioned power gave rise to philosophical questions regarding the compatibility of the existence of such a God with the reality of evil—questions that would not be addressed until the time of Origen and that remain unresolved within the creedal tradition even today. If God can wipe out any real evil at will, then anything we take to be evil is, in reality, all for the greater good because whatever truly exists is good. Evil, then, cannot be real. For this reason, Augustine argued that what we take to be evil is not real being; it is merely the privation or lack of being. Thus evil in this life is like everything we experience within the Platonic tradition: a mere appearance and not really real.

In addition to the problem of evil that this doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* renders so stark and unfathomable, there is the question of

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134. Tertullian, *The Treatise against Hermogenes* 8.2 and 9.1, trans. J. H. Wasznik (New York: Newman, 1956), 37; Latin text in *Patrologiae Latinae*, ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris: n.p., 1878), 2:227. Augustine's argument to the same effect is in *De civitate dei* 5.10.

whether God must create out of nothing to be considered almighty. I have contended elsewhere that this argument based on God's omnipotent power is not sound, for the reason that God need not be able to alter the past to be considered omnipotent.<sup>135</sup> One cannot reasonably argue, as Tertullian tried to do, from the definition of omnipotence to rule out the possibility that matter is eternal in the sense that it has always existed.

## Conclusion

I believe that we can conclude quite confidently that Copan and Craig have seriously misunderstood the evidence that they present in support of creation *ex nihilo*. Based on the evidence that I have reviewed, the following conclusions seem warranted:

1. The New Testament does not teach creation *ex nihilo*. On the contrary, 2 Peter 3:5–6 expressly teaches that God created out of the already existing chaotic waters, Hebrews 11:3 expressly teaches that God created the visible world from the already existing invisible world, and Romans 4:17 teaches that God created from an already existing substrate.

2. The claim made by Copan and Craig that the dogma of *creatio ex nihilo* was already well established in the Jewish texts about the time of Christ is simply false. None of the texts they cite for this conclusion addresses the doctrine of creation out of nothing. Indeed, some of the Jewish texts that they claim teach *creatio ex nihilo*, such

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135. Ostler, *Exploring Mormon Thought*, 105–35. Once a given state of affairs (SA1) occurs, all states of affairs inconsistent or noncompossible with SA1 are logically precluded as possibilities. There is therefore a distinction between the logically possible and the actually possible. Though a state of affairs is possible in a broadly logical sense, it may be excluded as an actual possibility on the grounds that another logically possible state of affairs has already come to pass. Thus, if SA1 is a logically possible state of affairs, then it is possible for SA1 never to actually occur; but once SA1 has occurred, it is no longer possible for SA1 never to occur. If physical realities have always existed in some form or another—a state of affairs SA2—then what it is actually possible for God to bring about is logically limited to states of affairs compossible with SA2. It seems that any coherent idea of omnipotence must take into account what has occurred in the actual world at any given time. Thus, it follows that a coherent account of divine omnipotence must inquire whether material states have always existed to determine what is within God's power.

as 2 *Enoch* and *Joseph and Aseneth*, expressly teach that God created the world by making visible those invisible things that already existed. In addition, none of the Christian texts cited by Copan and Craig, such as the Shepherd of Hermas and the *Odes of Solomon*, actually teach *creatio ex nihilo*. Indeed, these texts better exemplify the doctrine of *creatio ex materia*. Further, it is clear that several Jewish texts from around the time of Christ, such as the writings of Philo Judaeus and the Wisdom of Solomon, as well as several early Christian writers such as Clement, Justin Martyr, and Athenagoras, expressly teach the doctrine of *creatio ex materia*.

3. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* seems to appear rather suddenly about AD 180 in the writings of Tatian and Theophilus in their arguments with Stoics and Middle Platonists. It is fairly clear that it arose as a philosophical consequence of their adoption of a Middle Platonic concept of God. What we see in all texts from about AD 165 and after is that Platonic philosophy, both Middle and Neo-, had infiltrated Christian thought and become a basis for major innovations in doctrine. Latter-day Saints see this as the apostasy in action, in living color. The personal God of the Bible, known through revelation and personal encounter, is suddenly too far removed from the human sphere of existence to be involved in such things as interactions with humans. The notion that humans are created in the image and likeness of God must be reinterpreted to fit the Platonic view that God is utterly unique and entirely unlike humans. God's mode of creation, therefore, must be completely different from any human mode of creation. The Middle Platonic assumption that only the absolutely immutable can be eternal is used as a background assumption to argue that matter cannot in any sense be eternal because it is subject to change. The Middle Platonic view that matter necessarily entails an eternal cycle of recurrence leads to adopting a view of God that altogether transcends the material sphere. If one accepts the assumptions from which the Christian apologists of the late second century begin, then *creatio ex nihilo* becomes the only logical conclusion. It apparently never occurred to them to reject these Platonist assumptions.

The adoption of the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* had other far-reaching implications for the history and form of “Christian” theology, extending even to our own day. The doctrine of creation out of nothing led inevitably to the Council of Chalcedon, in which Christ was described as one person having two natures, consubstantial with the Father in his deity. This two-nature theory of Christology assured that the Platonic view of natures and substance would be essential to make “sense” of the doctrine of God within the creedal tradition. The doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* also gave rise, and continues to give rise, to arguments that everything that occurs must be caused by God, for if he did not cause each substance to exist anew in each moment, it would cease to exist. Thus, a very strong form of divine determinism and predestination seems to be entailed by the doctrine—though a thorough discussion of these issues would take me far afield from the purpose of this essay.

It seems to me, therefore, that Copan and Craig have overstated their case. They speak in their essay and book as if anyone who disagrees with them is simply in error and ignorant of the facts, heedless of the overwhelming number of respected scholars who do in fact disagree. They give a false impression of the evidence and fail even to note the necessary distinctions between absolute negation of existence and relative non-being that are necessary to make sense of the texts in the postbiblical era. All in all, their argument for *creatio ex nihilo* as the universally accepted doctrine of early Christians simply does not withstand scrutiny.

# DAN VOGEL'S FAMILY ROMANCE AND THE BOOK OF MORMON AS SMITH FAMILY ALLEGORY

Alan Goff

The Baganda people of Africa have a folk saying, "A person who never travels always praises his own mother's cooking."<sup>1</sup> Dan Vogel's biography of Joseph Smith represents a particular ideological and historical situation.<sup>2</sup> Vogel could have overcome his parochialism by reading some contemporary historiography to discover how trends in literary criticism, philosophy, and historiography itself are changing how historians approach their work, or he could have read more about how professionally trained readers interpret difficult texts. This biography needs editorial work to reduce its ideological saturation and length. Vogel surveys Joseph Smith's life, but his main thrust and ideological goal is to show parallels between Smith's life and the Book of Mormon text, to show that the Prophet transmuted the material of his own life and psyche into the Book of Mormon by writing a thinly veiled fiction.

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1. Cited in Philip Turner, "An Unworkable Theology," *First Things* 154 (June/July 2005): 12.

2. See the review of Vogel's book by Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, "No, Dan, That's Still Not History," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 205–22.

Review of Dan Vogel. *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004. xxii + 715 pp., with endnotes and index. \$39.95.

## Vogel's Biases

No positivist criticism can adequately deal with mythology and the supernatural.<sup>3</sup>

Vogel makes a generic acknowledgment that all biographers have biases (p. xii). He makes no attempt to conceal his ideological presuppositions (this is praise for Vogel, by the way);<sup>4</sup> I just wish he were more aware that his biases are not natural—representing just the way the world is, free of ideological intrusion. In other words, Vogel's acknowledgment of biases is too generic to be helpful. It does not divulge the extent to which those biases constitute and enable his historical interpretations. Such biases do not merely need to be noted, as if mentioning them generally negated their influence; our ideologies and prejudices are foundational.

From within political science the interpretivists have challenged the dominant positivist positions, and even the positivists have learned to admit to having biases. If one substitutes the word *historians* for *political scientists* in the following quotation, one will fairly see the limited advance it is to get positivists to admit their biases:

Generations of inquirers have subsequently learned to pay lip service to the interpretive critique's caveats regarding the inevitability of evaluation. Thus, one often hears from political scientists the doxic repetition that, whatever the field of study, their own "biases" must be recognized and/or acknowledged. But such declarations miss the suggestion that the

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3. Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths? An Essay on the Constitutive Imagination*, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 2.

4. On 15 December 2005, on a thread at the "LDS Dialogue and Discussion" portion of the FAIR Message Boards entitled "Probability and NHM," Vogel confessed: "It all hinges on what I'm trying to establish. I'm not trying to prove JS a false prophet or the BofM not inspired. I'm trying to establish the BofM is not historical, which the Spaulding theorists are already convinced of. Actually, my biography interprets JS's history and the BofM based on the assumption that the BofM is not historical, so I don't spend a great deal of time arguing that point." So much for ideological neutrality, for working without an agenda, and for simply letting the facts speak for themselves. See [www.fairboards.org/index.php?showtopic=12015&st=225](http://www.fairboards.org/index.php?showtopic=12015&st=225) (accessed 21 December 2005).

discovery of one's, let us, following Gadamer, say prejudices in language and practice might be the end of inquiry, or a demanding dimension of the process of inquiry, rather than an easy propaedeutic to it. Indeed, when the discipline missed this suggestion—when it institutionalized the interpretive critique as a caution about particular normative investments and research biases—it performed what we argue has become a routinized practice of fact neutrality.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than solving the bias problem, the mere admission of a prejudice drives the researcher from one form of positivism (the idea of doing research without biases) to another (the movement of facticity from the veridical world to the world of the researcher). Such a critique of positivism in both history and political science notes that the admission of a bias is only the beginning point of exploring how deeply ideological concerns are woven through the fabric of interpretation. Ideology constitutes, creates, and shapes the interpretation, rather than just being an impediment to proper explanation that can be overcome through the admission of prejudice.

Bill Russell, in a similar doxic manner, has asserted of Vogel's biography that "while no historian can be totally objective, Vogel's biases are not as visible as those of Brodie, on the one hand, or, on the other, orthodox biographies by Richard Bushman and Donna Hill."<sup>6</sup> How can Russell claim that Vogel's biases are less visible while I assert they are pervasive and intrusive? Russell is wrong. Two factors explain this difference: (1) Russell shares Vogel's ideology (I do not share Vogel's positivism nor his naturalistic faith commitment and am therefore more likely to be able to separate the consequences of those ideological commitments) and has a hard time seeing Vogel's ideological commitments as anything except just the way the world

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5. Sophia Mihic, Stephen G. Engelmann, and Elizabeth Rose Wingrove, "Making Sense in and of Political Science: Facts, Values, and 'Real' Numbers," in *The Politics of Method in the Human Sciences: Positivism and Its Epistemological Others*, ed. George Steinmetz (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 472.

6. William D. Russell, "He Was 'Game,'" review of *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*, by Dan Vogel, *Dialogue* 38/3 (2005): 188. In this book review, Russell also endorses Vogel's positivism/naturalism.

is; Russell has difficulty seeing the ideology because he is uncritical of it. Additionally, (2) Russell and Vogel both share an older view of bias that ceased to be viable in the 1970s. We ought to stop speaking about bias in this facile way, as if ideology were the embroidery, the decoration, that can easily be separated from the research and interpretation of a work. Ideology is the warp and woof of the fabric. We live in post-Gadamerian and post-Althusserian times. Russell takes this simplistic version of positivism so for granted that he ironically asserts that only people who agree with him about the Book of Mormon can be considered open-minded: "I think the open-minded reader can hardly avoid coming away with the clear conclusion that the Book of Mormon is indeed Joseph's book and not an ancient document."<sup>7</sup> This easy talk about bias—permitting the researcher to make a general and vague confession to having one without articulating the consequences for the interpretation with which it is intermixed—is a hangover from the "continuing existence of a robust, if updated (and sometimes camouflaged or unconscious) positivism" by those who practice the social sciences.<sup>8</sup> Despite those Mormon revisionist historians who practice positivism by creating their own private definitions of the philosophical position, we ought to keep in mind that "positivism is still an important folk category among social scientists."<sup>9</sup> Until these researchers acquire an accurate and explicit knowledge of the pervasiveness of positivistic ideologies in their thought and writing, we have little chance of moving beyond the positivistic stage in Mormon history. Positivism is a dominant folk epistemology among historians and other researchers who do not understand its formal characteristics but practice it in debased and popularized versions.

Historical evidence does not speak to us free of all ideology, and each of us is deeply enmeshed in ideologies we too often take for granted.

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7. Russell, "He Was 'Game,'" 190.

8. George Steinmetz, "Introduction: Positivism and Its Others in the Social Sciences," in *Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*, 30. The social sciences singled out in this book for being dominated by positivism are sociology, economics, political science, anthropology, and history.

9. Steinmetz, "Introduction," 30.



The need for evidence in historical writing has always been paramount, used as it is to illustrate and justify particular renderings and explanations of events. But without understanding the constructed nature of evidence itself, and then separating the need for evidence from its actual rhetorical function as that which both naturalizes and is naturalized by a writer's governing mythos, we forfeit a deeper understanding of the interpenetration between events, narrative, and historical interpretation.<sup>10</sup>

Vogel's "governing mythos" is one that denies that God acts in history (or at least that we can perceive such actions rationally) and assumes that it is religious believers who are ideologues, not their critics. Vogel commonly uses the word *apologist* (pp. xvii; 647 n. 34; 653 n. 59, for example) to describe those who disagree with him and believe in the traditional Mormon story. He does not acknowledge that he is also an apologist or defender of an ideology: "Ideology, like halitosis, is in this sense what the other person has."<sup>11</sup> The pejorative use of the word by Vogel implies that he and people who agree with him are less under the influence of ideological concerns than those of us who fundamentally disagree with him, just as Russell cannot be open-minded about people who disagree with him about the Book of Mormon's provenance and yet criticizes those opponents for being close-minded. One can be an apologist for a religious belief, but one can also be an apologist for an antireligious position such as positivism or naturalism (a religious apologist is only one specific use of the larger concept of *apologia*, as an encyclopedia such as *Wikipedia* shows).<sup>12</sup> By using the term pejoratively, and apologetically, the researcher prevents his or her own recognition of the ideology and, dealing with it critically, "the belief that one can avoid or transcend a transferential relation to

10. James E. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 37.

11. Terry Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction* (New York: Verso, 1991), 2; see David McLellan, *Ideology*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 1 and 49.

12. "Apologetics," *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apologetics (accessed 9 January 2006).

the object of study tends to foster definitions that are covertly ideological and less subject to critical control than they might otherwise be.”<sup>13</sup> This positivism attempts to deflect attention from the ideological ramifications of its own position. Positivism, and the positions advanced by its positivistic apologists, represents a “deliberate refusal to scrutinize the metaphysical and ideological interests that inform their readings.”<sup>14</sup>

Vogel has a method for reading history. We could label these interpretive principles Vogel’s Rules of Reductive Reading:

1. If a nineteenth-century fragment of rumor or gossip exists to throw Joseph Smith, his family, or associates in a bad light, highlight that hearsay evidence; always choose the most negative possible interpretive spin on events to discredit the Mormon founder.

2. If no such negative evidence exists, speculate it into existence or even make parallels if none emerge from the historical record; if no evidence can be gathered to demonstrate that a historical actor thought what you attribute to him or her, no conjecture can be beyond the realm of hypothetical possibility—just make things up, if you need to.

3. When reading a complex text such as the Book of Mormon, read it reductively so that it fits any remote parallel in Smith’s life, family, or social environment; apply the most simplistic possible meaning to the narrative, ignoring significant details in the text or alternative readings that make more of the text.

4. If a historical actor claims divine communication or intervention, reinterpret those claims psychologically to fit a naturalistic bias, dismissing the explanation offered by the person who was present; if a historical actor claims divine intervention, reinterpret that claim as evidence of dishonesty.

Vogel adheres to a particular ideology that claims to know the limits of knowledge and reality. The conjecture he indulges in always conforms to that ideology.

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13. Dominick LaCapra, *Soundings in Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 154.

14. Gary A. Phillips, “Exegesis as Critical Praxis: Reclaiming History and Text from a Postmodern Perspective,” in *Poststructural Criticism and the Bible: Text/History/Discourse, Semeia 51*, ed. Gary A. Phillips (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 17.

Vogel claims that he is not a positivist, just a naturalist. “A rejection of the supernatural does not automatically make one a positivist. It only means that one is a naturalist. The two positions are philosophically distinct.”<sup>15</sup> Let’s be more accurate about this assertion because the two positions are not at all distinct and the positivism common among historians has been broadly discredited for more than thirty years: while naturalism and positivism can be theoretically distinguished, in the real world they tend to overlap<sup>16</sup>

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15. Dan Vogel, “Goff on Positivism at Signature,” in *Mormon Metaphysics: Contemplations within Philosophy and Theology*, ed. Clark Goble, 28 September 2004, [www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html](http://www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html) (accessed 9 January 2006).

16. Roy Bhaskar discusses the relationship between naturalism and positivism. Naturalism emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in opposition to supernaturalism. In contemporary discussions, naturalism has three main elements: (1) materialism (material reality is all there is or all we can know), (2) both social and natural phenomena are capable of being explained by scientific approaches, and (3) facts and values can both be reasoned about (*Scientific Realism and Human Emancipation* [New York: Verso, 1986], 118); what Bhaskar means by naturalism is often called by positivists the unity of science thesis. The method for obtaining truth is the same for all inquiry, in the natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. So far, little damage has been done to Vogel’s assertions. Bhaskar notes that the history of naturalism delineated three different varieties of the position: (1) “a more or less unqualified naturalism, usually *positivistic* in complexion,” (2) a hermeneutical tradition, and (3) a critical naturalism that derives mostly from Marx (Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism*, 120). Vogel’s naturalism clearly does not belong in the latter two categories, but his use of empiricist claims and his insistence that, say, the Three Witnesses to the Book of Mormon had merely a subjective experience (subjective as opposed to objective; see pp. 442–43, 445, 446, 467, one that does not qualify as veridical, empirical knowledge) does fit the definition of the only true kind of evidence in a positivistic epistemology. These assertions classify Vogel’s epistemological claims firmly within the positivistic camp, for positivists insist that, to be called knowledge, events must “be subject to the standard operational protocols of any empirical inter-subjective science” (Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism*, 121). Vogel denies that the witnesses’ experience came through the physical senses; in other words, he asserts that it was not empirical. This commonsense version of positivism (in contrast to the much more technical positivism Bhaskar discusses) still endures in the social sciences: “If positivism is philosophically ‘dead,’ it survives and kicks in the sciences—as a current of thought in the natural sciences, and as considerably more than that in many of the human ones” (Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism*, 229). Bhaskar notes that the rationalist and empiricist claims to knowledge can no longer be reasonably supported (Bhaskar, *Scientific Realism*, 238). Similarly, Steve Smith also sees positivism as the larger category and naturalism as one of four main assumptions made by positivists. Steve Smith, introduction to *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond*, ed. Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 16. Dowe sees positivism as the narrower category and naturalism the larger one: The logical positivists asserted

and are often used synonymously.<sup>17</sup> Those who deny that God acts in the world in a way that would convince them demand the kind of empirical evidence of that action that would make the advocate both a naturalist and a positivist. On an Internet discussion board where Vogel tries to distinguish between positivism and naturalism and denies that he adheres to the former, he ends up convincing the other participants—who were initially reluctant to believe the charge—that he is a positivist.<sup>18</sup>

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that religious claims must be empirically verifiable if they are to be considered meaningful. “Under this strong version of naturalism, not only are science and religion in conflict, but religious assertions are meaningless and make no legitimate contribution to human knowledge, thought, or life.” Phil Dowe, *Galileo, Darwin, and Hawking: The Interplay of Science, Reason, and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 3. Discussing the epistemology of a position is often necessary because Vogel accomplishes much of his ideological work through the assumptions he makes about truth, presuppositions he assumes most of his readers will share. When I equate positivism and naturalism, I am appealing to common philosophical usage. Vogel’s use of terms relies on his own definition of the terms. Any time I use the word *naturalism*, the reader can feel free to use its synonym *positivism*.

17. H. O. Mounce says, “Scientific naturalism, or positivism, is a doctrine about the nature of reality as a whole. It is essentially *metaphysical*, though it often takes the guise of an attack on metaphysics.” Mounce continues to articulate a position called scientific naturalism that Vogel would agree with: physical nature and reality are coextensive, and nature is revealed through scientific methods. H. O. Mounce, *Hume’s Naturalism* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 9. Mounce notes that this scientific naturalism is different from the Scottish naturalism of Hume because “scientific naturalism is a development out of empiricism” (Mounce, *Hume’s Naturalism*, 8). This scientific naturalism is now the dominant position among intellectuals who use it to turn their inquiries into scientific naturalism, positivism, and empiricism. Mounce, *Hume’s Naturalism*, 11, uses the three terms interchangeably. The Web site ChangingMinds.org defines positivism in the standard way as knowledge founded on empirical evidence free of all metaphysics. It then defines the relationship between positivism and naturalism, with positivism being the larger category and naturalism (the unity of science thesis) as one of six tenets posited by positivism. See ChangingMinds.org/explanations/research/philosophies/positivism.htm (accessed 9 January 2006).

18. Clark Goble, “Goff on Positivism at Signature,” in *Mormon Metaphysics*, 2 October 2004 posting and 3 October 2004 posting at [www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html](http://www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html) (accessed 9 January 2006). See also Blake Ostler, “Goff on Positivism at Signature,” in *Mormon Metaphysics*, 3 October 2004 posting at [www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html](http://www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html) (accessed 9 January 2006). When charged with being a positivist, Vogel responded on multiple occasions by unleashing personal invective. The discussion was about the witnesses to the Book of Mormon, so the evidence and arguments Vogel was marshaling were essentially the same as in this biography.

Notice how philosophically informed commentators also note the broad overlap between positivism and its many allied positions, including naturalistic belief:

The second category of presuppositions is itself, like the first, also a form of bias. Sometimes labeled “positivist,” sometimes “verificationist,” “scientistic,” “empiricist,” or even “physicalist,” this category is intrinsically just as much an ideology as any other. Positivism in its more extreme forms has also been secularistic and antisupernaturalistic. Its underlying presupposition has been that no valid understanding of any event is possible that does not come to us directly from empirical observation. Only findings modeled by empirical methods and verificationist procedures, especially those utilized by the physical sciences, have been seen as sufficient or valid. Coming into vogue during the Enlightenment and becoming increasingly popular among historians during the nineteenth century, this view has consisted in a belief that *methodology*, in and of itself, could bring about a more *perfect*, if not a more total, comprehension of events. At last, a fully “objective,” “pure,” and “untainted” grasp of events could be possible. Cleansed of all bias and preconception, especially of anything supernatural or theological, a historian could distill “true facts” from more solid data. Solid data, taken from validated evidence, could produce facts. Facts of pristine authenticity, once established and rigorously tested, could speak for themselves.<sup>19</sup>

Naturalism is a circular position, for it will accept as evidence only historical claims that can be verified in naturalistic ways; when the researcher talks about those verificationist methods of validation, he or she then turns into a positivist. Vogel accurately claims that religious positions are circular in that they accept evidence that supports their positions and reinterpret contrary evidence so that it does not pose a danger. “The creation of a closed system and insulation against

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19. Robert E. Frykenberg, *History and Belief: The Foundations of Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 316–17.

contrary evidence is nevertheless the norm for religious movements” (p. 239). He seems to think that this makes religious belief somehow different from, say, positivism or naturalism. But all belief systems do the same, particularly Vogel’s, including defining naturalism and positivism as distinct concepts. So when Vogel claims that naturalism is natural and supernaturalism not, he is falling back on metaphysical presuppositions. This is how the rhetoric of naturalism/positivism works: “There is simply no reliable proof for the existence of the supernatural. Naturalism is a part of our everyday experience; supernaturalism is not” (p. xvi; see, in the block quotation above, the antisupernaturalism that Frykenberg associates with positivism). When you begin with positivistic presuppositions that define “reliable proof” in a positivistic way, you will end up with a claim such as this. In the footnote to his discussion of naturalism, Vogel articulates the assumptions of this ideology: “At heart, I am a rationalist and naturalist. I believe that the physical universe follows natural law, that it does not behave in supernatural or contradictory ways, that it functions without supernatural forces, and that it is unnecessary to go outside nature to explain what takes place within it” (p. 570 n. 39). Once a researcher accepts this metaphysical presupposition, the task of dismissing religious claims follows from the assumption. Alfred J. Ayer, archpositivist that he is, asserts that claims made by the religious believer are meaningless, for “as he says nothing at all about the world, he cannot justly be accused of saying anything false, or anything for which he has insufficient grounds. It is only when the theist claims that in asserting the existence of a transcendent god he is expressing a genuine proposition that we are entitled to disagree with him.”<sup>20</sup> When propositions are asserted, then the believer is in opposition to science, according to this positivist position. For Ayer, a claim to having religious experiences is interesting only for what it reveals about the psychology of the believer, “but it does not in any way imply that there is such a thing as religious knowledge,” for unless the theist “can formulate his ‘knowledge’ in propositions that are empirically verifi-

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20. Alfred J. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1952), 116.

able, we may be sure that he is deceiving himself.”<sup>21</sup> Just as Ayer rejects propositions that do not have sufficient empirical content to satisfy a positivist, Vogel says that different reports of the same vision undermine Smith’s claim that the vision occurred: “The manner in which Smith introduced later priesthood concepts into his 1823 interview with the angel makes one wonder if he ever viewed the vision as an empirical event” (p. 44); later in the same paragraph Vogel says Joseph Smith’s visions cannot be treated “as actual events.” The epistemological question here is not about Smith but about whether Vogel will allow the event as real when it does not measure up to his requirements as an empirical event. Vogel is using the claims of empiricism/positivism. He adheres to a founding myth that somehow “apologists” are different from people who have a bias but are not apologists for an ideology. Ideology works best when its believers naturalize it (“naturalism is part of our everyday experience”); that is, they claim that it is just the way the world is, not the way it is interpreted under the influence of an ideology. But everyday experience is indeed influenced by the ideological assumptions we use to categorize that experience. “Events must be constituted as ‘facts’ before they can be subjected to analysis and take up their place in discourses of truth produced by the various human and social sciences of an epoch. . . . [H]istorical events are never given directly to perception but always come to the investigator in an already *enfigured* form, as reports, testimony, document, hearsay, opinion, or the like.”<sup>22</sup>

Vogel has such a tenuous grasp on the philosophical notion of positivism that every time he asserts he cannot be a positivist, he provides further evidence that he is. Not only did Vogel convince other participants in the online discussion that he was a positivist, he also repeatedly said that Sterling McMurrin was not a positivist, an assertion easy to disprove since I merely had to cite a few of McMurrin’s own claims about knowledge to demonstrate otherwise. Here is Vogel’s misunderstanding about what positivism is:

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21. Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 119–20.

22. Hayden White, “The Real, the True, and the Figurative in the Human Sciences,” *Profession* 92 (1992): 15.

I think the introduction to my biography makes it abundantly clear that I'm not a positivist. Positivist historians would not attempt an interpretive biography, nor would they draw on psychology and sociology. They certainly would not describe themselves as "ontological naturalists." Whereas a positivist seeks to establish history on positive grounds, I'm comfortable with interpretations that carry various degrees of probability. Hence, I would describe my position as basically a post-positivist ontological naturalist.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to his misunderstanding of naturalism, take this bizarre claim that Vogel cannot be a positivist because he draws from sociology and psychology. A pattern has emerged among Mormon revisionists from the beginning of the Mormon *Positivismusstreit* in the 1980s; these people invent peculiar private language definitions of positivism in order to protect an ideological position. Thomas Alexander, for example, asserted that positivism is possible only in the natural sciences, not the social sciences.<sup>24</sup> This odd claim runs directly counter to informed research, which acknowledges that the social sciences are still dominated by positivism.<sup>25</sup> A similarly uninformed definition of positivism was offered by Marvin Hill in his Mormon History Association presidential address: "By positivism, again, in simplest dictionary sense, I mean that history is taken to be potentially verifiable—that the mind can know the outside world as it is and was."<sup>26</sup> Hill then goes on to provide a definition of positivism from a general dictionary; contrary to Hill, a claim is not positivistic if the researcher claims the past is verifiable, only if the claim is that the only proper way to verify an assertion is with empirical evidence. According to Hill's definition, Vogel would be a positivist, but then

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23. Dan Vogel, "Goff on Positivism at Signature," 28 September 2004 posting at [www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html](http://www.libertypages.com/clark/10110.html)

24. Thomas G. Alexander, "Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian's Perspective," *Dialogue* 19/3 (1986): 32.

25. Tim Woods, *Beginning Postmodernism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 226.

26. Marvin S. Hill, "Positivism or Subjectivism? Some Reflections on a Mormon Historical Dilemma," *Journal of Mormon History* 20/1 (1994): 3.



so would I and everybody else. Nobody defines the key term the ways Alexander, Hill, and Vogel do. I think we can use evidence to demonstrate that Ronald Reagan was wounded in an attempted assassination: eyewitness testimony, newspaper reports, physical evidence such as the bullets, videotape of the incident. I think we can verify that incident. That I maintain the incident is verified by evidence does not make me a positivist. A recent book on the topic of positivism, in fact, notes the “surprising longevity of positivism—especially in its latent, unexamined, or unconscious forms—in the human sciences.”<sup>27</sup> We are seeing the latent surviving forms of positivism in Mormon history when commentators offer such strange definitions so that they and their ideological allies can continue to make positivistic claims without being labeled positivists. In other words, these definitions of positivism are apologetic private definitions that protect the way Mormon revisionists have traditionally privileged their own positivistic claims. Vogel’s resort to psychology and sociology does not reassure his readers that he is not a positivist but does the opposite: “U.S. sociology still seems to be operating according to a basically positivist framework, perhaps a crypto-positivist one, if I can use that term without any conspiratorial connotations.”<sup>28</sup> A study on the relationship between positivism and psychology notes the opposite of Vogel’s claims: “In psychology the legacy [of positivism] is largely implicit even appearing from time to time as a militant antipositivism, while preserving intact some of the more self-destructive tenets of neopositivism.”<sup>29</sup> Summarizing Henderikus Stam from the same collection of essays, Charles Tolman notes that, in psychology (as in Mormon history), “our rejection of positivism proves to be mainly in words only; it has not penetrated deeply into the accepted practice of mainstream psychology.”<sup>30</sup> Vogel’s embrace of positivistic assumptions is accompanied

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27. Steinmetz, “Introduction,” 3.

28. George Steinmetz, “Scientific Authority in the Transition to Post-Fordism: The Plausibility of Positivism in U.S. Sociology since 1945,” in *Politics of Method in the Human Sciences*, 276.

29. Charles W. Tolman, introduction to *Positivism in Psychology: Historical and Contemporary Problems*, ed. Charles W. Tolman (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1992), 1.

30. Tolman, introduction to *Positivism in Psychology*, 2.

by a rejection of the philosophy in words only. Use of sociology and psychology needs, rather, to be viewed as a covert way the uncritical biographer smuggles in positivism from those disciplines. A reason for “positivism’s uncanny persistence in the human sciences up to the present moment”<sup>31</sup> is easy to provide if researchers hold such ideologically invested and inaccurate definitions of the term. These people do not understand the concept and have an ideological interest in obfuscating the definition; they do not understand the most common variety of positivism I have raised here, let alone the more technical versions that dominate the social sciences and historiography. Vogel, Alexander, and Hill (among other Mormon revisionists) are apologists for positivism.

With an uncritical and covert positivism at work in a transparent and obvious way, it is natural for Vogel, when he classifies Joseph Smith’s behavior, to impose his own positivistic epistemological presuppositions and say that religious experience is false consciousness. (I am adjusting Vogel’s language to bring it into alignment with the theoretical discussion in the historiographical and philosophical literature.) He is then convinced that when Smith or his associates believe they were having a religious experience and communicating with the divine, the experience must be translated into naturalistic terms. Vogel uses the harshest of terms to redescribe religious claims: “As is no doubt apparent, my inclination is to interpret any claim of the paranormal—precognition, clairvoyance, telekinesis, telepathy—as delusion or fraud. I do not claim that the supernatural does not exist, for it is impossible to prove a negative. I maintain only that the evidence upon which such claims rest is unconvincing to me” (p. xii; note the collapse of the paranormal into the supernatural and then the dismissal of both as fraudulent). The evidence is unconvincing because Vogel accepts as evidence only that which would qualify under a naturalistic/positivistic regime. When Smith is able to tell people what happened to them while he was many miles away, Vogel uses language describing how confidence men fool their subjects—for example, with hot and cold readings (pp. 69–70; 377–78; 592–93

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31. Steinmetz, “Introduction,” 2.

nn. 13–15). When Peter Whitmer claims that his field was miraculously plowed, which permitted him to transport Smith and Cowdery as they moved to Fayette, Vogel translates that religious language into naturalistic/positivistic language about Whitmer being so distracted that he did not realize how much ground he had plowed and Smith's supposed deception of Whitmer when the latter arrived in Harmony (pp. 377–78). Similarly, when Whitmer is traveling on the road and relates another putatively religious experience with a stranger on that road, Vogel translates the event into naturalistic and psychological language implying that Vogel knows better what happened than the historical actors did: "This seems to be an instance where Whitmer's fairly reliable memory shifted over time to conform to his subsequent psychological needs. The first version is likely closer to the truth, at least as initially perceived by Whitmer" (p. 380). Vogel translates the claim into empiricist terms about perception/empirical experience; he then invents a naturalistic explanation: the stranger was not a divine messenger transporting the plates but, he suggests without a hint of evidence, it was "merely an old Methodist circuit preacher carrying his Bible to his next meeting" who disappeared mysteriously from the road (p. 381). The positivist has to intervene to deny the claims the historical actor provides in order to supply ones that accord with his own epistemology and ontology. The religious language has to be replaced with a naturalistic one, and that translation is done under the aegis of a metaphysical conception of reality.

The primary function of an ideology is to conceal from the person who adheres to it the fact that he or she is operating under the influence of that ideology. The creed works, in other words, by convincing the subject that he or she knows how the real world works and that the others who disagree are apologists or are otherwise operating under a false set of beliefs: "Ideologies can be seen as more or less systematic attempts to provide plausible explanations and justifications for social behaviour which might otherwise be the object of criticism. These apologia then conceal the truth from others, and perhaps also from the rationalizing subject itself."<sup>32</sup> An ideology conceals from the

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32. Eagleton, *Ideology*, 52.

ideologue the fact that he or she adheres to a fundamental belief that structures the way he or she experiences the world and attempts to reorganize that world to conform to its preference. Making someone's ideology explicit is always hazardous because those ideologies are fundamental commitments and work best when they are concealed from the apologist. "Ideologies are actively engaged in furthering ends that are best furthered by not acknowledging their true natures."<sup>33</sup> So the ideologue—the apologist—must not only conceal from others the ideology at work but must also delude him- or herself.

Michael Mandelbaum, in *The Ideas That Conquered the World*, tells the anecdote of a girl eating at a friend's house. The friend's mother asks if she likes Brussels sprouts, to which she responds positively. The friend's mother serves her the vegetable, which remains untouched on the plate. The hostess says at the end of the meal, "I thought you said you like Brussels sprouts." The girl's reply is, "I do like them, . . . but not enough to eat them."<sup>34</sup> Dan Vogel is a positivist who bitterly resents being called a positivist. He wants no longer to be called one; he just does not want to be free of being a positivist enough to do what is necessary to make it happen—actually stop making positivistic claims. We can know when a man or woman has repented of positivism; he or she will confess and forsake it. Vogel is in positivistic denial, and his positivism is reductive because it consistently takes religious terminology and experience and then reduces them to psychological and naturalistic language that denies the former's religious meaning and veridical claims a priori. "The problem of reductionism is perhaps more accurately described as one of totalization: only this method, or only this hermeneutic of retrieval, or only this critique, or only this hermeneutic of suspicion can interpret what religion really is."<sup>35</sup> Vogel insists that religious claims to supernatural experience must be translated into his own positivistic language and explanation.

33. René Girard, "To Double Business Bound": *Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), 74.

34. Michael Mandelbaum, *The Ideas That Conquered the World: Peace, Democracy, and Free Markets in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2002), 353.

35. David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 100.

David Tracy notes, appropriately, that some religious believers have their own version of reductivism, insisting that a confessional explanation is the only adequate framework. Both the secularistic positivism of Vogel and the fundamentalist approach that insists on a single interpretive strategy are inadequate. "The difference between fundamentalist readings and secularist readings seems startling. But these are surface differences of answers, not of fundamental hermeneutical approaches."<sup>36</sup> Each of these interpreters insists that he or she has the method that delivers the final and convincing truth about religious belief. "The certainty of contemporary positivist and empiricist critiques of religion is well matched by the literalism and fundamentalism of religious dogmatists of all traditions."<sup>37</sup> The sociology of religion has long been the home of this type of reductionism:

Although things have changed dramatically since, the sociological approach to the study of religion had among its roots a nineteenth-century rationalism or positivism which questioned and rejected religious notions as illusory. They were thought to be irrational and otiose in a modern society in which science as a mode of understanding of reality would predominate. Religious ideas would atrophy and die in the face of the superior conceptions and explanations of science. These thinkers saw religion as a natural phenomenon to be studied objectively and scientifically and explained like any other natural phenomenon in terms of underlying causes. This position is usually designated positivist and reductionist. Religion is "reduced" to underlying factors which produce it so that the reality of religious entities, experience, and so on, is denied. To explain it in such a way was largely to explain it away.<sup>38</sup>

So when Vogel says he uses ideas from psychology and sociology, this is how he smuggles his positivistic concepts into his work of

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36. Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 101.

37. Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 101.

38. Malcolm Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2001), 1.

biography. But note that Vogel is using ideas here described as an older, nineteenth-century variety of sociology, not contemporary ones that contain a better understanding of religion and the role of the researcher of religion. Vogel is in denial about his own positivism. His readers ought not to be.

Vogel's book would have been considerably improved by a self-critical awareness of the role of ideology that a generic admission of bias does not address. All of us are apologists for an ideology because ideology is inescapable. "If you do not have an explicit politics—an ideology—then one will certainly have you."<sup>39</sup> I am not asserting that ideology is the alpha and omega of historical interpretation, for other interpreters, archival evidence, and other sources limit our interpretations; different historical accounts vary widely in ideological content. Vogel is uncritical about the impact of his own ideology. "It is, to begin with, too quickly assumed that the man of suspicion is himself unscathed by the defects which he denounces; ideology is the thought of my adversary, the thought of the *other*. *He* does not know it, but *I* do. The question, however, is whether there exists a point of view on action which is capable of extricating itself from the ideological condition of knowledge engaged in praxis."<sup>40</sup> A more sophisticated view of ideology needs to be acknowledged—all researchers have an ideology and that ideology sets limits to what the interpreter will consider as possible or reasonable explanations. I have read no work of historical explanation that has more intrusive and transparent ideological content than Vogel's biography of Joseph Smith.<sup>41</sup> When W. W. Meissner discusses the appropriate way to apply psychoanalytic insights to religious figures, he warns not to approach the topic the way Freud did, the way

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39. Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 70.

40. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 224.

41. I have read many biographies over the past few years, and the only one in the same ballpark that uses guesswork so extensively to advance psychological speculation is James R. Mellow's biography of Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Nathaniel Hawthorne in His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980), which has about one-tenth as much conjecture as Vogel's biography does with little of the ideological denigration present in Vogel's biography. Vogel's speculation almost always works to debase and attack Joseph Smith.

Vogel does: “The problem for Freud was that he was not a believer, . . . an objective or perceptive observer. His expressed views thus said more about his religious prejudices than about religion itself.”<sup>42</sup> One does not have to be a religious believer to write a biography of a religious figure, but the danger is that one will become simplistic and reductive without considerable attention and care. According to Meissner, the dangers of doing psychobiography include the connection between the analyst’s clinical experience and the interpretive scheme applied to the historical evidence. Vogel runs afoul of all the pitfalls Meissner warns about:

Problems arise in the selection of data, in the combination of events into recognizable patterns, in the omission or underemphasis of aspects that do not fit the putative hypothesis, in proposing false connections, in mistaking conjectural hypothesis for historical fact, in allowing one’s own attitudes or feelings about the subject to contaminate or influence the process of judgment or interpretation. The risk of fitting the data to the hypothesis by inappropriate selection or omission runs high. Keeping in mind that the psychobiographical approach carries with it little explanatory power that would allow it to reach beyond the conjectural, there is an understandable impulse on the part of the investigator to find certainty and a degree of factuality where none exists. Distorting factors can easily enter into the process that push in the direction of trimming the subject and his life to fit the procrustean bed of psychoanalytically generated hypothesis. The subject is trimmed to fit the model, rather than the model being designed to fit the subject and the rich complexity of his biography.<sup>43</sup>

Vogel’s positivism and his antipathy for Joseph Smith are two of the limiting factors that diminish this biography, even as Vogel tries to diminish Smith and the Book of Mormon to make them smaller than they are.

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42. W. W. Meissner, “Methodological Issues in the Psychohistory-Psychobiography of Religious Figures,” *Annual of Psychoanalysis* 31 (2003): 182.

43. Meissner, “Methodological Issues,” 184–85.

## Repeating Mistakes Typical of Psychohistory and Psychobiography

When interpreting the past using a dubious approach such as psychohistory, the reader would do well to discuss the theoretical debate that has been engaged about that approach. The point is for the researcher to be as aware as possible about his or her own ideological commitments to mitigate their uncritical impact. Vogel's ideology is so overwhelming that it suffocates the narrative. By a historian's engaging the ideas of those who disagree, the historian might see more clearly his or her own dominant ideology and tropes. Another way to reduce the uncritical application of an ideology is to use theoretical discussion to bring the history to a more abstract level. Vogel does neither.

Psychohistory and psychobiography are often faulted for being too free to speculate about what might have happened or what a person might have said or thought. Doing psychohistory too often means being liberated from the need to provide historical evidence for the researcher's claims.<sup>44</sup> Psychobiography and psychohistory are held in general disrepute among historians, so the incentive to avoid the label is strong.

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44. Vogel may well believe that the label *psychobiography* does not apply to his position because he uses approaches in addition to his psychobiographical analysis, but then all psychobiographies gather traditional archival and secondary sources and apply other abstractions in addition to psychological categories. Keep in mind that Vogel also attempts to avoid being classified a positivist although his position is overwhelmingly and uncritically positivistic. Vogel asserts as one of his controlling ideas that "we may never fully know Smith's reasons, but we can confidently say that if he wrote the Book of Mormon, became a prophet, and founded his church as a pious invention, he possessed the psychological means to explain and justify such acts" (p. xxi). Vogel sets out to provide a positivistic/naturalistic explanation of these "psychological means." He makes a layman's use of psychological categories such as internalization (p. 28), insecurity about writing (pp. 120, 356), fictional alter egos (pp. 118, 132, 134, 135, 166, 177, 249, 284, 326–28, 343, 417), sibling rivalry (pp. 138, 145, 256, 350, 410), Oedipal conflict (pp. 227, 274–75, 352–53, 608 n. 8, 622 n. 17), rationalization of deception (pp. 348, 368), family conflict and its attendant psychological damage (p. 373), oral rage (pp. 374, 655 n. 31), inner conflict between the person Smith aspired to be and the person he was (p. 417), essentially between the id and either the ego or super-ego, and family systems theory and family dysfunction (pp. xx, 256, 571 n. 59, and numerous other places). Vogel uses psychological concepts in a rudimentary way to advance his ideological position throughout his biography so consistently that he ends up teaching the philosophies of positivism,



Vogel's psychobiography exemplifies the weaknesses of the genre. David Stannard remarks that, at least through 1980, psychohistory had not produced any historical works worth noting. "While certainly some works of psychohistory are vastly superior to others, little, if any, psychohistory is good history."<sup>45</sup> In all fairness, Stannard is a strong detractor of the approach, but (unlike, say, Jacques Barzun's *Clio and the Doctors*) his criticisms are fair and informed. It is useful to survey the general disrepute that psychohistory has earned among historians and then measure those shortcomings against Vogel's psychobiography.

Many who practice psychohistory do so without being qualified. Robert Young refers to the "embarrassing excesses of psychohistory and psychobiography." For Young, psychobiography tends to project an individual's assumed psychological problems on the movement the person is associated with. Young here praises just one psychohistorian—Victor Wolfenstein, who is the exception among psychohistorians because he is both a professionally trained historian and a properly qualified psychoanalyst, one of a "small number of people similarly qualified, but not many." Psychohistorians who lack one of these two qualifications inevitably produce bad history, Young implies, manifesting these embarrassing excesses.<sup>46</sup> Psychobiographers who lack both qualifications would, based on Young's judgment, produce doubly incompetent psychobiography. Similarly, Peter Loewenberg notes that, to be successful, the psychohistorian needs to be trained in two professional fields, history and clinical psychology. Professional psychologists who offer historical interpretations are too often criticized for the crudity of their

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mingled with psychohistory. Positivism is the basso continuo that ties his entire composition together, with numerous positivistic variations on psychohistorical motifs liberally scattered throughout.

45. David E. Stannard, *Shrinking History: On Freud and the Failure of Psychohistory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), xiii.

46. Robert M. Young, "The Psychoanalysis of Sectarianism," at [human-nature.com/rmyoung/papers/paper19h.html](http://human-nature.com/rmyoung/papers/paper19h.html) (accessed 29 November 2005). This is the text of a talk given to the British Psychological Society, Psychotherapy Section, Scientific Meeting on 'Impasse in Political Conflict' London, 20 November 1993. It has been published in the British Psychological Society, Psychotherapy Section Newsletter 15 (1994): 2–15. I have read Young elsewhere also praise Peter Gay's biography of Freud.

historical attempts. Professional historians who wander into psychology do so at great risk. "The ultimate synthesis must take place in the mind of a psychohistorian professionally trained in both disciplines if the research and conceptualizations are to have integrity as both historical and psychological accounts."<sup>47</sup> Professional training as a historian combined with clinical training as a psychologist—that is a rare combination of skills indeed.

Stannard, no fan of psychohistory, notes that the approach itself is faulty. "It is a premise of this book that the best *possible* psychohistory would still be bad history because of the limitations imposed by the weaknesses of the underlying theoretical structure."<sup>48</sup> He gives the example of Freud analyzing Leonardo da Vinci, which is shocking just for the paucity of evidence accessible to Freud—resulting in the most far-reaching historical conclusions. Stannard notes that this is still "one of the finest and most restrained"<sup>49</sup> examples of psychohistory ever produced, which means that the subdiscipline started at a low point and declined from there. This critic notes that psychohistories suffer from four consistent problems, none of which seems to me to be exclusive to psychohistorians but which might be more common among them because of the theoretical poverty of the approach.

The first deficiency concerns problems of fact. For psychohistorians this includes "fiction writing to 'fill gaps' in the historical record."<sup>50</sup> This is a problem Vogel shares with Fawn Brodie. In his biography of Martin Luther, Erik Erikson, one of the better practitioners of psychohistory, cites an anecdote based on such thin evidence (gossip from Luther's enemies;<sup>51</sup> Vogel too often bases his conclusions on gossip

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47. Peter Loewenberg, "Psychohistory," in *The Past before Us: Contemporary Historical Writing in the United States*, ed. Michael Kammen (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 412.

48. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 21, emphasis in original.

49. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 22. Peter Gay, though a fervent supporter of Freud and psychohistory, admits that Freud's venture into da Vinci's biography is badly done. *Freud for Historians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 182. Freud also ventured into psychohistory when he coauthored a study of Woodrow Wilson.

50. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 22.

51. Not only does Erikson accept uncritically the reports of Luther's theological enemies, but these reports are fourthhand accounts (much the same tactic Vogel resorts to).

offered by Joseph Smith's enemies), and the "event" later becomes "fact" for Erikson.<sup>52</sup> When Vogel invents conflicts among the Smith brothers because they "must" have occurred for the strife in the Book of Mormon to be so prominent, he falls into this difficulty.

A second weakness of psychohistory involves problems of logic. The psychobiographer is, according to Stannard, particularly susceptible to *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacies. "So long as *B* is found to exist, it is *assumed* that *A must have* happened since *B* is a psychoanalytically posited *consequence* of *A*."<sup>53</sup> Stannard may be right to call this fallacy *post hoc* because the psychobiographer must posit a questionable causal relationship between a hypothetical childhood event and later adult behavior. The reasoning also seems to be an instance of affirming the consequent. Without a historically attested childhood event, the historian is tempted to assert that the earlier event must have occurred because the adult event occurred: If *A*, then *B*. We know *B* happened. Therefore *A* must have taken place also. The example Stannard gives in psychobiography is Michael Paul Rogin's biography of Andrew Jackson, with the biographer facing the same problem Freud had with Leonardo, Erikson with Luther, and Vogel with Joseph Smith: "no information on his subject's early childhood; that is, in the logical sequence, no *A*."<sup>54</sup> So, like other psychohistorians when they face this difficulty, Rogin makes up the childhood evidence about Andrew Jackson that is lacking in the historical record. The *post hoc* logical fallacy is something of which all historians must beware, but the psychobiographer is particularly susceptible to it for "the psychohistorian raises the odds almost to the point of certainty that he will fall prey to the fallacy, since he is adding to the pitfalls of historical analysis an explanatory system that has itself rarely addressed and has never dealt adequately with this dilemma to which

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Roland H. Bainton, "Psychiatry and History: An Examination of Erikson's *Young Man Luther*," in *Psychohistory and Religion: The Case of "Young Man Luther"*, ed. Roger A. Johnson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 42. Bainton does not dismiss the report because it is fourthhand; he just wants the reader to know its troublesome provenance.

52. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 22–23.

53. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 24.

54. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 25.

it is intimately tied.”<sup>55</sup> Izenberg urges that psychohistorians develop more sophisticated methodological reflection to avoid the typical issues raised by the explanatory tool. “One of the most serious objections, for example, rests on the paucity of evidence about the early childhood of historical figures, with the result that psychohistorical explanations may become circular: hypotheses about early developments are speculatively deduced from adult events and then used to explain those events.”<sup>56</sup> This weakness in the larger field well describes the problems of psychobiography in Mormon studies. Vogel’s biography suffers from this very circularity as does Brodie’s biography and other works on psychology and Joseph Smith.

The third weakness of psychohistory emerges from problems of theory. “This problem involves the *method* that the psychohistorian uses to invent the facts of a subject’s childhood before showing those facts to be the causes of adult behavior.”<sup>57</sup> Stannard notes that no psychohistorian even questions whether or not psychoanalytic theory is valid. Regarding explanations of Nixon’s and Hitler’s adult behavior, the idea that the characters are projecting their own shortcomings on others is taken for granted without ever asking if projection exists. A naturalistic psychobiographer such as Vogel must translate the religious language of the historical actors into his own methodological framework that denies the religious claims. But one ought to do so with caution and restraint. “What right does the historian have to dismiss or denigrate the importance of the intellectual processes by which historical thinkers have arrived at their beliefs and refer instead to unconscious impulses, phantasies, defenses, or conflicts in order to explain them?” Izenberg answers his own question by referring to this translation process as the traditional “problem of reductionism.”<sup>58</sup> Biographers should be cautious regarding the abuse potential caused by reductive analysis. Rather than assuming up front that the accounts provided by the historical witnesses are inaccurate or deceptive, the more appropriate

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55. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 71.

56. Gerald Izenberg, “Psychohistory and Intellectual History,” *History and Theory* 14 (1975): 139.

57. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 26.

58. Izenberg, “Psychohistory and Intellectual History,” 140.

method is to take the sources at face value until other reasons emerge to question them; Vogel assumes as a foundational principle that Joseph Smith is a consistent liar and therefore, unsurprisingly, finds him to lie all the time. "The hermeneutics of suspicion always runs the risk of arbitrariness and therefore should intervene only in the last instance, when no other interpretation appears possible any longer."<sup>59</sup> By suspecting that any assertion of divine intervention is proof that the believer is lying, Vogel imposes his own ideological position too early and too suffocatingly on the historical testimony.

The fourth shortcoming is one of culture. The psychohistorian does not understand the larger culture in which the person being explained operates. Stannard's main example here is Fawn Brodie's biography of Thomas Jefferson. Jefferson's use of the word *mulatto* to describe the color of soil is not a hidden clue to Jefferson's relationship or preoccupation with Sally Hemings; the term was commonly used by many people in Jefferson's day.

If this sort of silliness were confined to Brodie's book, it would be merely (to use one of her own favorite words) curious; but it is not. All of the books mentioned in the previous several pages share, in varying degrees, the problem of making much of matters that are notable only for their lack of singular importance once they are placed in their cultural context. All of them also share all of the other problems that have been pointed out. The studies of Luther, Jackson, Hitler, and Jefferson all build complex arguments on virtually nonexistent evidence; all violate elementary rules of logic in developing those arguments; and all analyze data using theories that fail to withstand empirical examination and experimental testing.<sup>60</sup>

These failings in psychohistorical studies are understandable because they are based on an impoverished theoretical foundation, "for all of

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59. Jean-Luc Marion, "In the Name: How to Avoid Speaking of 'Negative Theology,'" in *God, the Gift, and Postmodernism*, ed. John D. Caputo and Michael J. Scanlon (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 25.

60. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 29–30.

these works are guided by a collection of hypotheses—one version or another of psychoanalytic theory—that itself suffers from problems of illogic, experimental nonconfirmation, and cultural parochialism.”<sup>61</sup>

Stannard notes that, “from the earliest endeavors to write psychohistory to those of the present, individual writings of would-be psychohistorians have consistently been characterized by a cavalier attitude toward fact, a contorted attitude toward logic, an irresponsible attitude toward theory validation, and a myopic attitude toward cultural difference and anachronism.”<sup>62</sup> Even apologists for psychohistory admit that reductive histories are common among this lot. Peter Gay writes that “reductionism appears so besetting a defect of psychohistories that historians have seen it woven into their very fabric, an ineradicable and fatal flaw.”<sup>63</sup> But Gay denies that it is built into the method of psychohistory; it is accidental that unrestrained speculation happens to be present in almost all psychohistories.

Psychohistory and psychobiography have earned the general disrepute in which they are held. Even defenders of the method admit that most psychohistories still suffer from the problems apparent, beginning with Freud, in applying psychoanalysis to historical figures:

The naive self-assurance of the first psychoanalysts, the apparent ease with which they could, on the basis of a few key pieces of evidence and a few key theoretical concepts, arrive at original “discoveries” concerning the people studied, as well as the total absence of historical training on the part of the analysts—all these factors made the psychobiographies of the heroic period (and many later psychobiographies as well) no more than dilettantish studies, superficial at best.<sup>64</sup>

Vogel’s speculations and logical problems are not just representative of the subfield of psychobiography but take the excesses and weaknesses of psychohistory to extremes.

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61. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 30.

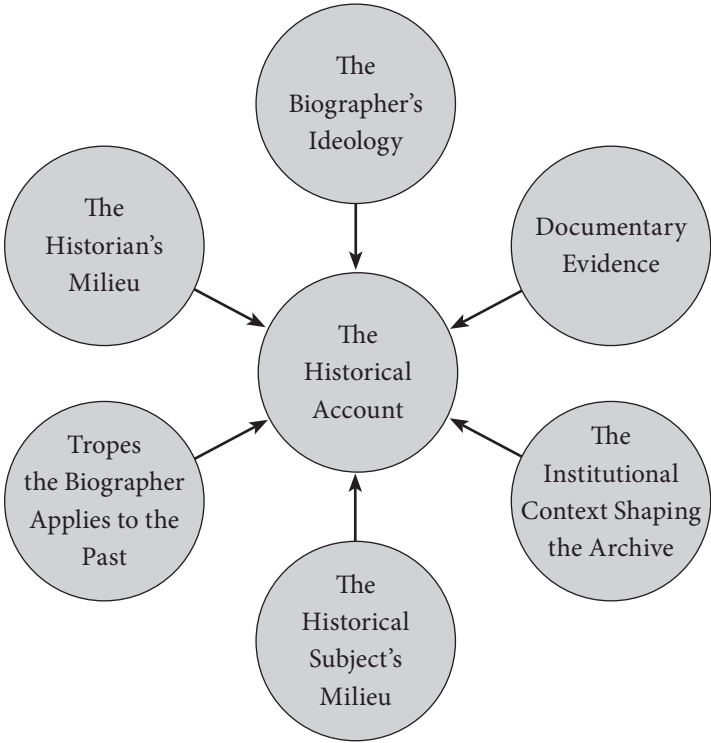
62. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 147.

63. Gay, *Freud for Historians*, 185.

64. Saul Friedländer, *History and Psychoanalysis: An Inquiry into the Possibilities and Limits of Psychohistory*, trans. Susan Suleiman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1978), 43.



his family, and his associates. Perhaps a representation of Vogel’s ideological content with more dimensions would be more helpful.



One could easily come up with more elements that contribute to the final historical product (represented here in the middle), with those circles on the outside being factors contributing to the content and shape of the center circle. For Vogel, that center circle would be overwhelmingly dominated by one component—the biographer’s ideology.

Virtually every page of Vogel’s biography drips with the animosity he feels for Joseph Smith and those associated with him. This is a serious problem in psychobiography. It is such a consistent shortcoming that when a psychohistorian deals with the subject using respect, that approach is notable. Erik Erikson’s biography of Martin Luther reports negative information about the subject (his putative anal fixation, for example), “but not with a pejorative intent. The admira-



tion and respect of the biographer for his subject as a *persona* and for Luther's historical role is evident throughout."<sup>66</sup>

When Vogel is not trying to discredit Smith, he is just plain mean-spirited about the Smith family. In a bit of conjectural character assassination totally without any basis, Vogel raises the charge that Joseph Smith Sr. was an adulterer. When the Book of Mormon (Jacob 2:31–35) criticizes the Nephites for practicing polygamy, Vogel makes the speculative leap that this indicates that Joseph Jr. was criticizing his father for being unfaithful. I will italicize the phrases where Vogel foregrounds this guesswork:

In 1834, Joseph Sr. confessed, without being specific, that he had “not always set that example before my family that I ought.” *Maybe* the years of alienation from Lucy and his lack of sobriety had pushed him to other offenses. This *would explain* the emotionally charged doctrinal debates in the Smith household and why Joseph Jr. *would have felt* so desperate about his family, particularly his father. *It may also explain* why Joseph Jr. relentlessly attacked Universalism and why he became such an uncompromising advocate of obedience to the basic commandments, why he placed sexual crimes above all others excluding murder, and why he was so harsh toward others who were guilty of sexual misconduct. Finally, *it may explain* how he could condemn adultery while at the same time fraternizing with other women himself. Smith identified with his father and *may have found* it difficult to resist his example. (pp. 452–53, emphasis added)

Admitting to not always setting the right example is a far cry from breaking marriage vows. This is irresponsible, even if the footnote tries to back away from responsibility for doing this hatchet job on both father and son. That footnote, betraying a sense of the over-the-top element of this charge, says, “I raise this interpretation as a possibility only” (p. 671 n. 56). One can only contrast the tone of Vogel's book toward its subject with the generosity of spirit demonstrated by

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66. Loewenberg, “Psychohistory,” 418.

Robert Remini toward Joseph Smith in his biography of the Mormon prophet.<sup>67</sup> Remini does not believe in the prophetic claims made by Smith any more than Vogel does, but his tone is not one of constantly attacking, persistently debunking, insistently debasing or questioning motives.

If Vogel lacks even half a rumor on which to base the previous libel, imagine what he can do with gossip. He carries this attack mode on in other places—for example when Joseph Smith was arrested and put on trial 1 July 1830, in South Bainbridge, for disorderly preaching. After Josiah Stowell and Jonathan Thompson testified in support of Smith, Stowell's daughters also testified. According to Vogel, Smith reported that "they were individually 'examined, touching my character, and conduct in general but particularly as to my behavior towards them both in public and private.' Smith said 'both [women] bore such testimony in my favor, as left my enemies without a pretext on their account'" (p. 514). With sworn testimony in Smith's favor, Vogel goes about undermining those witnesses with innuendo and gossip. "Of course, Stowell's daughters had no reason to cooperate with the prosecution. Despite the women's denials, *one wonders if* there was some substance to the prosecution's expectations about how they would testify" (p. 514; I have added the emphasis, once more, to highlight Vogel's speculative assault). He then cites gossipy accounts with the conclusion: "In light of Smith's later, well documented polygamous activities, the early rumors cannot be dismissed too quickly even though no extant evidence provides further details about these accusations" (p. 514). Vogel's predilection to accept the most defamatory comments in opposition to sworn court testimony tells us something about his preference for libelous, scandalous, and defamatory evidence of whatever quality. At one point, he even prefers third- or fourthhand evidence provided by Governor Thomas Ford—evidence that he admits is "garbled" on at least some points—as his synthesizing element regarding the eight Book of Mormon witnesses (p. 468). Vogel impeaches firsthand evidence if it supports the claims of Smith, preferring much less reliable—but ideologically useful—hearsay.

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67. Robert V. Remini, *Joseph Smith* (New York: Viking, 2002).

Vogel guesses what Smith might be thinking so often and to such great ideological consequence that providing representative examples would be tedious. I will, however, provide just a few examples of how he uses such methods to find parallels to Book of Mormon narratives. While analyzing the incident of Nephi's broken bow in which Nephi returns successfully from a hunt, Vogel says, "In fantasy, it was perhaps a role Joseph had played out in his own mind countless times" (p. 137). If one can invent fantasies supported by no comments, writings, or accounts from the historical actors, the researcher has broad liberty to impute any idea to the biographical subject. Imagine what a biographer could do with Vogel's, his book reviewer's, or the reader's life if he or she took these liberties with the record.

In a series of madcap parallels, Vogel says of Amalickiah when he first gains Lehonti's confidence, then assassinates him by administering poison (Alma 47; again, I will italicize the speculative markers), and ultimately takes over military leadership that Lehonti is "a *possible link* to father Lehi. However, Lehonti's subsequent death by poisoning *calls to mind* Alvin, Joseph's surrogate father, who died of poisoning. Although Joseph had nothing to do with this, he *may have felt guilt* about stepping into his older brother's role. *It is common* for surviving siblings to feel such guilt, *especially if* misfortune was preceded by envy. Nevertheless, Alvin's death helped Joseph move closer to uniting his family under his leadership" (p. 256). But Alvin is Joseph's surrogate father only in Vogel's mind and psychological theory.

Both recent literary theory and historiography have broken down the traditional walls between the writing of literature and the writing of history. With the recognition that history and literature are often closely related ways of understanding the past, and that the historian, like the fiction writer, is in the business of constructing narratives, a recent hybrid of the two approaches has emerged. Historiographic metafiction is fiction in which the author takes up historical characters or events (the historiographic part) while feeling free to alter the record to help the reader understand it better (the fictive part). Think of E. L. Doctorow's *Ragtime*, Graham Swift's *Waterland*, T. C. Boyle's *Water Music*, Susan's Daitch's *L.C.*, Julian Barnes's *Flaubert's*

*Parrot*, or Don DeLillo's *Libra* as parade examples of fiction that take up history in these terms. The *meta-* part is represented by an acute self-consciousness that the narrative is shaped for present purposes. These novelists often provide accounts of the same event by different witnesses (*L.C.*) or include multiple and conflicting endings (John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman*) in order to convey the tentativeness of all realistic narratives. The writer is critical about his or her own way of shaping the past to serve present needs. Like recent work in historiography that emphasizes the similarities between literature and history, historiographic metafiction points out the constructed—fictive—nature of all narratives. Vogel uses psychological theories and speculation to invent what Joseph Smith and his contemporaries might have thought or experienced. This is what Stannard refers to as using fiction to supplement the historical account. Vogel is uncritical about his own ideology and the tools he uses (psychological and speculative) to transform Mormon belief (consequently, the *meta-* portion of historiographic metafiction does not apply), so I will call what we have in his biography of Joseph Smith a work of historiographic fiction. Vogel's work is more in a new genre with few members (outside psychohistories), such as Simon Schama's *Dead Certainties* and Edmund Morris's *Dutch*.

### Simplistic Textual Analysis

In the final analysis, what one reads out of the text depends on what one reads into it.<sup>68</sup>

Historians see in their material only what they are prepared to perceive.<sup>69</sup>

Almost anything can be read into any book if you are determined enough.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Patrocínio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn, introduction to *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts*, ed. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocínio P. Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), xii.

69. Loewenberg, "Psychohistory," 409.

70. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (San Diego: Harvest, 1958), 99.

Vogel claims to approach the Book of Mormon as autobiographical not to “determine its modernity or antiquity but rather to achieve a deeper understanding of its contents and what it reveals about Smith” (pp. xviii–xix); the Book of Mormon is one of the “primary sources containing possible clues to his inner conflicts and state of mind” (p. xviii). But its very stream-of-consciousness production precludes the book’s being deep and complex; Vogel cannot countenance a sophisticated Book of Mormon because “Smith’s method of dictation did not allow for rewriting. It was a more-or-less stream-of-consciousness composition” (p. xix). He means by “deeper understanding” his effort to probe deeper into Joseph Smith’s psyche. This is why his reading must necessarily be reductive and simplistic. He is committed to a superficial book that reflects a rustic’s talented and inventive mind. Vogel has asserted that the more you study the Book of Mormon, the less complex it appears.<sup>71</sup>

This passage alone has two tropes in it: (1) scripture as autobiographical novel and (2) the dictation of the Book of Mormon as stream-of-consciousness experience. The first simile is circular (though not necessarily viciously circular), for it will lead to the search for evidence that would make the book parallel to Joseph Smith’s experience—ignoring any evidence of complexity or sophistication in the text, ignoring details that cannot be construed as parallel to Smith’s biography. The second comes to us from literary criticism, and since Vogel is analyzing the book as a literary text (a novel—occasionally he suggests an “inspired” novel), that seems to be where the vocabulary comes from. But note here that stream of consciousness is not in literary theory a term we apply to an author (in this case Joseph Smith) but to a narrator or character. We do not discuss the stream of James Joyce’s consciousness or Virginia Woolf’s; we discuss the stream of Molly Bloom’s or Mrs. Dalloway’s consciousness. If we use

71. Doug Fabrizio, interview with Brent Lee Metcalfe, Dan Vogel, Thomas Murphy, and Trent Stephens, Radio West on KUER, 26 August 2002. The file used to be available at the Signature Books Web site [www.signaturebooks.com/news.htm](http://www.signaturebooks.com/news.htm) (no longer available). This comment comes twenty-seven minutes into the sound file. Rather dismissively, Vogel (although it is hard to tell; it could be Metcalfe) notes that those FARMS people have posited the complexity of the scripture, but he flatly dismisses the assertion.

the term the way William James did—the phrase’s originator—then all thoughts for every person are stream-of-consciousness events. With this stream-of-consciousness metaphor, we can more accurately get at what Vogel is doing. In his book, Joseph Smith is a character, and Vogel is attempting to follow the stream of consciousness of a historiographic fictional character named Joseph Smith, much of whose thought must be invented by using psychological jargon and creative thought processes (invented by Vogel) much as novels explore a narrator’s or character’s consciousness.

That his readings would end up being superficial is not surprising; Vogel posits that the text is superficial from the start. He denies that scripture can be complex in the simplistic way he conceives of complexity: the rapid pace of dictation with little or no revision did not permit reworking the text (p. xix). In addition, Vogel, as a reader, has no track record or capability of reading a complex text in a complex way. One does not have to believe that the Book of Mormon is an ancient work to acknowledge its complexity. Mark Thomas’s book *Digging in Cumorah* is an argument that the book is modern but at the same time a complex work of literature.<sup>72</sup>

Dominick LaCapra says that historians are professionally trained as nonreaders. Self-taught biographers such as Vogel go one step beyond and are specifically unprofessionally nontrained nonreaders by absorbing the dominant ethos of the historical profession without having the methodological and historiographical preparation professional historians encounter in graduate training. “In a sense, historians are professionally trained not to read. Instead, they are taught to use texts in rather narrow, utilitarian ways—to ‘strip mine’ or ‘gut’ them for documentary information. Indeed, historians tend to appreciate texts to the extent that they provide factual information about

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72. Mark D. Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah: Reclaiming Book of Mormon Narratives* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999). Thomas explicitly discusses the complexity of the book on pages 48 and 85–86, although he does not go far enough in reading the book in a sophisticated way; we should still see his book as a refutation of Vogel’s inability to read the book as a thick narrative.

given times and places.”<sup>73</sup> Such strip mining of the text makes up the overwhelming majority of Vogel’s biography. Hans Kellner says of LaCapra’s observation that “this statement does not say that historians are not professionally trained to read, but that they are precisely trained *not* to read. The sort of reading that is proper to historical work is a mitigated one, which slights not only most of the true complications inherent in written texts, but also the necessary dialogical interplay of reader and text and the conflict of voices within a text itself.”<sup>74</sup> Kellner wants historians to learn a more textualist form of reading that does justice to complexity and contradiction in texts. “It seems that ‘reading’ in the modern critical sense is not only deemed ‘not historical’ per se, but is also something that a historian *ought* not to do, apparently on moral grounds, because questioning language also calls into question the nature of the ‘truth of history’ that is constituted by language.”<sup>75</sup> Since professional historians tend to view sources in strict documentary ways (“all texts and documents are assimilated to a homogeneous status as source or evidence that enables the determination of certain findings”),<sup>76</sup> they frequently avoid engaging literary or philosophical (and I would add religious) texts that demand so much more of a reader. “Typically, literary or philosophical texts are reduced to the status of unreliable sources because they do not yield solid evidence or clear-cut facts about empirical states of affairs.”<sup>77</sup> Vogel takes this antireading propensity among historians to extremes, reducing the Book of Mormon to a simple mirror of Joseph Smith’s world and then making it into a text as simplistic as his own assumptions about it in order to solve this problem. He seems to show no awareness that his is a mitigated and simplistic reading, and he is not even aware that he is engaging in this kind of reductive behavior. According to

73. Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 339.

74. Hans Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation: Getting the Story Crooked* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 11–12.

75. Kellner, *Language and Historical Representation*, 12.

76. Dominick LaCapra, *History and Reading: Tocqueville, Foucault, French Studies* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 30.

77. LaCapra, *History and Reading*, 30.

LaCapra, this “synoptic or paraphrastic approach” attempts to make the text as lucid and clear as possible while it “downplays nuances and is geared to the reconstruction of the object, often to the exclusion (or occlusion) of a more dialogic, critical exchange with the past and its artifacts.”<sup>78</sup>

The older positivistic view of historiography that Vogel represents has been eclipsed by philosophically sophisticated historians who take seriously the challenges presented by theory. Those historians who continue to follow older models have a hard time adjusting to the new circumstances; those “grounded in an epistemological foundationalism, have offered few convincing rejoinders to philosophers’ and theorists’ critiques of this assumption.”<sup>79</sup> Clark cites Beverly Southgate, who asserts that those who still uphold some older variety of historiographical confession often see themselves as besieged, and their reaction is often one of aggression.<sup>80</sup> This describes quite well Vogel’s personal attacks on those who point out his positivism. The professional response is not to engage in personal attacks but to offer some alternative theory that is believable. But such analysis calls for self-criticism and philosophical sophistication, exactly what the historical profession has drained out of the discipline, for such a critical approach calls on historians to do “what historians do worst, or at least badly: reflecting on epistemology.”<sup>81</sup> History must be reconceptualized, and, again citing Southgate, Clark notes that the answer is not impoverished intellectual attacks on others, but that positivistic historians must “set forth more explicitly the philosophical underpinnings of their subject.”<sup>82</sup> Historians must, in other words, be more theoretical and self-critical about their own ideological and philosophical presuppositions rather than just taking them for granted.

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78. LaCapra, *History and Reading*, 34–35.

79. Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 25.

80. Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 26.

81. Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The “Objectivity Question” and the American Historical Profession* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 15.

82. Clark, *History, Theory, Text*, 27.



Historians, by training, are an antiphilosophical and antitheoretical lot; Hayden White recently noted that his own work was advanced to combat the dominant positivism in historiography: “It is against positivism, against a positivistic notion of history [that White wrote *Metahistory*]. The discipline of history is systematically antitheoretical. Historians think of themselves as being empirical, and they are, but they are not philosophically empirical. They are empirical in a commonsense way—in an ordinary, everyday way.”<sup>83</sup> Other fields (literary criticism and anthropology, for example) have been intensely theorized over the past thirty years. History is undergoing such philosophical retooling now. Just as a literary critic will be criticized for not articulating the theoretical basis of his or her approach, in a decade all historians will be found lacking to the extent they cannot lay out their theory or ideological and philosophical commitments. This “aversion historians instinctively have to ‘theory’”<sup>84</sup> needs to be overcome if historians are going to be more self-critical about their work. Vogel manifests many of the anxieties prevalent in the historical profession—including the anxiety that he is a positivist with the determination to engage in ad hominem attacks if called a positivist—without the philosophical background to deal with the issues adequately. “Historians operate on the basis of ‘tacit knowledge’ that they rarely make explicit themselves, and that they pass along to their students in the form of transmitted anxieties.”<sup>85</sup> Just a few examples show how underperforming readers such as Vogel read the Book of Mormon down to their own reading level.

### **Marriage Abduction, Lamanite Daughters, and Isaac Hale’s Daughter**

I will provide a few examples to demonstrate Vogel’s desiccated readings of the Book of Mormon alongside alternative readings that bring literary competence to the text. The Mormon scripture tells of

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83. Hayden White, interview, in Ewa Domańska, *Encounters: Philosophy of History after Postmodernism* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 15.

84. Domańska, *Encounters*, 84. The words are Frank Ankersmit’s.

85. Hans Kellner, interview, in Domańska, *Encounters*, 41.

the priests of Noah who escaped, fleeing from their own people, leaving their wives and children behind to save their own lives. The priests later lay in wait, abducting Lamanite girls to be their new wives. Here is Vogel's account of the story: "Noah's priests escape into the wilderness. Two years later, they resurface to capture twenty-four Lamanite women, carrying them into the wilderness to become their wives (19:29; 20:1–26)" (p. 193). The following is the analysis Vogel devotes to this story, attempting to make a parallel to Joseph Smith's life:

Ironically, the priests have won over the Lamanites because they abducted Lamanite women to be their wives. Still, Smith would understand this situation, having eloped with Emma, who thereafter was the only thing standing between him and Isaac's wrath. From Isaac's point of view, Joseph, within two years of having met Emma (cf. 19:29), had sneaked back into town and "stolen" his daughter. In pleading with the Lamanite army for their husbands, the Lamanite women reveal that they are no longer captives but voluntary wives. Emma had done likewise with Joseph. Thus, through marriage, former enemies became uncomfortable allies. (p. 194)

Sometimes, one must point out the obvious. Abduction is not the same thing as eloping. Vogel's parallelomaniac comparison between Joseph Smith and this episode from the Book of Mormon does not even have the most basic element in common. I use Samuel Sandmel's definition of parallelomania: "that extravagance among scholars which first overdoes the supposed similarity in passages and then proceeds to describe source and derivation as if implying literary connection flowing in an inevitable or predetermined direction."<sup>86</sup> The way to avoid the extravagance of parallelomania is to examine the specific passages and their larger contexts.<sup>87</sup> Selected and isolated elements often look parallel, but the examination of details frequently undermines the connection.

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86. Samuel Sandmel, "Parallelomania," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 81 (1962): 1.

87. Sandmel, "Parallelomania," 2.

I have analyzed this story elsewhere.<sup>88</sup> Vogel does not refer the reader to alternative readings of the Book of Mormon that would place in question his naïve and forced comparisons; yet a writer should acknowledge readings of which he is aware that undermine his or her own position, if for no other reason than to reassure the reader that the writer is being fair with evidence:

Dishonest apologists insist on these standards for everyone but themselves and in every subject but their own. Honest apologists avoid suppressing material evidence, even as they seek to downplay the significance of controversial information. Traditional Mormon history has had (and continues to have) both honest apologists and dishonest apologists. Many “New Mormon Historians” are also honest apologists for what they see as the essential truths of Mormon theology and the basic goodness of the Mormon experience. These New Mormon Historian apologists often seek to downplay the significance, or “to put into context,” any evidence they find which may discomfort believing Mormons. Traditional Mormon apologists discuss such “sensitive evidence” only when this evidence is so well known that ignoring it is impossible. Personally, I have always tried to write both as a New Mormon Historian and an honest apologist for the Mormon faith and experience.<sup>89</sup>

D. Michael Quinn goes on to assert that failure to note contradictory evidence for the reader is dishonest: Researchers

are certainly “dishonest or bad historians” if they fail to acknowledge the existence of even one piece of evidence they know challenges or contradicts the rest of their evidence. If this omission of relevant evidence is inadvertent, the author

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88. Alan Goff, “The Stealing of the Daughters of the Lamanites,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 67–74.

89. D. Michael Quinn, introduction to *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past*, ed. D. Michael Quinn (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), xiii n. 5.

is careless. If the omission is an intentional effort to conceal or avoid presenting the reader with evidence that contradicts the preferred view of the writer, that is fraud whether by a scholar or non-scholar, historian or other specialist. If authors write in scholarly style, they are equally dishonest if they fail to acknowledge any significant work whose interpretations differ from their own.<sup>90</sup>

Vogel occasionally cites authors who believe the Book of Mormon is an ancient work, but only to argue with them; his ideological commitments do not permit him to acknowledge sources that undermine his main point about the simplistic nature of the Mormon scripture.

Since 1991, when I wrote my essay about the abduction of the Lamanite girls, I have found other sources that support the idea that this story belongs to antiquity, not to Joseph Smith's world. Fawn Brodie is right that it requires that we look to ancient texts for comparisons although she is wrong about the significance of the story, for she asserts that it is evidence that Joseph Smith plagiarized the story from the Bible<sup>91</sup>—specifically from Judges 21. The story of the abduction, rape, and marriage of the daughters of Shiloh from Judges belongs to a complex of stories in the eastern Levant about abduction marriage. What neither Brodie nor Vogel mentions is that a Roman story in Plutarch (and Livy, for that matter) about the early Romans abducting the daughters of the Sabines represents the wives/daughters reconciling their fathers and husbands in much the same way the

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90. Quinn, introduction to *New Mormon History*, xiii n. 5. I think Quinn's sharp dichotomy is too rigid and harsh, although it helps focus the mind on what ideologues/apologists such as Vogel neglect. The volume of scholarship in any discipline today is so large that to dismiss someone as either dishonest or incompetent for missing a single source (a person's metaphysical or ideological commitments help determine which sources are relevant, so the concept of relevance is not value-free) is too simple, especially when a reading of the Book of Mormon calls for a reader to be competent in historiography, biblical criticism, literary criticism, and philosophy. But I think we could reasonably expect Vogel to have engaged counterreadings that provide alternatives to his own position.

91. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 63.

Lamanite daughters do and is a much better parallel than anything offered by the two Joseph Smith biographers.

Stories from the ancient Mediterranean world about the abduction of girls are so common that a critical mass of studies has now been published on the motif. These abduction-to-force-marriage themes are common in Hebraic, Greek, and Roman writings (they continue into medieval Europe also). This common abduction type-scene permits Helena Zlotnick to posit that the standard form of giving a nubile maiden in marriage was through dowry and negotiation, but abduction marriage represents an alternative strategy for grooms and their families.<sup>92</sup> “More often than not, however, an abduction led to marriage and reconciliation.”<sup>93</sup> Zlotnick focuses on the rape of Dinah in Genesis 34 more than on the abduction of the daughters of Shiloh, but she does fit the Shiloh story into her reading.

After listing a range of Greco-Roman stories containing the abduction-marriage motif,<sup>94</sup> Susan Ackerman highlights the common features between the biblical and Greek stories: (1) the abducted maidens are participating in cultic dancing, (2) the girls’ youth is emphasized, (3) the ambush has “an element of prurience,”<sup>95</sup> of older men’s erotic gaze at girls, (4) the kidnapping violates the normal processes of conveying a girl from father to husband, and (5) the girls dance in a liminal space on the boundary between city and wilderness, culture and nature.<sup>96</sup> The Book of Mormon story includes these characteristic Mediterranean kidnapping elements: (1) the Lamanite girls gather to sing and dance at a particular place (Mosiah 20:1); (2) the girls are always referred to as the “daughters of the Lamanites” (Mosiah 20:1, 4–6) and only when the Amulonites are discovered later by the Lamanites does the terminology shift to include the title “wives” (Mosiah 23:33–34); (3) the wicked priests are older, already

92. Helena Zlotnick, *Dinah’s Daughters: Gender and Judaism from the Hebrew Bible to Late Antiquity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 34.

93. Zlotnick, *Dinah’s Daughters*, 39–40.

94. Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 267–68.

95. Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 269.

96. Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen*, 268–71.

having wives and children they have abandoned (Mosiah 20:3), and they “laid and watched” the dancing girls (Mosiah 20:4); (4) the theft violates the standard procedure of conveying girls to husbands, so the Lamanites attack the Zeniffites in the mistaken belief that they are the kidnappers (Mosiah 20:6), and later those daughters must intervene with their fathers so that the latter do not “destroy their husbands” when discovered (Mosiah 23:33–34); and (5) we cannot know much about the place the girls dance, but it is in the Lamanite land of Shemlon (Mosiah 20:1) where the priests of Amulon “tarried in the wilderness” (Mosiah 20:4). Shemlon was also the Lamanite land bordering the Zeniffite territory (Mosiah 10:7; 11:12; 19:6). The eastern Levantine stories of abduction marriage fit a pattern shared by the Israelite and Book of Mormon narratives. These connections should increase, not decrease, respect for the text. Only a superficial reading can have the opposite result.

Additionally, Vogel’s comparison of Emma and Joseph’s elopement to the abduction of the Lamanite girls makes no psychological sense. If Smith wrote this story, then he would be identifying himself subconsciously in Mosiah’s narrative as a kidnapper and rapist. The priests of Amulon are not portrayed heroically, admirably, or even neutrally in the Book of Mormon story. Vogel sees Smith creating a lot of alter egos for himself in the Book of Mormon: Mormon (pp. 118, 326–28), Nephi (pp. 132, 134–35), Mosiah (p. 166), Andrew Jackson/Captain Moroni (p. 249), and Samuel the Lamanite (p. 284). In all these instances, Vogel projects these figures as Smith’s alter egos *because* they are portrayed heroically, as a kind of fantasy fulfillment for a young Joseph Smith. So this identification of the priests of Noah as stand-ins for Smith would go against the grain of even Vogel’s own interpretive principles. These kidnappers are scoundrels who abandon their original wives and children to abduct new wives and start a new life. Later they align themselves with the Lamanites to oppress and enslave a group of Nephites.

The book of Judges frames the three stories of violence (which are usually against women) at the conclusion of the book (Judges 19–21) with the claim that there was no king in the land (Judges 19:1) and

that, consequently, each man “did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). The Mosiah narrative of abduction marriage alludes to the Judges abduction marriage story to make the point that even with a king in the land (Noah—and these priests are called the priests of Noah) each man still often does what is right in his own eyes (unless the people reject wicked kings such as Noah); Noah and his priests brought the people into slavery (Mosiah 23:12), and overthrowing a king is so difficult because “he has his friends in iniquity” (Mosiah 29:22). The Mosiah stories continue a complex discussion of leadership inherited from the Bible. Vogel’s reading of the text is so elliptical that it does not develop the consequences of its position. His reading is stunted by its own ideological imperatives.

Vogel’s story of Emma and Joseph’s elopement does not involve an abduction, does not have nubile maidens group dancing in a liminal area to celebrate a cultic rite, does not have older men watching pruriently (Joseph was younger than Emma, and Emma was of adult age), does not have outraged fathers and brothers vowing to kill the abductors, does not have daughters pleading for their husband’s/abductor’s lives, does not have the details that connect the Book of Mormon story to Old World antecedents. Vogel’s parallel is superficial, avoiding any descent into particulars.

### The Foreigner at the Well Type-Scene

Vogel’s scheme also uses Joseph and Emma’s elopement as a parallel for another story, the narrative of Ammon’s missionary journey to the Lamanites in which King Lamoni offers his daughter in marriage to the Nephite. (I have also published a reading of that story.)<sup>97</sup> Here is Vogel’s take on this story: After entering Lamoni’s domain, Ammon is taken captive and

ingratiates himself to the king to the point that Lamoni offers him his own daughter in marriage. Ammon refuses. This scene has prompted Robert Anderson to suggest that Lamoni

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97. Alan Goff, “Reduction and Enlargement: Harold Bloom’s Mormons,” *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 96–108.

represents Isaac Hale and that the offer of his daughter's hand is a reversal of the humiliation Joseph felt during his and Emma's elopement. Indeed, the setting of Ammon in a distant wilderness far from home suggests the Pennsylvania frontier, and various elements attached to King Lamoni—his power over Ammon, the offer of marriage, and his location in the land of Ishmael, which recalls the image of Nephi's father-in-law as previously described—suggest Isaac Hale. However, other elements, especially the dynamics between the king, queen, and Ammon, seem more reflective of Smith's own family. Lamoni is likely a composite of Isaac Hale and Joseph Smith Sr. (p. 222)

*Caveat lector* when journalists and biographers begin talking about composite characters; it means they are using fictionalizing techniques of synthesis because they cannot find a historical person to do the necessary work. Vogel then proceeds to summarize Ammon's encounter as a shepherd with the bandits who attempt to steal the flocks from the waters of Sebus, speculating whether they represent "adolescent games and fantasies" as Ammon defends the flocks with sword and sling (p. 222).

Again, Brodie has better readerly instincts about the interpretation of this narrative, for she—once more—speculates that Smith stole it from the story of David and Goliath.<sup>98</sup> To deal with this story adequately, one needs to compare it to biblical narrative, not Joseph Smith's life. True enough, Ammon is in a distant land (although Vogel seems to believe that the adjoining states of Pennsylvania and New York are foreign countries) and there are marriage implications; that is as much similarity as Vogel finds between the stories.

Robert Alter has shown that the primary feature of biblical narrative is its constant allusiveness.<sup>99</sup> The Book of Mormon—as Hebraic literature—likewise assumes that the reader will be able to make the connection between its own stories and the biblical stories it takes for

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98. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 63.

99. Robert Alter, *The World of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: BasicBooks, 1992), 51.



granted. The Bible is full of type-scenes, stories whose basic motif is repeated with variations in other passages, sometimes in imitation, sometimes in opposition, sometimes in parody, and always to ensure that we compare the characters to each other to obtain the sense. The meaning of the particular type-scene is to be discerned through the resort to tradition and innovation in that type-scene. The story of Ammon's meeting Lamoni and confronting the thieves at the waters of Sebus belongs to that biblical textuality; more allusion to biblical Davidic stories is going on in the Ammon narrative. I will present the streamlined version here. Notice how viewing the story as a type-scene accounts for details in the narrative in a way that Vogel's generality does not even approach.

Alter refers to "a betrothal type-scene," and others call this repetitive pattern "the wooing at the well type-scene." He lists five elements of the motif: (1) the groom or his substitute is in a foreign land, (2) he comes across a nubile maiden, (3) one of them draws water, (4) the maiden rushes home announcing the arrival, and (5) the groom is invited in for a meal and marriage negotiations.<sup>100</sup> Moses's betrothal at the well is the simplest and most explicit betrothal scene (Exodus 2). Moses, (1) fleeing from Pharaoh, is in the foreign land of Midian; (2) he approaches the well used by Reuel (also known as Jethro) as Reuel's daughters herd their sheep there. Rogue shepherds drive away the girls' sheep; (3) Moses confronts the shepherds, then helps to draw water; (4) the girls tell their father about the stranger; and (5) Moses is welcomed to the household, later marrying Zipporah.

Another version of the type-scene has Jacob fleeing from his brother (Genesis 29). When he is (1) traveling as a stranger in Haran, (2) he sees Rachel at the well herding sheep, and (3) he helps water the sheep. (4) Rachel tells her father Laban, and (5) Jacob and Laban negotiate a marriage (eventually two marriages). Others of these type-scenes abound in Genesis and the books of Samuel.

Here is the fit with the Ammon type-scene in the Book of Mormon. Ammon (1) preaches in a foreign land and is bound before King Lamoni. Lamoni, pleased with Ammon, (5) offers a marriage to

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100. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: BasicBooks, 1981), 52.

his (2) nubile daughter (Alma 17:24). Ammon declines and instead serves as a shepherd. The story lacks a well, but there is (3) a watering hole for the sheep, the waters of Sebus (Alma 17:26) where the flocks are scattered by thieves. As Moses resists the shepherds at a well, Ammon saves the sheep. With sword and sling Ammon defends the sheep, and the other servants run to the king with (4) news and testimony of Ammon's mighty deeds (Alma 17:39).

Vogel's interpretation of this story is so ideologically focused on finding some obscure and general parallel to Joseph Smith's life that he does not elucidate the details within the story. His reading is rudimentary, and he never ventures to point the reader to rival readings that might provide more satisfaction.

### Abinadi's Disguise Fools Vogel

Another passage Vogel reads cursorily regards the prophet Abinadi.<sup>101</sup> He begins by comparing the slavery experienced by the Book of Mormon people of Limhi to Smith's discomfort at living in Harmony on land owned by his father-in-law:

The story of Limhi's people subtly parallels Joseph Smith's situation in Harmony. After their marriage, Joseph and Emma lived briefly in Manchester, but Emma longed to return to Harmony. When Joseph and Emma moved there, they settled on land owned by her father, Isaac, who was not sympathetic to Joseph. Isaac nevertheless offered to help them get established. Initially, Emma was happy in her homeland, and Joseph probably believed that living in Harmony was preferable to the conditions he had left behind in Manchester. Yet, there were unsettling aspects to living on land owned by an opponent, not the least of which was Hale's threat to have Smith evicted. Cowdery arrived with means to remove the

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101. Again, I have provided a published reading about Abinadi's confrontation with King Noah to which Vogel could have referred, but Vogel, as what Quinn calls a "dishonest apologist" or an incompetent researcher, does not. Alan Goff, "Uncritical Theory and Thin Description: The Resistance to History," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 170–207.

threat, but persecution would eventually drive Smith away. The lesson to Emma was that it was better living in freedom in a foreign land than in bondage in one's homeland. (p. 167)

Again, New York and Pennsylvania are foreign lands. The parallels here, like the last few examples, are too general and extended to be useful. For Vogel, literal slavery is literarily comparable to being a renter with a disagreeable landlord. When this narrative was written, some of the corresponding events (persecution in Harmony and South Bainbridge) had not even happened yet. These are parallels stretched beyond their plasticity. Vogel extends the parallelomania by writing that Smith's insecure relationship with Isaac Hale is allegorically like Zeniff's/Noah's/Limhi's living at a disadvantage or even in slavery to the Lamanites: This "must have seemed like servitude and bondage to Smith. Nevertheless, father-in-law and son-in-law reached an uncomfortable truce that allowed Smith to work on his Book of Mormon" (p. 176). Going beyond the realm of evidence, Vogel speculates that King Noah "may be a composite of people Joseph knew" (p. 177). Again, composite characterization is a feature of Vogel's fictive narrative. For Vogel, the wealth of Noah is reminiscent not only of Isaac Hale but also of the drinking of Smith's own father and of the king's vineyard of the biblical Noah. Noncredible comparisons are not beyond the range of guesswork for Vogel: "Just how complete or exaggerated the image of King Noah is as applied to Joseph Sr. remains speculative. Certainly, Joseph Sr.'s excessive drinking was a matter of public record and his repeated attempts to become wealthy were apparent to all familiar with his story" (p. 177). But these are pretty thin foundations for a literary comparison. Vogel continues his speculation on pages 178–79, where indicators of wild guesswork occur fifteen times on page 178 alone with another seven on page 179 ("could allude," "perhaps indicating," "there is no direct evidence," "may have," "provides a clue," "perhaps," "may be exaggerated," "may have been," "might have included," "maybe he similarly," "if," "would have felt," "perhaps," "a brief glimpse," "provides just a hint," "certainly," "would have regarded," "may have alluded," "undoubtedly," "in any

case,” “may reflect,” and “in other words”). Such speculation is all too representative of this book.

Vogel then gets down to the serious work of textual eisegesis. Abinadi cries repentance to Noah’s people.

Following God’s command, Abinadi prophesies destruction upon King Noah and his people unless they “repent in sackcloth and ashes” (11:25; cf. Matt. 11:21). The prophet’s message angers Noah, who commands his men to bring him “hither, that I may slay him” (v. 28). Abinadi escapes into the forest, from where, two years later, he emerges from seclusion dressed in a disguise and resumes prophesying. This time he is captured and brought in bonds before Noah and his priests to be interrogated concerning his teachings.

Smith returned to Harmony after having been away for two years, and this time he came in a prophet’s mantle. Residents of the small rural community rejected him for the same reason, in part, that caused Abinadi’s martyrdom, which was because he taught that “Christ was the God, the Father of all things . . . and that God should come down among the children of men, and take upon him flesh and blood” (7:26–27), as previously stated by King Benjamin (3:5–10). (pp. 178–79)

For one thing, Vogel is so misled by his tendency to see parallels between the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s life that he fudges on this one. Joseph Smith was never away from Harmony for a two-year period from the time he first arrived until his ultimate departure to finish translating the book at the Whitmer home. Here is the timeline: Smith first goes to the Harmony/South Bainbridge area in October 1825 to work for Josiah Stowell, splitting most of 1826 between Harmony and South Bainbridge/Colesville; Joseph and Emma elope on 18 January 1827 and leave Harmony. In August 1827, Joseph and Emma return to Harmony to retrieve her property just four months before Joseph returns with the plates in December 1827 to begin translating the Book of Mormon.

Here is Vogel's claim again: "Smith returned to Harmony after having been away for two years, and this time he came in a prophet's mantel."<sup>102</sup> Vogel has to get the chronology wrong in order to make the parallel match Abinadi's two years, just as Fawn Brodie has to misrepresent the Book of Mormon to acquire one of her parallels. Asserting an unusual similarity between Lehi's family and Joseph Smith's, Brodie claims that even the order of sons is the same: "Like Joseph himself, Nephi had two elder brothers, Laman and Lemuel, and three younger, Sam, Jacob, and Joseph."<sup>103</sup> But this order misrepresents Sam's place in the family to make the birth order comparable, for the Book of Mormon, the only source available, declares (twice, in 1 Nephi 2:5 and in the introduction to the book of 1 Nephi) that Sam is older than Nephi. Turning back from Brodie's to Vogel's mistake, if you count backward two years, or twenty-four months, from the time Smith returned with the gold plates, that takes you back to a few months after Joseph Smith first arrived in the Harmony area. Joseph Smith did not return after being away for two years, as Abinadi did. Smith had been away from Harmony for four months and had only eloped—and therefore changed residence from Harmony to the Manchester area—ten months earlier. When Vogel needs a parallel between the Book of Mormon narrative and Joseph Smith's life, he is not above making things up that are contrary to the historical record.<sup>104</sup>

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102. A *mantel* is, by the way, a home furnishing attached to the fireplace. A *mantle* is a piece of clothing often associated with an office or position. Vogel may be confusing Joseph Smith (or Abinadi—if I may indulge in riotous Vogelian-type speculation—who might have worn Nephite home furnishings as a disguise), who symbolically wore a piece of clothing, with Jeremiah who did not wear part of a fireplace as an accoutrement but did wear "bonds and yokes" around his neck (Jeremiah 27:2–7) as a symbolic act prophesying the bondage Israelites would soon experience. Although typos and misspellings are inevitable in any book, Vogel's has an unusually high number of such grammatical and spelling mistakes, indicating sloppy compositional and editorial work. For example, Vogel perversely misspells the word *subtly* as s-u-b-t-l-e-l-y (p. 182) or s-u-b-t-l-e-t-y (p. 167). While spelling was not regularized by the early nineteenth century, it has been today. In addition to numerous misspellings, Vogel doesn't understand that subjunctive verb forms should be used in hypothetical claims (the bulk of Vogel's book) or statements contrary to fact (pp. 514 and 256, for example).

103. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 43.

104. When I read Vogel's biography, I read the introduction first and then skipped to chapter 12 about Abinadi's confrontation with Noah because I had written in the past

A more adequate reading of the Abinadi/Noah confrontation needs to be made. Vogel's interpretation minimizes the text when his version is not just plain wrong. Let me pick up on a detail Vogel mentions but does not even bother to explain. Abinadi's disguise is the interpretive key to this narrative. The Bible has a series of stories that contain the following elements: (1) a confrontation between a prophet and a king, (2) a disguise that is ineffective or is immediately dropped, and (3) a condemnation of the king. The type-scene appears often enough with those particulars that "we may suppose that a theological point is being made here."<sup>105</sup> Table 1 charts the occurrences of this biblical type-scene as Richard Coggins reads the text.

Notice that the Abinadi story has the same elements, worked into a different story. Just as the Bible makes a point by the repetition of the type-scene, the Book of Mormon does also. The Book of Mormon is much more complex than Vogel's readings would suggest. His readings are superficial because his ideology requires superficiality. He mentions the disguise detail but misses its importance, which is to attune the reader to the text and its version of textuality—to remember the biblical stories of prophets, kings, and disguises. Coggins's analysis of the disguise type-scene fits the Abinadi/Noah story as well as it fits any biblical narrative. The Abinadi story uses the word *disguise* to get the reader reflecting on the discussion of kingship that the Deuteronomistic history carries on with its stories of kings, prophets, and disguises.

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about that narrative. My mind was "thin slicing" this chronology, as Malcolm Gladwell calls it in *Blink*. Something just seemed wrong to me. I compared the chronology to J. Christopher Conkling's *A Joseph Smith Chronology* and found the problem, then looked up the details in a half dozen other Joseph Smith biographies. If you read Vogel's chapter 6 and keep track of the chronology there, you will see that he gets the dates correct and disproves his own assertion about Smith's being absent for two years. It is only when he makes the comparison to Abinadi that he distorts the time period. This was the first and only passage from Vogel's book that I spent any substantial time fact checking, and this one happened to be wrong—and ideologically wrong at that.

105. Richard Coggins, "On Kings and Disguises," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 50 (1991): 55.

Table 1. Type-scene features in biblical stories about disguise

	Disguised Saul and Witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28)	Unnamed Disguised Prophet and Ahab (1 Kg. 20)	Disguised King of Israel and King of Judah against Syria (1 Kg. 22)	King Josiah's Disguise (2 Chr. 35:20–24)	King Jeroboam, His Disguised Wife, and Ahijah (1 Kg. 14)
<b>A disguise</b>	Saul disguises himself to get the woman to conjure Samuel's spirit	The prophet demands to be assaulted and dons ashes as a disguise	Jehoshaphat wears kingly robes while Ahab is disguised	King Josiah disguises himself to fight the Egyptians	Jeroboam sends his wife disguised to Ahijah to supplicate for a sick son
<b>The disguise promptly dropped or is ineffective</b>	The woman sees through King Saul's disguise	The prophet drops the disguise after Ahab passes judgment	The Syrians told to engage only the king, but Ahab dies despite disguise	Josiah dies despite the disguise	The blind prophet perceives the real identity despite blindness and disguise
<b>Conflict between prophet and king</b>	Samuel criticizes Saul, whom the Lord has abandoned	Ahab should have killed Ben Hadad instead of releasing him	Ahab assaults and imprisons Micaiah for pessimistic prophecy	No conflict is evident	Ahijah criticizes Jeroboam for departing from commandments
<b>Condemnation of the king</b>	Saul will die that day in battle along with his sons	For releasing the rival king, Ahab himself will die	400 prophets in Ahab's employ predict victory; only Micaiah predicts death	Josiah is not condemned	Jeroboam condemned for idolatry and the son will die

## Off with Their Heads

Another motif from the ancient world that Vogel handles incompetently is the theme of a dancing lover followed by a decapitation. Vogel follows Brodie in a simplistic analysis of this story: “Many stories he borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed.”<sup>106</sup> Without acknowledging Brodie’s antecedent claim, Vogel writes about this story in the book of Ether: “Like Salome who danced for the head of John the Baptist, Jared’s daughter dances before Akish (8:10–12; cf. Matt. 14:6–12)” (p. 350).<sup>107</sup> Here is the larger context of Brodie’s charge that Joseph Smith plagiarized from the Bible: “Many stories [Joseph Smith] borrowed from the Bible. The daughter of Jared, like Salome, danced before a king and a decapitation followed. Aminadi, like Daniel, deciphered handwriting on a wall, and Alma was converted after the exact fashion of St. Paul. The daughters of the Lamanites were abducted like the dancing daughters of Shiloh; and Ammon, the American counterpart of David, for want of a Goliath slew six sheep-rustlers with his sling.” This passage, where Brodie accuses Smith of pilfering in composing the Book of Mormon, must be the most commonly plagiarized passage from Brodie’s book. Here Wayne Ham lifts from Brodie (without attribution) as he accuses Smith of plagiarizing from the Bible:

Other apparent biblical allusions in the **Book of Mormon** include Alma’s conversion in a similar fashion to Paul’s; Ammon, like David, slaying six sheep rustlers with a sling; the daughter of Jared, like Salome, dancing for the king in return

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106. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 62–63.

107. Similarly, Vogel does not acknowledge part of this Brodie passage when suggesting another story Smith took from the Bible: the sons of Mosiah and Alma disrupt the church, and “their conversion story is patterned after that of Paul in Acts 9:1–31” (p. 196); again, Vogel does not cite Brodie where Brodie says, “Alma was converted after the exact fashion of St. Paul.” Brodie notes one other passage that she considers a plagiarism that the Book of Mormon pilfers from the Bible: “Aminadi, like Daniel, deciphered handwriting on a wall” (Brodie, *No Man Know My History*, 63), when Vogel asserts the following: “Among Amulek’s ancestors was Aminadi, who like Daniel in the Old Testament ‘interpreted the writing upon the wall of the temple, which was written by the finger of God’ (v. 2; Dan. 5)” (p. 210).



for a decapitation; Jesus' blessing of the children; and an abduction scene similar to that involving the daughters of Shiloh.<sup>108</sup>

In this article, Ham explicitly raises the context of students plagiarizing in a class: "All of this may raise the same kind of question as might appear in a teacher's mind when one student's project shows a marked resemblance to a project submitted previously by another student. To what extent was the author (or editor, or compiler) of the *Book of Mormon* dependent upon the King James Version, and why?"<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, even though evangelical author Ruth Tucker cites Brodie as her source, Tucker also plagiarizes the passage from the Joseph Smith biographer because she cites the passage verbatim (inserting an introductory phrase) without including quotation marks.<sup>110</sup> This material from Fawn Brodie shows up many times in anti-Mormon books and Web pages. Like Ham's copying, a Web page (entitled without any apparent irony "Honest Inquiry") appropriates Brodie without citation: the "daughter of Jared danced before the king (Ether 8) like the daughter of Herodias (Matthew 14) (decapitation followed in both cases)."<sup>111</sup> Acknowledging sources on the Internet is subject to different rules, but these examples clearly fall outside acceptable behavior. Other parts of Brodie's paragraph also show up in this vicinity under the heading "Why do so many stories seem like exaggerated borrowings from the Bible?" Failure of originality often accompanies failure to acknowledge literary theft (while at the same time the critics are accusing the Book of Mormon of theft).<sup>112</sup> There is some irony that Brodie's simplistic charges of plagiarism are so often plagiarized in books and on the Internet (one can easily find more sites, such as the one that claims

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108. Wayne Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 1/1 (September 1970): 22 n. 8, emphasis in original.

109. Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History," 19.

110. Ruth A. Tucker, *Another Gospel: Alternative Religions and the New Age Movement* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 55. I have taken the subtitle from the title page, which differs slightly from the dustcover.

111. See [www.lds-mormon.com/bookofmormonquestions.shtml#BOM8](http://www.lds-mormon.com/bookofmormonquestions.shtml#BOM8) (accessed 16 December 2005).

112. You can also find the same material at [www.bible.ca/mor-questions.htm](http://www.bible.ca/mor-questions.htm) (accessed 16 December 2005).

that Akish's daughter's dancing is copied from the Bible while lifting the idea from Brodie).<sup>113</sup> The modern notion of plagiarism is alien to the ancient world, but it is clearly applicable to writers today.

The story of a woman (although sometimes a homosexual lover) who, after drinking and dancing, asks for a prisoner's decapitation is such a common theme in Hebraic, Greek, and Roman texts that its ubiquity needs to be addressed; Vogel needs to deal with this ancient theme rather than just implying that Smith took it from the Bible (or he must address Smith's gift in knowing just which ancient themes to exploit as he wrote his novel). This story motif doesn't start with the Herodias-Salome iteration, but the bloody and distinctive elements of the story go back before the Christian period.<sup>114</sup> Zagona cites the story of Flaminus in Cicero and Plutarch. Those who fault the Book of Mormon for not being original ought to recognize that the New Testament story that Vogel thinks is the original for the decollation story itself is not original (Emerson insisted that the originals are not original):

The two versions reflect similar tropes: both men were killed to satisfy a need of the ruler to please a young figure of desire. The order of death is not related to any actual crime by the victim. While the biblical text does not indicate that Salomé and Herod had any sort of sexual involvement, he accedes to her wish because she has pleased him and he wishes to please her. In the classical story the consul Flaminus wants to please his lover. Pleasure in both cases overrules justice. Similarly each sexual story overwrites the political one.<sup>115</sup>

Herodotus contains a similar story.<sup>116</sup> In fact, J. Duncan Derrett asserts the most improbable elements of the Salome story are paralleled in

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113. See [www.helpingmormons.org/Parallels.htm](http://www.helpingmormons.org/Parallels.htm) (accessed 16 December 2005), and [www.2think.org/hundredsheep/bom/matthew.shtml](http://www.2think.org/hundredsheep/bom/matthew.shtml) (accessed 16 December 2005).

114. Helen G. Zagona, *The Legend of Salome and the Principle of Art for Art's Sake* (Geneva: Librairie E. Droz, 1960), 14–15.

115. Alice Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 214–15.

116. Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. A. D. Godley, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1925), 4:285–93.

Herodotus and Athenaeus: a princess's provocative dance, a promise of half the kingdom.<sup>117</sup> I have read Athenaeus a number of times (save me from the ordeal of reading that much about Roman gastronomy again) for the intertext, though, and I do not find a story there I would call parallel. The stories of Esther and John the Baptist are similar to Herodotus's Xerxes. In Herodotus the theme is part of a complex of stories about the vengeful queen. This motif is important for understanding the *Histories* as a whole.<sup>118</sup>

The Salome story shows clear dependence not on the Old Testament book of Esther but on rabbinic midrashim of Esther:

A ruler's similarly foolish promise is found in the book of Esther, where besotted king Ahasuerus, at a banquet, promises the young Queen Esther, also termed *korasion* in the LXX, the apple of his eye, that she may have anything she desires up to half his kingdom. Both stories involve women manipulating men through wining, dining, and gazing at delicious feminine beauty. Each of the all-powerful kings ends up ordering a man killed although he may not truly want to execute the man. Each ruler violates legal authority with impunity because each has had his mind "poisoned" by desiring a very tasty female dish.<sup>119</sup>

In the midrashic narratives Vashti loses her head for not dancing before the king's party. Esther then replaces Vashti as queen. Roger Aus notes ten broad similarities between the Esther midrashim and John's death in Mark 6:17–29. "Cumulatively, however, they simply provide too many exact word and motif similarities for the latter to be dismissed as mere 'reminiscences' of the former."<sup>120</sup>

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117. J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Herod's Oath and the Baptist's Head," *Biblische Zeitschrift* 9 (1965): 49.

118. Stewart Flory, *The Archaic Smile of Herodotus* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), 42.

119. Bach, *Women, Seduction, and Betrayal*, 231.

120. Roger Aus, *Water into Wine and the Beheading of John the Baptist: Early Jewish-Christian Interpretation of Esther 1 in John 2:1–11 and Mark 6:19–29* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1988), 67.

The reader's responsibility in reading Book of Mormon narrative is much deeper than Brodie, Ham, and Vogel recognize. "The antiquity, depth, complexity, and diverse aspects of the Herodias, Salome, and John stories were only gradually discovered in the course of the nineteenth century by scholars of folklore, religion, and anthropology. Their studies disclose the pre-Christian roots of the biblical story."<sup>121</sup> While one could ask for but hardly expect Vogel to have read these relevant sources, he might at least have referred to Hugh Nibley's brief comments on the antiquity of the Salome theme.<sup>122</sup> Vogel's textual analysis does not show any awareness of the repetitive nature of this theme in ancient Mediterranean cultures.

### Nephi's Fraternal Conflict and Manufactured Smith Fraternal Conflict

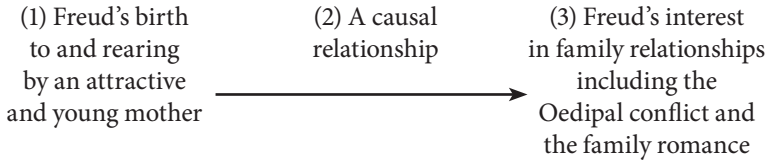
One might wonder where the boundary is between an appropriate amount of speculation in history (some educated guesswork or product of the imagination, it seems to me, is necessary in writing both history and biography) and the unacceptably speculative. Let us say I were writing a biography of Freud. Hypothetically we have an event that the biographer thinks is causal—Sigmund Freud was born to Jacob and Amalia Freud (Jacob's third wife) in 1856. Amalia was twenty years younger than her husband, and Sigmund's half-brother Emmanuel was actually older than Amalia. So when faced with Freud's family circumstances and a later one—Freud's evolving interest in family relationships including the family romance<sup>123</sup> and the Oedipus complex—a historian might posit three things: (1) an initial event (Freud's being raised by a young and attractive mother and a much older father), (3) an effect (Freud's explanation that a male child wants to wrest the mother's affection from a father the son competes with even to the point of patricide), and (2) a

121. Ewa Kuryluk, *Salome and Judas in the Cave of Sex: The Grotesque: Origins, Iconography, Techniques* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1987), 201.

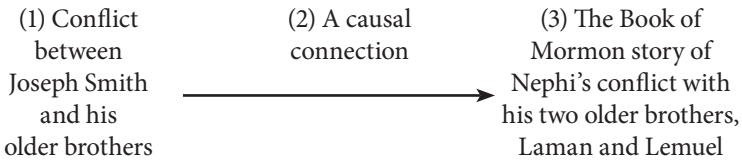
122. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 210–13.

123. The family romance is Freud's explanation that the child imagines a different—usually more affluent or stylish—family than he or she actually has by positing or fantasizing about adoption, abandonment, or similar arrangements.

causal connection between the two. The historical conclusion might be diagrammed like this:



Stannard would view even this fairly tame connection as an example of a logical fallacy—the *post hoc, ergo propter hoc* fallacy that assumes a causal connection between two events when that connection might be coincidental. Let's take Vogel's unacceptably speculative explanation of fraternal conflict in the Book of Mormon. Vogel posits that the story of conflict between Nephi and his older brothers must emerge out of Joseph Smith's life experience, so there must have been conflict between him and his older brothers to motivate such a story's emergence in the Book of Mormon:



The problem with this historical explanation is that, unlike the Sigmund Freud biography where points 1 and 3 are matters of historical record and the psychohistorian must supply only the reasonable causal connection, Vogel has only one of the three elements. He must use his imagination and his ideology to fabricate points 1 and 2. When the biographer must invent two of the three elements, the probability of the comparison's being hijacked by ideological concerns is too great—and that potential abuse becomes a reality in Vogel's book. Because the consequent must have happened, according to Brodie and Vogel, surely there must be some antecedent event that caused the Book of Mormon stories of sibling rivalry. Vogel is affirming the consequent at the same time he is making a questionable logical connection to an unattested event.

Both Vogel (p. 575 n. 60) and Brodie<sup>124</sup> admit that no historical evidence exists supporting the alleged murderous rage between Smith brothers. Both psychobiographers (at least, Brodie was a psychobiographer by the time she wrote the supplement to her book on Joseph Smith) go about inventing the parallel episode. Vogel follows Brodie when she says that the Book of Mormon provides evidence of Smith's "inner conflicts. Like any first novel, it can be read to a limited degree as autobiography. It contains clues to his conflict with members of his own family," especially his own brothers;<sup>125</sup> in other words, it provides clues to events for which Brodie has no evidence. The Book of Mormon fratricidal conflict "is remarkably suggestive of what may have been a similar conflict within Joseph Smith's own family over his veracity."<sup>126</sup> Like Vogel, Brodie admits the total lack of evidence for this fraternal conflict:

We do not know if Joseph Smith as a young boy was treated harshly by his older brothers. Lucy Smith tells us that when he was fourteen, "a gun was fired across his pathway, with the evident intention of shooting him." The ball lodged in the neck of a cow, but the mystery of who fired the gun was never solved. Since the shooting happened at the door of his own home, one cannot help wondering if young Joseph thenceforth harbored unconscious or even conscious fantasies about the would-be murderer being one of his own brothers.<sup>127</sup>

It is irresponsible to invent events simply because your ideology requires them. Even Freud—and Stannard calls him irresponsible in fabricating evidence—refers to an event involving da Vinci's sexuality that he connects to childhood experiences; Freud at least starts from scribbles in da Vinci's notebooks that discuss a childhood dream about a bird. (Freud misinterprets the type of bird, and his entire analysis depends on that mistranslation.) It would take a gullible reader to

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124. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 414.

125. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 413.

126. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 414.

127. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 414.

accept Brodie's intense guessing of people's thoughts. She continues, being even more specific about her own stand-in for Laman:

Alvin died only about a month after Joseph Smith told his family of the initial discovery of the golden plates, just at the time, one would guess, that the plot of the Book of Mormon was being constructed in Joseph Smith's fantasies. The constantly recurring theme in the book of brothers killing brothers would thus seem to be more than mere coincidence. Literary fantasy is an ancient therapeutic device, used by countless authors who have no understanding of how or why it brings some surcease to inner turmoil.<sup>128</sup>

Both Vogel and Brodie venture onto fictive ground as they fabricate this supposed conflict between Joseph Smith and his brothers. I am not aware of any Smith brothers killing each other or even attempting to, and neither are Brodie and Vogel.

Just as Brodie must misrepresent the Book of Mormon in order to get Lehi's sons and birth order to match Joseph Smith Sr.'s sons and birth order, Vogel must do major juggling of Smith children to get the right result:

The parallels to the Smith family are not seen as much in direct representations as in more subtle emotional profiles. Joseph's older and younger brothers, Hyrum and Samuel, are much like Laman and Lemuel to the extent that, in Joseph's emotional language they "rebelled" against the authority of Joseph Sr.'s dreams and joined the Presbyterian church—even though in the Book of Mormon story both Laman and Lemuel are older than Nephi. One might see Joseph's two older siblings, Hyrum and Sophronia, in the same light, the latter having also joined the Presbyterian church. Nephi and Joseph occupy the fourth position among their siblings in their respective families, although again somewhat differently. Nephi was the fourth of Lehi's sons, but nothing is

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128. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 415.

said concerning the ordering of his sisters (2 Ne. 5:6). Joseph was the fourth of Joseph Sr.'s sons only if one includes the unnamed infant who died before Alvin's birth. At the same time, Joseph was the fourth of the living Smith children. One important difference exists in that Alvin died before the family became fractured. Regardless, Joseph's decision to write about a family that was seriously divided over the meaning of its patriarch's dreams is significant. (pp. 131–32)

So we now come to the point where attempting fratricide is parallel to joining the Presbyterians; one wonders what the parallel would be if Hyrum were to join a group of radicals such as the Baptists. See how easy it is to get the right number of children and birth order? You can include or exclude sisters, you can count or ignore (as Brodie does) children who die in infancy. You can count Alvin or discount him if he dies young. Brodie, at least, when she posits the necessity of strong conflict among the Smith brothers to account for the Nephi/Laman and Lemuel conflict, just leaves it at the uncontrolled speculation that the brothers fought. As you can see from this passage, Vogel is not satisfied with that explanation. He provides a reason for the presumed conflict even as he states that these parallels are not really parallels but "subtle emotional profiles" (p. 131). Joseph Smith Sr. had visions (which he did), which included the message that all churches on the earth were wrong (p. 8) and expressed disapproval of Lucy's participation in Methodist activities (p. 15). In about 1824, Lucy, Hyrum, Sophronia, and Samuel joined the Presbyterian church (p. 58). On pages saturated with conjecture, Vogel finds the cause of what he believes is the family conflict, and fraternal conflict, among the Smith family. "Religious discussion in the Smith household undoubtedly reached unprecedented intensity after Lucy, Hyrum, Samuel, and Sophronia joined the Palmyra Presbyterian church" (p. 62). The Presbyterian minister had asserted that Alvin—recently deceased and unbaptized—would go to hell. "Second, the authority of Joseph Sr.'s dreams and Joseph Jr.'s visions which, while not specifically stating that all churches were false, indicated that the entire religious world was spiritually moribund and under condemnation. When Lucy joined the Presbyterian



church, she ignored the import of these revelations” (pp. 62–63). This is the stuff of Vogel’s Smith family conflict. Hyrum and Samuel (or perhaps Hyrum and Alvin or even Hyrum and Sophronia; Vogel hedges on the identification) were allegorically Laman and Lemuel because they joined the Presbyterian church. This is a thin argument based on conjecture built upon speculation. Laman and Lemuel attempted to murder Nephi several times because Hyrum and Samuel joined the Presbyterian church.

But Vogel admits that no evidence exists beyond his *post hoc* argumentation for such conflict. He simply sees parallels to this putative conflict in the Book of Mormon. When “Laman and Lemuel tie [Nephi] with cords,” “one wonders if the attention to detail in Nephi’s account draws from an actual event. William D. Morain has questioned Lucy’s claim that young Joseph remained unrestrained during his surgery. Actually, Joseph had two operations on his leg and may have been tied up for only the first. Regardless, the repetition of Nephi being bound by his older siblings points to the significance the image had for Joseph” (p. 140). Vogel does not bother to explain the brothers’ connection to his leg surgery. This is wild and unrestrained guesswork that Vogel takes for granted actually happened outside his own mind in the past, for he asserts that the “story of Nephi’s rivalry with his brothers not only reflected the family dynamics of Joseph Smith’s own circumstances but also functioned as a warning to accept the Book of Mormon” (p. 145). Vogel also finds this murderous intent from Smith’s brothers in other Book of Mormon narratives. After Ammon kills the leader of the bandits at the waters of Sebus and lies unconscious on the floor, the brother of the bandit leader attempts to kill Ammon but is struck down: “This protection from an avenging brother perhaps reflects the fear Joseph once harbored concerning his own siblings following Alvin’s death” (p. 225). You can see how the absence of historical evidence results in Vogel’s irresponsible use of psychobabble and hunches to take him where his ideology leads.

For an example of psychobabble, think of an oral fixation that undergirds another parallel Vogel finds between Book of Mormon narrative and Smith’s supposed conflict with his brothers, aggression

Vogel fabricates through presupposition and ideology that he later counts as established. When Mormon during wartime mentions to Moroni the depravity of both Lamanites and Nephites who rape and cannibalize, Vogel claims that these acts resemble atrocities in wars between European settlers and the Indians:

On a deeper level, Mormon's words show how intense Smith's emotions over his own family situation were (Morm. 6–7). One is justified in seeking psychological meaning in Mormon's words, for they are laden with intense feeling and narrate the culmination of family strife that began with Nephi and his brothers. More poignantly, Mormon may point to the feared breakup of Smith's family, which Smith desperately wants to avert. The language can be seen as a symbolic, unconscious window to the soul. (p. 373)

Vogel shows no restraint in his imaginative desire to connect Book of Mormon episodes to Joseph Smith's life. But a lack of evidence ought to limit the fictive desire in a biography.

Unlike others who speculate along these lines, Vogel wants to exempt Joseph's older brother Alvin from the Laman identification, even though Vogel may at times refer to Nephi's being tied down by his older brothers (p. 140), implying that the same event happened to Joseph. For Vogel, Alvin is more like Jared in the book of Ether: "In contrast to Nephi and his brothers, Jared and his brother work in harmony and cooperation, suggesting the Smith family before the death of Alvin or an idealized family that is reunited in the millennium. Harmony is achieved largely because Jared submits to his brother's spiritual leadership, much as Alvin did for Joseph" (p. 343; Vogel criticizes Robert Anderson for equating Alvin with Laman, pp. 607–8 n. 2). My objection excludes Vogel at this point, but those who insist that the Book of Mormon is evidence of lethal discord between Joseph and his elder brothers should acknowledge not only that no documentary evidence exists for the quarrels (the psychological evidence is, needless to say, fragile at best) but that what historical evidence does exist undermines this claim. When Joseph Smith Jr. expressed his feel-

ings for Alvin, he spoke of Alvin's "zeal" and "kindness" toward him and the work of bringing forth the Book of Mormon.<sup>129</sup> Lucy spoke of Alvin's "singular goodness of disposition—kind and amiable,"<sup>130</sup> while Joseph, the one who supposedly feared being killed by Alvin and Hyrum, said the following about his eldest brother: "Alvin, my oldest brother—I remember well the pangs of sorrow that swelled my youthful bosom and almost burst my tender heart when he died. He was the oldest and the noblest of my father's family. He was one of the noblest of the sons of men. Shall his name not be recorded in this book? Yes, Alvin, let it be had here and be handed down upon these sacred pages for ever and ever. In him there was no guile. He lived without spot from the time he was a child. From the time of his birth he never knew mirth. He was candid and sober and never would play; and minded his father and mother in toiling all day."<sup>131</sup> Psychobiographers need to explain how living "without spot from the time he was a child" can be reconciled with suspicions of fraternal murder.

If Hyrum were the alleged Laman, then psychobiographers must deal with the claim that "Hyrum and Joseph were as close as any two brothers could be. 'I have been acquainted with him ever since he was born.'" Hyrum shared all his younger brother's deeds, words, and actions.<sup>132</sup> Joseph said of his brother Hyrum that the latter was "a natural brother; thought I to myself, brother Hyrum, what a faithful heart you have got."<sup>133</sup> After a Smith family argument with William, Hyrum talked things out with Joseph. Joseph wrote on this occasion that "I could pray in my heart that all my brethren were like unto my beloved

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129. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 65, citing Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (1853; repr., New York: Arno and the New York Times, 1969), 90.

130. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 65, citing Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches*, 89.

131. *History of the Church*, 5:126–27.

132. Jeffrey S. O'Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith: A Life of Integrity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 8. The internal quotation is from Hyrum himself. See testimony of Hyrum Smith before the Nauvoo municipal court, 1 July 1843, in *History of the Church*, 3:404.

133. *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, ed. Dean C. Jessee (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989–), 2:416.

brother Hyrum, who possesses the mildness of a lamb, and the integrity of a Job, and in short, the meekness and humility of Christ; and I love him with that love that is stronger than death, for I never had occasion to rebuke him, nor he me, which he declared when he left me to-day.”<sup>134</sup> Such statements are in sources very easy to access and are in obvious contradiction to Vogel’s guesses. Vogel could have, and should have, at least raised them in relation to his own speculation.

Other people noticed the genuine love Joseph and Hyrum had for each other. William Taylor noted their affection when the two brothers were reunited: “Never in all my life have I seen anything more beautiful than the striking example of brotherly love and devotion felt for each other by Joseph and Hyrum,” he observed. “I witnessed this many, many times. No matter how often, or when or where they met, it was always with the same expression of supreme joy.”<sup>135</sup> Does this sound like a relationship between brothers that, when they were younger, would have prompted suspicions of murder because of cruel treatment? Such explicit testimony represents truly historical evidence of what was in Joseph Smith’s mind. It can be countered by means of *ad hoc* psychological concepts such as repression, but the explicit evidence argues against any notion that Joseph feared being killed by his older brothers, and those who say otherwise need to engage, rather than ignore, genuine historical evidence. The comments by family members and observers later in life show no traces of what Brodie, Vogel, and others require to be a murderous childhood relationship. One ought to be cautious about accepting speculation driven by the biographer’s theory and without any historical grounding outside that theory. Vogel and Brodie invent evidence to buttress their ideological positions while suppressing evidence that explicitly contradicts them.

Explaining the Book of Mormon theme of fratricidal conflict can be done more economically than just concocting evidence that the historical record does not provide. A fundamental principle of biblical composition is stated in the rabbinic rule that “what happened to the fathers, happens to the sons.” Robert Alter states it differently:

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134. *History of the Church*, 2:338.

135. Cited in O’Driscoll, *Hyrum Smith*, 272.

"All that happened to the fathers was a sign for the sons" that events repeat themselves over generations: "In the Bible, however, the matrix for allusion is often a sense of absolute historical continuity and recurrence, or an assumption that earlier events and figures are timeless ideological models by which all that follows can be measured."<sup>136</sup> Vogel does not understand Book of Mormon textuality because he does not understand biblical textuality. He mentions the biblical stories of conflict between younger and older brothers, but only to suggest that Joseph Smith lifts that theme from the Bible in composing the Book of Mormon (p. 138). Again, Vogel reads the Book of Mormon far under its potential because he is ideologically committed to a simplistic Book of Mormon. The theme of the ascendancy of the younger son is common in specific portions of the Bible. The Book of Mormon requires that its readers catch those allusions and read Laman and Lemuel versus Nephi against the biblical backdrop of younger brothers succeeding over older brothers: Cain and Abel, Esau and Jacob, the sons of Jacob and Joseph, the sons of Jesse and David, David's sons and Solomon, Manasseh and Ephraim.<sup>137</sup> The story is highlighted in the Book of Mormon because it emerges in the Bible: "The theme of the passed-over firstborn seems to have something to do with the insufficiency of the human desire for continuity which underlies the custom of passing the inheritance on to the eldest son. . . . The deliberate choice of a younger son represents a divine intervention in human affairs, a vertical descent into the continuity that breaks its pattern, but gives human life a new dimension by doing so."<sup>138</sup> God sometimes chooses weak tools to accomplish the work and is not locked in by traditions such as primogeniture. What happens to the fathers happens to the sons, and in Hebraic literature what happens to Jacob/Israel happens to his descendants just as what happens to the Lehites (who

136. Robert Alter, "Putting Together Biblical Narrative," in *Cabinet of the Muses: Essays on Classical and Comparative Literature in Honor of Thomas G. Rosenmeyer*, ed. Mark Griffith and Donald J. Mastrorarde (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 121.

137. E. Fox, "Stalking the Younger Brother: Some Models for Understanding a Biblical Motif," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 60 (1993): 45–46.

138. Northrop Frye, *The Great Code: The Bible and Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 182.

claim the biblical Joseph as their ancestor) repeats what happened to Joseph and the other sons of Jacob: “The fact that the Younger Brother motif is so fully played out precisely in the stories about the character who is himself named Israel, confirms its importance as a whole-people motif.”<sup>139</sup> Other parts of the Bible have stories of siblings, but not often stories of brothers and sisters in discord. More specifically, stories of brothers in strife are organized around Jacob<sup>140</sup> and extend to his son Joseph. Vogel’s superficial reading of the Book of Mormon motif should be expanded and deepened.

While Laman and Lemuel insist on primogeniture as the leadership is passed on from Lehi to his sons, the Book of Mormon (like the Bible) is concerned that God determine the next generation’s rulers: “Most of the biblical stories are not concerned with the transmission of land, as ultimogeniture most commonly provides, but with the transfer of status, whether in the form of kingship or a father’s blessing.”<sup>141</sup> The reader should not mistakenly believe that because God chooses Nephi over Laman the younger son is inherently superior. God’s choice is determined by some mysterious election or perhaps the righteousness of the characters: “Stories about heroes who narrowly escape death at the hands of those close to them—a father, brothers, or a father-figure [such as King Saul] are not triumphalist but rather salvific. They reflect not a period of intense pride in great national accomplishments, but rather one (or more) of outer and inner crisis—crises, which to be sure, are resolved by overt or covert divine intervention.”<sup>142</sup>

I cannot develop the depth and complexity of this theme in the Bible or the Book of Mormon in this essay. I can only provide a flavor as an antidote to Vogel’s superficial Book of Mormon eisegesis. The Book of Mormon assumes that the reader will catch the allusion to the biblical theme and realize that the motif of the younger son’s success will illuminate the characters of Nephi and Laman: “Being favored with the blessing—a theological category rather than a legal one—

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139. Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 62.

140. Frederick E. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together: The Preeminence of Younger Siblings in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 112.

141. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 14.

142. Fox, “Stalking the Younger Brother,” 63.

means being an ancestor of Israel, marking the line through which the people traced their descent and justifying the thread of the biblical account. Ultimately these tales are about which son (or daughter) will be followed by the continuing narrative. Essentially retrospective, they explain for later generations how God had determined those through whom *the* line would continue.”<sup>143</sup> The textuality featured in the Bible occurs also in the Book of Mormon. If you believe Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, you must account for his sophisticated incorporation of such textuality into his book.

### Joseph Smith, Dan Vogel, Book of Mormon Narrative, and Reading the Bible

The Book of Mormon text needs to be treated with far more respect than Vogel accords it. Vogel must add comic-strip psychoanalysis that invents fraternal conflict to support his impoverished readings. Vogel's readings turn the plenitude of scripture into poverty by using a reductive technique; although inventive and often imaginative, his Book of Mormon readings are reductive and overdetermined by his ideological concerns.

I could have selected many more examples of Vogel's underestimation of the Book of Mormon narrative. For instance, he refers to the story of Nephi's broken bow in 1 Nephi 16. "This event seems inspired by David's psalm in 2 Samuel 22:35, which poetically states: '[God] teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken in mine arms'" (p. 136). Vogel focuses on the issue of whether or not steel is an anachronism and, so, does little with the broken bow imagery. But he must account for the Book of Mormon's use of biblical symbolism in ways far outdistancing his own readings. As Nahum Waldman's essay shows, the broken bow was used in the Bible to symbolize submission or impotence<sup>144</sup> and was used extensively in vassal treaties. The bow itself was used to represent military power. If Joseph Smith wrote the

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143. Greenspahn, *When Brothers Dwell Together*, 56.

144. Nahum Waldman, "The Breaking of the Bow," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 69/2 (October 1978): 82.

Book of Mormon, Vogel still needs to explain how time after time he is inferior to Smith as a biblical exegete. He has at his disposal the enormous resources of contemporary biblical criticism, but he ignores those tools because his ideology insists on their irrelevance, and they would indeed have complicated his explanatory problems. Psalm 37:14–17 illustrates the bow and broken bow symbolism: “The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and *their bows shall be broken*. A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. For *the arms of the wicked shall be broken*: but the Lord upholdeth the righteous.” The figure here is one of arrogance and domination. But, as the biblical trope demonstrates, the proud will be humbled. Before God will provide a way to fashion a new bow and to obtain food, Nephi and his group need to repent and demonstrate humility. Waldman explains that the bow was also a symbol of leadership; think of Jonathan turning over his symbols of rulership to David: bow, robe, garment, and sword (1 Samuel 18:4). If Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, he came up with precisely the right biblical symbolism to apply to Nephi as he begins to assert his leadership; at the same time Laman’s and Lemuel’s bows lose their elasticity.

Vogel focuses on “poor grammar,” “digression, redundancy, and wordiness” in the Book of Mormon; these, by the way, are also failings of Vogel’s biography. For him, the characters are flat (and they are if you compare them to the tension in biblical characters or the best of modern novels); this one literary judgment by Vogel is adequate to the Book of Mormon. “Generally the plots are simple and frequently improbable. However, the point was not to produce a literary masterpiece” (p. 119). Here you can see the penury of Vogel’s literary judgment. The Book of Mormon is indeed a literary masterpiece and it obtains its quality through repetition, allusion to biblical narrative, and internal allusion—the very elements Vogel finds faulty. I am not the only reader who has insisted on the complexity of Book of Mormon



narrative.<sup>145</sup> Vogel ignores this emerging consensus among competent literary critics that Book of Mormon narrative is refined and rewards the closest readings.

By ignoring readings that assert Book of Mormon sophistication, Vogel avoids a serious historical problem he had a responsibility to address. Even if you contend that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon, you still must explain his genius in appropriating a biblical form of textuality. The Book of Mormon uses biblical texture and biblical themes in ways that require Smith to be vastly superior to Vogel as a reader. Vogel's inadequate readings indicate failure in the historical analysis. How did Joseph Smith know to use type-scenes and the very motifs Alter singles out as the best examples of this form of textuality from the Bible and to do it long before contemporary biblical and literary criticism discovered an appropriate way to theorize the material? Vogel reads down to the Book of Mormon, but such condescension is ironic considering the qualitative difference between Book of Mormon narrative and his readings of it. Vogel's biography devotes the bulk of its historical work to reading the Book of Mormon, yet his reading of this book of scripture is the most insistent and powerful weakness in his biographical work. Therefore, Vogel's book is vastly inferior to the book it attempts to explain.

### **Book of Mormon Passages Contradicting Vogel's Theory of Book of Mormon Composition**

In a book as long as this biography, and in one that attempts to account for the whole range of Mormon scripture, Vogel could have paused on difficult passages that pose problems for his account of the book's origins. But he does not engage passages that challenge his

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145. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard Dilworth Rust, *Feasting on the Word: The Literary Testimony of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1997); Thomas, *Digging in Cumorah*; Robert A. Rees, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the American Renaissance," *Dialogue* 35/3 (2002): 83–112. Vogel refers to Rust and Thomas, but only to mention the Book of Mormon's occasional lyricism (p. 605 n. 48), not to address their assertion about the book's complexity.

theory; he passes them over, preferring to stack the deck, suppressing counterexamples, ignoring the textual material that does not support his ideologically inspired reading.<sup>146</sup> The theory of composition assumes that there were no gold plates for Smith to translate from—he was just making things up as he went along. Smith produced the book of Lehi first, then that portion was lost by Martin Harris. When Smith recommenced, he started with Mosiah–Moroni, then later went back to compose 1 Nephi–Words of Mormon to fill in the early part of the book. Vogel and other revisionist authors claim that the more developed theological material is in the first two books of Nephi. For Vogel and these other writers, Smith’s compositional sequence is demonstrated in the structure of the Book of Mormon, with more evolved portions (1 and 2 Nephi) being dictated last. Let me provide a few examples of what biblical critics sometimes call one-sided or one-way literary dependence—passages that give the reader some idea of which textual section was composed later because particular parts show awareness of other portions. Literary and biblical critics usually analyze such features under the heading of allusion or citation, but Vogel uses only the most elementary literary terminology or concepts as he reads what he considers Joseph Smith’s novel.

According to Vogel’s compositional theory,<sup>147</sup> the first Book of Mormon material Joseph Smith made up was Mosiah. But even the first chapter of Mosiah is already pointing back to narrative that Vogel believes Smith had not yet invented and for which he had no idea what the content was going to be: “Yet, when Smith begins to dictate the superscription to Nephi’s book, he sketches the historical material but is vague about the religious content. There is no mention of

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146. I have addressed these issues previously when I reviewed essays by Brent Lee Metcalfe, Susan Staker, and Edwin Firmage Jr., so some overlap between the points I make here and the ones I made there may occur. These three authors take up the same theory of composition expounded by Vogel in his biography of Joseph Smith. See Alan Goff, “Positivism and the Priority of Ideology in Mosiah-First Theories of Book of Mormon Production,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 11–36.

147. I don’t want to dismiss this compositional order. One can believe that the Book of Mormon is ancient and still believe that Joseph Smith started translating again with the book of Mosiah rather than with 1 Nephi. But Vogel’s compositional theory depends on the scripture’s being a novel invented by Joseph Smith.

Lehi's dream or Nephi's prophecies, both central elements in Nephi's account. While Nephi would have known what he was going to include in his book, Smith evidently did not know beforehand what he would be inspired to dictate" (p. 384). Smith did not know what was going to be in 1 Nephi when he started composing 1 Nephi (June 1829) (p. 407), let alone when he wrote Mosiah (starting in September 1828) (p. 148), according to Vogel's chronology. However, among other things, this argument manifests the logical fallacy called an appeal to silence; just because a text does not mention some idea or episode does not mean its author was unaware of that idea. (Until now, I have not mentioned string theories or coaxial cables, yet it would be a mistake to assume that I am completely unaware of them; or, to summarize a point Vogel makes elsewhere, to assume the Book of Mormon writer did not know about something is tricky because proving a negative is impossible.)

The principal weakness in Vogel's book is his textual analysis, and since his attempt to connect Book of Mormon narrative to specific episodes in Smith's life and environment comprises the largest part of this biography, those superficial readings make for an overwhelming debility in the book. For example, the first chapter of Mosiah, which for Vogel is the first section of the current Book of Mormon that Smith fabricated, contains a reference back to the Nephi portion that Vogel claims was not yet written. Referring to the "sayings of our fathers from the time they left Jerusalem until now" (Mosiah 1:6) recorded on the plates that Benjamin is transferring to Mosiah, Benjamin says, "I would that ye should remember to search them diligently, that ye may profit thereby; and I would that ye should keep the commandments of God that ye may prosper in the land according to the promises which the Lord made unto our fathers" (Mosiah 1:7). The first instance we have of this promise is recorded in 1 Nephi 2:20, where Nephi is promised that "inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper, and shall be led to a land of promise, yea, even a land which I have prepared for you." According to Vogel, Benjamin is referring back to a promise that has not been composed, yet the Benjamin passage specifically refers to the promises made to the fathers. Vogel even connects these two passages from Nephi and Benjamin, but he

does not seem aware that they pose a problem to his theory that needs to be explained. Vogel makes a speculative leap about this promise, referring to Lehi's version in 2 Nephi 1:20:

This not only explains the cyclical events of Nephite history but gives definition to Joseph Sr.'s financial reversals, the ebb and flow that the history of the Smith family took. Joseph Jr. must have believed it was his father's Universalism and lack of concern for the commandments that brought periodic hardship to the family. In later years, Lucy would shift the blame for her family's misfortunes to evil and designing men. In Joseph's mind, this would not have been possible if his father had been more diligent in obeying God's commandments. (p. 409)

Not only does Vogel connect the Book of Mormon passage to an event he invents because he believes he can read Joseph Smith's mind independent of traditional historical traces, but he also misses the fact that the passage creates a problem for his theory of Book of Mormon origins. Vogel even refers the reader to Mosiah 1:7 without seeing the challenge this passage poses to his ideology.

Vogel might say that Smith vaguely remembers the promises made to the fathers from the Lehi materials lost by Martin Harris. But he has already argued against such an *ad hoc* apology; the introduction to 2 Nephi is so vague, he says, that it "hints that Smith had limited recall of the historical material in the lost manuscript and was still uncertain about what the religious content would be" (p. 407).

A similar passage from Alma 9:13 poses the same problem to Vogel's hypothetical construct. Speaking to the people at Ammonihah, Alma reminds them of the promises made to a specific father: "Behold, do ye not remember the words which he spake unto Lehi, saying that: Inasmuch as ye shall keep my commandments, ye shall prosper in the land? And again it is said that: Inasmuch as ye will not keep my commandments ye shall be cut off from the presence of the Lord." If the Mosiah passage referred generally to the promises made to the fathers, this Alma passage clarifies by telling us that one of the fathers was Lehi; in other words, the passages demonstrate a one-sided lit-

erary dependence. The Alma and Mosiah passages point back to the Nephi and Lehi passages. It would take an oddly contorted argument to assert that Nephi and Lehi—supposedly written later—are quoting Benjamin and Alma because Benjamin refers to the promises made to the fathers and Alma refers specifically to Lehi as the source of the promise. Vogel does not engage the issue of how Alma could quote from a passage that Smith had not yet written if Smith really had no idea how that part of Book of Mormon narrative would develop. Vogel suppresses or represses textual evidence contrary to his ideology.

If there were plates, composition order does not matter much. Whether Smith started translating from 1 Nephi or from Mosiah, the process is sustained by those plates. An allusion or reference back to the Nephi material is intended by Mormon or some other writer, not Smith. But allusions or quotations to the Nephi material in the Mosiah–Moroni portion generate a problem for Vogel because for him this material has not been written yet and he does not permit time for Smith to rewrite or research earlier portions of the manuscript to harmonize with “later” material (p. xix).

In Mosiah 1—the first chapter written, according to Vogel—Benjamin teaches Mosiah in verse 7 how he and his people can prosper in the land. That key word *prosper* comes up later in the chapter when Benjamin turns the sacred objects over to his son: plates of brass, Nephi’s plates, Laban’s sword, and the Liahona, the last of which led the “fathers through the wilderness” according to the “*heed and diligence*” which they paid to God’s word (Mosiah 1:16) and stopped functioning when they no longer paid heed and diligence to the ball so that “they did not prosper nor *progress* in their journey” (Mosiah 1:17). Here Benjamin is alluding to another story that, in Vogel’s version, has not yet been written.

After losing the use of their bows while traveling in the Arabian wilderness, the group falls to murmuring. When Nephi rallies them, they consult the ball: “And it came to pass that I, Nephi, beheld the pointers which were in the ball, that they did work according to the *faith* and *diligence* and *heed* which we did give unto them” (1 Nephi 16:28). Benjamin is not referring back to some vaguely remembered

narrative, as Vogel would have it, but is using *Leitwörter* here, key words that are intended to point the reader back to the earlier passage. The ball or compass works according to the “*faith* and *diligence* which we gave unto it. And thus we see that by *small means* the Lord can bring about *great things*” (1 Nephi 16:29), for Nephi consults the ball, which tells him where to hunt—which he does successfully. Between the Mosiah 1 and 1 Nephi 16 passages we have three specific correspondences: the ball, the key words *heed* and *diligence*, and the small things that result in great works. The Mosiah passage has just the Liahona and the *heed* and *diligence* elements that permit the earliest generation of Nephites to prosper in their journey. This is the kind of complicated allusion that Vogel says Smith did not have time to create, and the Mosiah passage intentionally points the reader to what it assumes is a prior narrative.

Benjamin is not the only Book of Mormon writer who alludes to this passage that Vogel claims had not yet been written. Alma also refers to the compass, giving the traditional name by which it was known by the Nephites, the Liahona (Alma 37:38). He urges his son to follow the example of his fathers, for this Liahona “did work for them according to their *faith* in God” (Alma 37:40). But often the fathers did not receive the blessings “because [although] those miracles were worked by *small means* it did show unto them *marvelous works*. They were slothful and forgot to exercise their *faith* and *diligence* and then those *marvelous works* ceased, and they did not *progress* in their journey” (Alma 37:41). Alma ends up turning this compass and its spindles into a symbol for his son further in the chapter. But earlier in the chapter he expands the “small means” to refer to the records kept by the Nephites so that they could preserve memory (Alma 37:6–7).

These passages by Benjamin and Alma owe their meaning to a one-sided literary dependence that is manifestly more complicated than Vogel’s simplistic theory of composition.

Another passage that undermines Vogel’s contentions is Ether 12:22. There Moroni lists previous figures who exercised great faith. Included are Book of Mormon luminaries such as Ammon and his missionary partners, Alma and Amulek, the brothers Nephi and Lehi,

and the brother of Jared. “And it is also by *faith* that my *fathers* have obtained the promise that these things should come unto their brethren through the Gentiles” (Ether 12:22; I read “these things” to be the stories of faith conveyed in the Nephite records). Moroni seems to be alluding to Enos 1:13, in which verse Enos prays that if the Nephites are destroyed, the Nephite records will still be kept and preserved for the Lamanite descendants. The Lord grants the desire (Enos 1:12), and Enos requests that if the Nephites “by any means be destroyed, and the Lamanites should not be destroyed, that the Lord God would preserve a record of my people, the Nephites . . . that it might be brought forth at some future day unto the Lamanites, that, perhaps they might be brought to salvation” (Enos 1:13). Enos receives this promise because of his great faith (Enos 1:15) and because this promise was earlier given to Enos’s fathers for “thy *fathers* have also required of me this thing; and it shall be done unto them according to their *faith*, for their *faith* was like unto thine” (Enos 1:18; 1 Nephi 15:14; 2 Nephi 3:12 and 30:5 seem to be passages Enos refers to containing the promises made to the fathers). Moroni refers to a specific passage (perhaps passages) that, according to the Vogel chronology, had yet to be written.

In another example, Alma 3:14–17 cites words to Nephi about Lamanites being cursed with a mark in 2 Nephi 5:21–22; again, the Alma passage cites these as “the words which [God] said to Nephi” (Alma 3:14). Vogel wants us to believe that Alma is referring to passages that had not been written yet. Alma 36:20–26 also poses a serious problem, for Alma quotes Lehi directly (1 Nephi 1:8). Brent Metcalfe advances a stunningly wrongheaded argument in this regard:

Alma’s declaration, “*methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God*” (Alma 36:22; emphasis added), parallels almost verbatim the account of Lehi’s vision in the small plates, “[Lehi] saw the heavens open, and *he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God*” (1 Ne. 1:8 emphasis added). A case can be made from a traditionalist perspective

that Alma is quoting the small plates. From a critical viewpoint it can be maintained that 1 Nephi 1:8 quotes Alma 36:22.<sup>148</sup>

Notice that through his use of passives and modals, Metcalfe never actually takes responsibility for this argument. This is sleight of hand, juggling; Metcalfe neglects to address the conspicuous issue that the Alma passage actually refers to its source. Maintaining that it is the original being quoted is hard to do when it broadcasts its origin. A case can be made that the Alma material is the original being quoted, but not one that Metcalfe is willing to endorse. Here are the two passages:

**Alma 36:22**

Yea, methought I saw, even as our father Lehi saw, God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourse of angels, in the attitude of singing and praising their God; yea, and my soul did long to be there.

**1 Nephi 1:8**

And being thus overcome with the Spirit, [Lehi] was carried away in a vision, even that he saw the heavens open, and he thought he saw God sitting upon his throne, surrounded with numberless concourses of angels in the attitude of singing and praising their God.

Metcalfe's assertion is disingenuous because if the Nephi passage were quoting the Alma passage, the Alma passage specifically states its belatedness. While Metcalfe does not address the problem posed by this passage, Vogel never bothers to engage the question in any form at all: how could Alma cite a passage almost verbatim that would be composed months in the future? Vogel has already stated that Smith did not have time to cross reference one passage to another.

Book of Mormon superficialists such as Dan Vogel, Brent Metcalfe, Susan Staker, Fawn Brodie, and even lesser lights (such as William Morain and Robert Anderson) need to move from a reductive mode to a complex mode of textual analysis. Professional training in a philologi-

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148. Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 417 n. 26.



cal discipline (philosophy, literary criticism, biblical criticism, classics) might help Book of Mormon minimalists overcome their complexity complex in this regard. Their presuppositions, which incorporate a type of positivism and for ideological reasons assume the text to be superficial, I dub methodological superficialism. Vogel and his ideological compatriots need to come to grips with the superficialism of their methodology rather than just assuming its adequacy.

### Contributions of Vogel's Biography

Besides demonstrating a fundamental inability to read a complex text in a sophisticated way—even to make the most basic distinction between a simplistic and a textured and dense text—Vogel's biography does have some favorable qualities. He makes extensive use of source material, some of which he himself has made available to researchers. Historians place a high value on the use of archival or primary source materials, and Vogel has done much to bring some of the sources to light.

As Vogel tries to match Book of Mormon passages with events in Joseph Smith's life, he provides a couple of credible parallels. The similarity in wording between the title page and 2 Nephi 26:12–13 is one such parallel (pp. 426–27); another one compares Doctrine and Covenants 10:67–68 and 3 Nephi 11:32–40 (p. 293).

But Vogel engages in circular reasoning when he hypothesizes fraternal conflict in the Smith family. The only (question-begging) evidence of such conflict is in the Book of Mormon, especially the stories of Nephi. For Vogel, that means that Joseph Smith's brothers might have threatened to kill him, might have tied him up, or might have otherwise done terrible things to him when he was a child or a youth. Although there is no documentary evidence of such events, the supposed psychological remnants of that violence percolate to the surface in the Book of Mormon. Vogel merely has to invent the evidence. But Vogel also posits other strife in the Smith family; Freudian theories of psychology (the main theories used in psychohistories) depend on a particular view of human nature

positing internal and external conflict, especially conflict within families. Freudian theories work better if the biographer can generate more strife in a subject's life, so the psychohistorian has a vested interest in exaggerating family struggle. In chapter five, entitled "A Family Divided," Vogel is on slightly more solid ground than when discussing brotherly conflict; he finds struggle between Joseph Sr. and Lucy over her joining the Presbyterian church. He places himself with Marvin Hill and against Richard Bushman on how much conflict was present in the family (pp. 571–72 n. 60) over this issue. Vogel sees in Lucy's desire to have her family churched and Joseph Sr.'s resistance to being churched conflict so strong that it threatened to destroy the family. If this chapter of Vogel's book contains all the evidence extant about the issue, however, the logical leap seems one founded on considerable faith. A disagreement does not yet make for a family divided or a family in crisis. One of the problems with psychohistory is that the most ordinary events in a historical actor's life can be made to carry tremendous importance to the biographer's thesis. These researchers could "find psychoanalytic meaning in the fact that Richard Nixon one day ate corned beef hash with an egg on it; the logical elasticity of psychoanalytic theory attempts to make a virtue of what G. K. Chesterton long ago recognized as the 'sin and snare' of biographers: the tendency 'to see significance in everything; characteristic carelessness if their hero drops his pipe, and characteristic carefulness if he picks it up again,'" something Stannard refers to as a soothsayer device, a form of circular logic.<sup>149</sup> At least in this instance, though, Vogel does not have to invent a previous causal event out of whole cloth in order to posit a second difference of opinion in the Smith family; and it appears that the disagreement is one subject to a fairly wide range of interpretation—Bushman seeing this religious divergence as relatively insignificant and Vogel seeing it as crucial in explaining Smith family dynamics and Joseph Jr.'s attempt to rescue his family by becoming a prophet.

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149. Stannard, *Shrinking History*, 70.

## Vogel's Shrinking Joseph Smith and Smallest Conceivable Book of Mormon

Closing his presentation at the Library of Congress Symposium on Joseph Smith, Richard Bushman claimed that biographies attempting to shrink Joseph Smith to less than he is have not accounted for the complexity of the man or the revelations he produced. "A small history will not account for such a large man."<sup>150</sup> Vogel turns the plentitude that is the Book of Mormon into a dearth, the scriptural copiousness into scarcity. The quality of a reading can never rise above the quality of the reader. Having a good reader of a text is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition to having a good reading.

Vogel's readings of the Book of Mormon are small not because the book is tiny but because his presuppositions and ideology are diminutive; a group cannot afford to have its scripture's least competent and most hostile readers setting the agenda on interpreting foundational texts. Meissner warns that psychobiography is particularly subject to problems of countertransference where the biographer transfers issues or emotions from his own psychological makeup onto the biographical subject. "The vulnerability of the method to these sources of distortion or coloring of the data is greatest at those points where the gaps in the material must be filled, or where the interpretation of certain behaviors or patterns of behavior comes under interpretive scrutiny."<sup>151</sup> Vogel has rejected the Mormon tradition and symbolically taken other fathers—Comte and Freud—but his approach is not adequate to deal with the Mormon past and Mormon scripture. Vogel's ideology and method are not up to the task of elucidating such a complex text, and he imposes his own crude and reductive ideas on the Book of Mormon. Combine this textual deficiency with philosophical naiveté, an undertheorized concept of historiographical writing, and ideological saturation, and Vogel's book is broadly inadequate. For a biography in which ideology is the overwhelmingly dominant ingredient, to show no awareness of

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150. Richard L. Bushman, "Joseph Smith's Many Histories," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Print Services, 2006), 18.

151. Meissner, "Methodological Issues," 187.

the function and nature of ideology severely hampers the effectiveness of a work of historical explanation. Performing simplistic readings is simple; complexity is difficult, and rare.

# JEWS AND MORMONS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Raphael Jospe

## Background

My topic, “Jews and Mormons: Similarities and Differences,” is not an obvious choice for an Israeli visiting America. Jews are overwhelmingly ignorant of and indifferent to Mormonism, even Jews who know something about other Christian religions or Islam. Indeed, a friend of mine, who is a highly respected Israeli scholar and who frequently lectures abroad, when he heard that I had begun teaching at Brigham Young University’s Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, asked me whether it were true that Mormons still practice polygamy.

To a large extent, Jewish awareness of Mormonism, however minimal, remains negative, due mainly to two Latter-day Saint practices widely regarded as offensive in the Jewish community: Missionary work (or proselytizing) and baptism for the dead (namely, posthumous baptism by proxy of non-Mormons, usually ancestors of a Mormon). Most Jews are unlikely to be aware, however, that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has attempted to respect Jewish sensitivities on both these issues, which are, after all, fundamental practices of Mormonism. In an agreement submitted to Israeli authorities when the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies was opened, the president of the church (Ezra Taft Benson) and the president of Brigham Young University (Jeffrey R. Holland) signed a solemn commitment (hung prominently next to the center’s dining hall) forbidding Latter-day Saint

proselytizing in Israel, and threatening any student, member of the faculty, or staff violating that commitment with immediate expulsion from the Jerusalem Center and from the country. Similarly, respecting Jewish sensitivity, especially after the Shoah (Holocaust), the church agreed in 1995 to stop the practice of baptism for the dead applied in a wholesale manner to Jews (although reaffirming the right of individual Latter-day Saints to baptize their own direct ancestors).<sup>1</sup>

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1. Given their experience of centuries of Christian missionary and conversionary activity, including forced baptisms, Jews are unlikely to appreciate the idealism, devotion, and commitment (what Jews would call *mesirut nefesh*) of Latter-day Saint “elders” in their late teens or early twenties, who spend a couple of years serving their church in distant regions, usually supporting themselves or being supported by their families. Jews are likely to resent the intrusion in their lives or the implication that they are in need of yet another gospel. It is precisely because missionary work is such a fundamental component of Mormonism that the commitment by the church and Brigham Young University to refrain from proselytizing in Israel is so solemn and should be taken seriously. Nevertheless, sometime after the center was closed, the influential *Jerusalem Report* published an article in which the antimissionary organization Yad L’Achim expressed glee at the closure (Ronit Zimmer, “Anti-missionary Group Rejoices at Closure of Mormon University,” 10 February 2003, p. 7) and then published my response (24 February 2003) defending the center’s scrupulous enforcement of the commitment and unparalleled record in bringing hundreds of students a year to study in Jerusalem. Baptism for the dead tends to be an even greater problem in terms of Jewish sensitivity, particularly when applied to Jews murdered in the Shoah (Holocaust), including Anne Frank, and also reportedly to such figures as Theodore Herzl, David Ben-Gurion, and Golda Meir (according to *Yedi’ot Aḥaronot*, 5 October 2003, and *Ha’Aretz*, 31 December 2003). In 1995 the church, once again, demonstrated sensitivity to Jewish concerns by agreeing to stop the practice of baptism for the dead applied wholesale and indiscriminately to Jews, although maintaining the right of individual Latter-day Saints to continue to baptize their direct Jewish ancestors. There continue to be periodic Jewish complaints about widespread violations of that policy, with the church, in turn, claiming that it cannot control all local and individual initiatives, nor can it filter millions of names. Hopefully, increased sensitivity on local as well as national levels, and more sophisticated computer techniques for review and control, may reduce if not totally eliminate this source of tension between Jews and Mormons. Nevertheless, while I fully and unconditionally identify with Jewish concerns on both these issues, I believe it is important for Jews to recognize that the Latter-day Saints, who have not yet met all Jewish expectations, have come a long way in showing understanding for Jewish sensitivity, and have made great compromises of what are for them fundamental tenets and practices, in their desire to respect Jewish opinion and improve relations with the Jewish people. Truman Madsen has informed me that when Latter-day Saint microfilmmers first came to Israel to copy Jewish records and met with resistance, the eminent scholar of religions R. J. Zvi Werblowsky was consulted; he suggested differentiating between what people do and why they do it. Copying and preserving genealogical records provides a valuable service. Since Jews do not

Therefore, given that Mormonism is not a significant factor in the concerns of most Jews, why do I believe that Jewish-Mormon dialogue is important for both sides? My answer is given on three levels: general, Jewish, and Mormon.

First, in general, many people of diverse backgrounds today increasingly recognize the urgent need for increased interreligious dialogue and understanding, all the more so in our era of the “global village” and at a time when the whole world is threatened by fanatical and fundamentalist religiopolitical terror. As radical Catholic theologian Hans Küng has said, without peace among the world’s religions, there will be no peace among the nations.<sup>2</sup> In my part of the world in particular, it is an unfortunate fact that religion is rarely a force for peace and is usually used (or abused) to exacerbate conflicts that are basically national and political, and not theological, in nature. We need, therefore, to encourage interreligious dialogue wherever possible, and with whomever possible.

Second, looking at interreligious, specifically Jewish-Mormon relations, from a Jewish perspective, the Jewish people in general and the state of Israel in particular do not have many friends in the world. Some of the decades-old Jewish alliances with mainline and liberal Christian churches over domestic American agendas such as civil rights and civil liberties are now increasingly strained due to some of these churches’ involvement with overt criticism of Israel, support for Palestinians, and calls for divestiture and even boycotts of Israel, of Israeli universities and academicians, or of companies doing business in Israel. Moreover, given the resurgence of European anti-Semitism, it seems to me an obvious Jewish interest to foster relations with churches, like the Church of Jesus Christ, that have extended their hands in friendship to the Jewish people and the state of Israel and that have no history of consistent anti-Semitism. Various Christian churches are struggling with, or overtly repudiating, the supersessionist theology that typified so much of their

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believe that Mormon ceremonies in their temples can actually affect the redemption of a Jew, dead or alive, Latter-day Saint motivation is not a problem.

2. Hans Küng, “World Peace—World Religions—World Ethic,” in *Caring for Future Generations: Jewish, Christian and Islamic Perspectives*, ed. Emmanuel Agius and Lionel Chircop (Twickenham: Adamantine, 1998), 69–81, especially 74.

historical attitudes toward the Jewish people and Judaism. The Latter-day Saint record is far more positive. For example:

Ye need not any longer hiss, nor spurn, nor make game of the Jews, nor any of the remnant of the house of Israel; for behold, the Lord remembereth his covenant unto them, and he will do unto them according to that which he hath sworn. (3 Nephi 29:8)

Specifically, given the diminishing numbers of Jews in America (in absolute terms, and all the more as a proportion of the American population), and in light of the fact that—contrary to Arab propaganda—the Jewish-Israeli lobby does not control the American Congress and has never been able to stop sales of advanced weapons to Arab countries (like Saudi Arabia) hostile to Israel, it seems clear that the only true power the American Jews possess is the power of moral persuasion. Persuasion, however, requires reaching out in dialogue to a broad spectrum of communities with whom the Jews have not previously had extensive dialogue, including the Latter-day Saints, who are growing in numbers and influence.

Third, though of course I cannot speak for Latter-day Saints, it seems to me from my encounters with them (including serving as the professor of Jewish civilization at the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies), that there is growing interest among Latter-day Saints for dialogue with Jewish people, who occupy a special place in Mormon thought. Latter-day Saints, seeing themselves as physically descended from ancient Israel (primarily from the tribe of Ephraim), often feel a special kinship with the Jewish people, whom they sometimes refer to as “cousins” of “the house of Israel” of the tribe of Judah,<sup>3</sup> leading them to regard themselves and Jews as “two houses of Israel.” In many respects this sense of kinship is reinforced when Latter-day Saints portray themselves as a new Israel, suffering persecution and wandering on the “Great Trek” in the wilderness until they came to an American “Zion.” We shall return later to this LDS notion of physical lineage. But

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3. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, “Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes,” *FARMS Review* 15/1 (2003): 403.



what is no less important for Jewish-Mormon dialogue is the growing “LDS effort to relate to Jews, not as an Old Testament tribe but as a living religious community.”<sup>4</sup>

So for different and legitimate reasons, Latter-day Saints and Jews can recognize not only the general need for religious encounter, but also a specific common interest in a special dialogue with each other, a dialogue that will not eliminate the fundamental differences between them, but will, rather, enhance those differences with greater mutual understanding and respect.

That special dialogue suffered a setback some years ago, when the security situation in Israel led to the closing, for the time being, of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, despite valiant efforts of the BYU administration in Jerusalem and Provo to keep it open under difficult circumstances. The center was a major locus for Jewish-Mormon dialogue.<sup>5</sup> To the best of my knowledge, no other university in the world brought some 850 young people annually to study in Jerusalem over a number of years. Indeed, few, if any, Israeli universities have programs for overseas students coming from all over the world that can approach that number. In fact, few of my colleagues in Jewish studies around the world, who are often lucky to teach a few dozen students a year, taught, as I did, 850 students every year, all of whom were potential ambassadors of goodwill in the relationship between Jews and Latter-day Saints.

When, in the fall of 2001, just a few weeks after the tragedy of 9/11, I came to Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, to participate in the celebration of the publication of the book I helped to conceive and edit, *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*

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4. Arnold H. Green, “Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse,” *Journal of Mormon History* 25/1 (1999): 195–228. Green here (p. 221) is describing the work of Steven Epperson (see below, note 25).

5. After the failure of the Clinton-Barak-Arafat summit at Camp David in 2000, there was a sharp quantitative and qualitative rise in Palestinian terror. Unlike the Intifada of the 1980s, which was an “uprising” starting on the ground while Arafat and the PLO leadership were still in Tunisia, the violence beginning in the fall of 2000 was not spontaneous but was organized and sustained as low-intensity warfare by Arafat’s own Fatah as well as by Hamas and Islamic Jihad. So long as the U.S. State Department officially advises Americans against travel to Israel, Brigham Young University has been unable to obtain American insurance coverage for its students in Jerusalem.

(based on a conference held at the University of Denver in the winter of 1998), a reporter for the BYU *Daily Universe* newspaper asked me why the dialogue between Jews and Latter-day Saints is important, and I responded, “Because of the similarities and because of the differences between us.”<sup>6</sup>

Having explained why I think Jews and Latter-day Saints need to engage each other in dialogue, I would now like to describe some examples of their similarities and differences, on a general level, and then deal with two specific issues, each exemplifying both similarities and differences between the two communities. Understanding each other’s terminology and frame of reference is an obvious requirement for effective communication.

### Similarities and Differences

In many cases, the same point serves as the basis for both similarity and difference between Jews and Latter-day Saints, beginning with the most basic fact of all, size of population. There are roughly the same number of Jews and Latter-day Saints in the world today, some twelve to fourteen million in each case—a point of obvious similarity. But the population figures are simultaneously a point of difference since the number of Jews in the world is generally decreasing (primarily through intermarriage and assimilation), whereas the number of Latter-day Saints in the world is generally increasing (primarily through a high birthrate and proselytes). Indeed, with the exception of the Orthodox sector of the Jewish community, which represents a small minority of the Jews in most countries, the only country in the world in which the overall Jewish birthrate exceeds the 2.0 replacement rate and in which a higher birthrate, combined with immigration, results in regular net annual growth is the state of Israel. Since 1939, the population of the world has probably tripled or quadrupled, and yet the Jewish people, which numbered some eighteen million

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6. *BYU Daily Universe*, 17 October 2001. This particular quotation does not appear in the article. The occasion was the publication of *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism*, ed. Raphael Jospe, Truman G. Madsen, and Seth Ward (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press—Associated University Presses, 2001).

before World War II, remains not much larger than it was in 1945 after the loss of one-third of the Jewish people in the Shoah.

Another obvious similarity is that both these tiny communities (in global terms) see themselves as “chosen” and categorize the rest of the world as “Gentiles.” But here, too, there is a difference. From a Jewish perspective, Latter-day Saints are usually seen (often ignorantly) as another vaguely Protestant group of Christians, and thus as Gentiles. Like many other Jews, I looked forward to my first visit to Utah, joking that I looked forward to experiencing what it feels like to be a Gentile. It was only some time later, when I became more seriously involved in dialogue with Latter-day Saints, that I found out that they see themselves as linked to biblical Israel (usually through the tribe of Ephraim) and do not consider Jews to be Gentiles but as descendants from the biblical tribe of Judah and thus as a sort of “cousins” in the house of Israel.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, a recent popular book, coauthored by a Jew and a Mormon, is called *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel*.<sup>8</sup> So the similarity becomes a difference: both groups regard outsiders as “Gentiles.” But for Jews, there are only two categories: Jews and Gentiles (including Mormons), whereas for Latter-day Saints, Jews occupy a third, special category, being neither Latter-day Saints nor Gentiles.

Both communities base their religious authority on revealed prophecy, but here, too, the similarity breaks down almost immediately. For Latter-day Saints, prophecy remains an active category, the presidents and apostles of the church being deemed prophets. Revelation is understood among Latter-day Saints to be “continuing,” and a later revelation can actually overturn and supercede earlier revelations, as (for example) the famous 1978 priesthood revelation, which opened the ranks of priesthood to all races. By sharp contrast, in Jewish tradition, authority decreases over time: the Torah has the highest authority, followed by that of the prophets, followed by the other books of scripture, followed in late Second Temple times by the earlier *tana'im*, who were in turn

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7. Chadwick, “Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes,” 403.

8. Frank J. Johnson and William J. Leffler, *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel* (Hoboken: Ktav, 2000).

followed by the later *amora'im* of the Talmud. Among the post-Talmudic rabbis, the authority of earlier authorities (*rishonim*) exceeds that of the later authorities (*aḥaronim*). Jewish tradition regards prophecy as having ceased with the destruction of the ancient temple in Jerusalem, and the Talmudic rabbis categorized people claiming to be prophets as fools.<sup>9</sup> In a famous incident, when Rabbi Eliezer invoked miracles and even a divine voice (*bat kol*) was heard to support his minority position, the majority sharply rejected the divine voice, stating that the *halakhah* (law) must be determined by human reasoning and majority vote of the rabbis because (citing Deuteronomy 30:11–14) now the Torah “is not in heaven” anymore, but is “close to you . . . in your mouth and in your heart, to do it.”<sup>10</sup>

As a result of their opposing views of the ascending or descending nature of authority, Latter-day Saints and Jews tend to differ sharply in the structure of their religious organization. A colleague at Brigham Young University observed that the Latter-day Saint structure is, if anything, even more hierarchical and centralized than that of the Roman Catholic Church, and the clear emphasis is on convergence and consensus. While some countries have official or self-appointed “chief rabbis,” such rabbis are widely ignored by other rabbis and by many or even most Jews. The emphasis, going back to the Talmudic system of disputing and questioning virtually every point of interpretation of law and lore, is on divergence and diversity.

This difference in approach was overtly evident in the Mormon and Jewish papers published in our book. The five Mormon participants, all distinguished scholars well versed in other religious literature, some of them also at home in Hebrew or Arabic, cited Latter-day Saint scripture as entirely authoritative, as a given revealed text. The five Jewish participants are all actively committed and religious Jews; yet all of them, both personally and professionally, manifested a critical

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9. Babylonian Talmud *Bava Batra* 12b: “Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Since the day the Temple was destroyed, prophecy was taken away from the prophets and given to fools and infants.”

10. Babylonian Talmud *Bava Mezi'a* 59b.

distancing from the traditional sources, and they came from diverse ideological sectors of the Jewish community.

Many other points of similarity should be explored, but in order to focus on two major points, I will simply mention some of them without further analysis. Points of similarity (even if frequently understood or implemented in different ways) would certainly include an emphasis on family and a regard for the family as a focal point for religious life and transmission of values. Consequently, both groups oppose marriage outside the community; both observe dietary rules, establishing boundaries between members and nonmembers; both have ritual garb (the Jewish *tzitzit*, fringes based on Numbers 15:37–40; and Mormon “temple robes” and undergarments); both emphasize the centrality of Sabbath observance; both groups reject the notion that religion is separate from life and relegated to the church or synagogue, but insist, rather, that it infuses all aspects of our lives; in both communities a high value is attached to education and intellectual accomplishment, as reflected in Doctrine and Covenants 93:36, “the glory of God is intelligence,”<sup>11</sup> and in the rabbinic statement, “the study of Torah counterbalances all the rest [of the commandments].”<sup>12</sup>

There are, however, also many points of difference that should be explored but which I will also merely mention, such as the obvious political differences between American Jews (the clear majority of whom, other than the minority Orthodox, consistently support liberal causes) and Latter-day Saints (who are equally overwhelmingly supportive of conservative causes). Jewish and Mormon theologies and conceptions of God are totally different, beginning with the fact that Latter-day Saints affirm a corporeal God, whereas virtually all Jews since the time of Rabbi Moses Maimonides (1135–1204) at least give lip service to the notion that God is, and can only be, totally incorporeal (even if they do not necessarily understand the radical implications of that doctrine). Latter-day Saint temples, like the ancient temple

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11. The statement is the motto of Brigham Young University. In Seth Ward’s important “Appendix: A Literature Survey of Mormon-Jewish Studies,” in *Covenant and Chosenness*, 203, the quotation is erroneously attributed to Brigham Young.

12. Mishnah *Pe’ah* 1:1.

in Jerusalem, exclude outsiders (at least from inner areas), whereas the synagogue is not a “temple” and is open to all who wish to enter. Mormon rituals are kept secret from outsiders, whereas Jewish rituals, although they apply only to Jews, are not secret. Another point of difference is the lack of symmetry between Latter-day Saint interest in the Jews, including the extensive work of such notable scholars as Hugh Nibley, Truman Madsen, and Arnold Green, and widespread Jewish indifference to and ignorance of Mormonism, with the exception of a few Jewish scholars who have studied Jewish-Mormon relations (such as Rudolf Glanz)<sup>13</sup> or have related to Mormon themes in some of their writings (such as Jacob Neusner).<sup>14</sup>

To sum up thus far, the name of another book of Latter-day Saint scripture, *Doctrine and Covenants*, in a sense describes the differences between Jews and Mormons. Note that the first word, *doctrine*, is in the singular, and the second word, *covenants*, is in the plural. Latter-day Saints can speak of doctrine in the singular, given their affirmation of continuing revelation and prophecy; a singular, authoritative body of doctrine can be revealed and proclaimed. They can also speak of covenants in the plural because they affirm multiple covenants: (1) what Christians call the “old covenant”—namely the Jewish Bible; (2) the “new covenant”—namely Christian scripture; and (3) the renewed, modern, or “latter-day” covenant revealed in the Book of Mormon, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*. For Jews, I think the instinctive phrase would be “doctrines and covenant”—multiple doctrines (as in the title of one of the first books of Jewish philosophy, Sa’adiah Ga’on’s *Book of Beliefs and Doctrines*), with no uniform dogma or single body of doctrine, but one everlasting covenant of the Torah, which will not be superseded.

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13. Rudolf Glanz, *Jew and Mormon: Historic Group Relations and Religious Outlook* (New York: Waldon, 1963).

14. Jacob Neusner, *The Glory of God Is Intelligence: Four Lectures on the Role of Intellect in Judaism*, with an introduction by S. Kent Brown (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978); “The Case of Leviticus Rabbah,” 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, 1990), 1:332–88; Jacob Neusner, “Conversation in Nauvoo about the Corporeality of God,” *BYU Studies* 36/1 (1996–97): 7–30.

## Chosenness and Its Implications

This is not the place to explore in detail the concept of chosenness, which was the subject of my paper in our Jewish-Mormon volume.<sup>15</sup> Here I wish only to call attention to how the concept brings out similarities and differences between Jews and Mormons.

Chosenness can be understood as externally or internally directed; it can be based on truth claims or on patterns of behavior, and it can be applied in inclusive or exclusive ways.

Chosenness is externally directed when it is used to assert some kind of superiority over others, to compare the chosen group favorably with other inferior groups. Although there are certainly some texts in Jewish literature, beginning notably with several passages in Deuteronomy, that at least on a superficial level lend themselves to such an externally directed interpretation, they are generally conditional upon proper behavior and need to be understood contextually. Other texts, no less authoritative and traditional, modify and counterbalance such externally directed readings and redirect the concept of chosenness internally: their intent is not to compare Jews to others, but to challenge the Jews—not that the Jews are actually better than other people but that they themselves should become better people, who have not a higher privilege but a higher responsibility.

Although my paper in *Covenant and Chosenness in Judaism and Mormonism* deals only with chosenness in a Jewish context, and therefore my expressed concern is only that Jews not adopt any superiority complex (spiritual or other), Mormon scholar Jeffrey Chadwick (in his review of three books of Jewish-Mormon interest) explicitly extends that concern to the Latter-day Saints as well.<sup>16</sup> Thus far, all we find is a similarity in terms of the need of both Jews and Latter-day Saints to exercise caution in their conceptions of chosenness, to avoid the danger of moral and spiritual arrogance. Ultimately, people who see themselves as chosen need to remind themselves, in the words of Micah 6:8, “to walk humbly with your God.”

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15. Raphael Jospe, “Chosenness in Judaism: Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity,” in *Covenant and Chosenness*, 173–94.

16. Chadwick, “Three Books on Jewish and Mormon Themes,” 410.

But when we move to the next aspect of chosenness—namely truth claims, we see a marked difference in the two communities' understanding of chosenness. Jewish chosenness is expressed in the covenant at Sinai, with the injunction to live according to the Torah, which is traditionally understood to contain 613 commandments<sup>17</sup> that apply only to the Jewish people and not to non-Jews. The truths implicitly presumed or explicitly taught by the Torah are potentially accessible to anyone who recognizes them, but that recognition or acceptance does not, in itself, obligate the person to observe the Jewish way of life based on the Torah. One can affirm, for example, belief in a God who created the world, without accepting the obligation to observe the Sabbath (certainly not in the traditional Jewish manner). One can affirm the exodus from Egypt without observing the commandments relating to the Passover festival and eating *matzah*. In all these respects, Jewish understandings of chosenness remain internally directed and relate to certain patterns of behavior, not to specific truth claims. As I understand Latter-day Saint conceptions of chosenness, however, although there is certainly also a behavioral component, they tend to emphasize certain claims of truths revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith and his successors, revelations recorded in Latter-day Saint scripture but also in later and even contemporary "continuing revelation." Although Mormon teachings are, in some of these areas, characterized by "multivalence" and "unsettled openness" (in Arnold Green's terms) and are thus less unequivocal than classical Christian notions of "one truth," "one way," and "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*" ("no salvation outside the church"), it seems to me that it is precisely such a basic belief in these exclusively Mormon truths as requisite for ultimate or full salvation that underlies the missionary

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17. The tradition that the Torah contains 613 commandments goes back at least to Talmudic times, although it was not until the Middle Ages that actual lists of the 613 were compiled, most notably by Maimonides. See "Commandments, the 613," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 5:761–83. It should be noted that no Jew can possibly fulfill all 613 commandments, many of which are collective or national in nature and relate to the conquest and agriculture of the land of Israel, the temple, and sacrificial cult. In the absence of the temple and sacrificial cult, many commandments cannot be performed either individually or collectively.



drive: if it is true that one possesses an exclusive truth required for human salvation, the clear moral corollary is to attempt to share with others these keys to salvation.<sup>18</sup>

Jews and Mormons, each community similarly believing in its own chosenness and in its having received a unique divine revelation, thus derive opposing conclusions from a common premise. For the Jews, understanding chosenness primarily in behavioral terms, the conclusion is directed internally, namely that they alone are obligated to observe the ancient commandments of the Torah. For the Mormons, understanding chosenness in terms of truth claims, the conclusion is directed externally, namely that they have an obligation to share with the world the latter-day gospel of salvation.<sup>19</sup>

In that respect, Jews and Mormons also have opposing conceptions of inclusivity and exclusivity. Jews see themselves as exclusively commanded to certain patterns of behavior, which are not obligatory for any other people, but do not claim exclusivity of salvation. To the contrary, as Maimonides reworded a famous saying of the Talmudic rabbis:

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18. Truman Madsen is representative of an “inclusivistic” trend in Mormonism, which understands degrees of salvation in terms of progressive enlightenment and emphasizes the existence of good and true principles in all religions and philosophies. Covenant is thus a matter of both truth claims and behavior (personal correspondence). Nevertheless, it seems to me that a dynamic, dialectical tension remains between Madsen’s inclusivism and various passages in the Book of Mormon, according to which full salvation does not come by the law of Moses (Mosiah 13:27–29; Alma 25:16), but only to those who repent, are baptized, and have perfect faith (2 Nephi 9:23); without Christ “all men must perish” (2 Nephi 11:6), and “Whoso believeth in me, and is baptized, the same shall be saved; and they are they who shall inherit the kingdom of God” (3 Nephi 11:33).

19. Again, it seems to me that there is an inescapable tension between the missionary impulse that is basic to much of Mormonism and the inclusivism of Mormons like Madsen. Such dialectical tensions typify much of religious thought, certainly in our era, as in Roman Catholic struggles since Vatican II, and are pronounced in such documents as “Dominus Iesus” (2000) by then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, which simultaneously continues to maintain classical truth claims while recognizing the value of interreligious dialogue. In a conference in Jerusalem in 1994, Ratzinger asked whether we can move from mere toleration to mutual acceptance—a question certainly in tension with his later “Dominus Iesus.” Such tensions are characteristic of much of Jewish thought over the ages. To my way of thinking, such tensions do not threaten religions; to the contrary, they are spiritually and intellectually enriching and underlie any quest for truth.

“The righteous of the nations have a share in the world to come.”<sup>20</sup> Salvation is thus inclusive and does not require being Jewish, but only being a decent human being. Conversely, because Latter-day Saints understand full or ultimate salvation in exclusive terms, as a function of belief in certain revealed truths that only they possess, they logically seek to share these keys of salvation with everyone else, and all others are invited to become Latter-day Saints. Again, therefore, chosenness for Jews is directed internally, and for Mormons, externally.

### The Tension of Universalism and Particular Lineage

My friend, esteemed colleague, and coeditor Truman Madsen, professor emeritus of philosophy at Brigham Young University and former director of the Jerusalem Center for Near Eastern Studies, is well known for his prolific writings, which frequently explore parallels and similarities in Jewish and Latter-day Saint teachings. He also opposes supersessionist theology, which delegitimizes contemporary Judaism. I should like to adopt his comparative approach (but in reverse, beginning with Mormon teachings) and show how a dynamic tension in Mormon thought has a remarkable parallel in Jewish thought, which will, once again, bring out similarities and differences between the two communities.

In an important essay on “Gathering and Election: Israelite Descent and Universalism in Mormon Discourse,”<sup>21</sup> Arnold Green, an eminent historian at BYU (and also a former director of the Jerusalem Center), has described the tension between universalism and physical lineage in early and subsequent Mormon ideology. In contrast with other theological questions that are authoritatively and definitively resolved (in some cases by divine revelation, such as the 1978 priesthood revelation), this tension remains, and the question continues to be open and unresolved

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20. Moses Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah* (Code of Law), Book of Knowledge, Laws of Repentances 3:5. Maimonides’s phrasing differs from that of the Talmudic rabbis in Tosefta *Sanhedrin* 13:2, ed. M. S. Zuckerman and Saul Lieberman (Jerusalem: Wahrmann, 1970), 434; cf. Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 105a. See my discussion in “The Concept of the Chosen People: An Interpretation,” *Judaism* 43/2 (1994): 127–48, and in “Chosenness in Judaism: Exclusivity vs. Inclusivity,” 173–94.

21. See note 4, above.

in Mormon thought, which at least in this area is (perhaps uncharacteristically) multivalent.

As Green shows, statements in the writings of the Prophet Joseph Smith support the view of a direct physical lineage between Latter-day Saints and the ancient Israelites (of the tribe of Ephraim). I would simply add at this point the comment that such a belief in physical lineage is phenomenologically similar to Jewish and Arab belief in descent from Abraham (respectively through Isaac and Ishmael) and differs sharply from classical Christian supersessionist emphasis of the new “Israel of the spirit” replacing the old “Israel of the flesh.” Conversely (as Green shows), statements by Joseph Smith also support a “universalist” view that the affinity is spiritual, not physical; that anyone can become “adopted” as Abraham’s posterity; that Latter-day Saints are “a community of faith” and “not a community of blood,”<sup>22</sup> and that all people, of whatever national, racial, or ethnic background, can participate fully in that spiritual community. Such a universalist position in Mormonism, it seems to me, is far closer to the Pauline notion that became dominant in classical Christianity: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:28–29 Revised Standard Version).

What Green demonstrates is that this unresolved tension and “openness” in Smith’s teachings was continued in subsequent Mormon thought, with Brigham Young emphasizing physical lineage and Orson Pratt emphasizing universalism, and that the multivalence has continued down to our own day. What is important for us is not the internal Mormon debate itself, but two points of significance for Jewish-Mormon relations: (1) the link between the belief in physical lineage and philo-Semitism and (2) the parallel tension in Jewish thought.

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22. There is no necessary contradiction or inconsistency between claiming both physical and spiritual linkage; both can be affirmed. This would constitute another Jewish-Mormon similarity, since, as discussed above, Jewish identity is simultaneously and inseparably national and religious.

First, the emphasis on physical lineage, which still plays a major role in Mormon thought, and which, as we have seen, represents a break with classical Christian doctrine, has been an important factor in Mormon philo-Semitism. Joseph Smith's interest in Jews was not merely one of religious curiosity. He criticized anti-Jewish legislation in Italy and praised the emancipation of the Jews in the United Kingdom.<sup>23</sup>

In his 1963 *Jew and Mormon: Historic Group Relations and Religious Outlook*, Rudolf Glanz showed that in nineteenth-century Utah, Jews were religiously and socially removed from the Christian-Latter-day Saint tensions and animosity. Unlike other Christians, the Latter-day Saints did not exhibit specific anti-Jewish animus; unlike non-Mormon Christians, the Jews were not involved in anti-Mormon agitation. Jews were excluded economically, together with other Christians, from the "Zion Cooperative," but "there was no basic Jewish-Mormon quarrel."<sup>24</sup> Early Jewish travelers to Utah, Samuel Nunez Carvalho (1854) and Israel Joseph Benjamin (1859), wrote favorably about LDS attitudes toward Jews and Judaism, and the Latter-day Saints gave early Jewish immigrants a place to meet on the High Holidays as well as cemetery plots in which to bury their dead. To add a contemporary note: Jews are certainly not involved in the current dispute as to whether Mormons are really Christians (since Mormons declare a belief in Jesus as Christ and accept the New Testament) or are not Christians (since they are not Trinitarian and since they affirm an additional, later revelation and covenant constituting them as a separate religion with its own particular scripture), nor are Jews involved in the question whether the World Council of Churches should include the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Latter-day Saints' own experience of religious persecution, as well as a sense of kinship with the Jews, may also have contributed to their more positive attitude toward Jews, which is reflected in statements affirming the principle of religious toleration. The eleventh Article of Faith of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints states: "We

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23. Green, "Gathering and Election," 201.

24. Glanz, *Jew and Mormon*, 3–4.

claim the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of our own conscience, and allow all men the same privilege, let them worship how, where, or what they may.” Earlier, in 1835, the church adopted a declaration of belief regarding governments and laws in general:

We believe that no government can exist in peace, except such laws are framed and held inviolate as will secure to each individual the free exercise of conscience. . . . We do not believe that human law has a right to interfere in prescribing rules of worship to bind the consciences of men, nor dictate forms for public or private devotion; that the civil magistrate should restrain crime, but never control conscience; should punish guilt, but never suppress the freedom of the soul. (Doctrine and Covenants 134:2, 4)

All of this is not to suggest that Mormon teachings about Jews and Judaism are all uniformly positive. They are not. As with other scriptures and traditions, Latter-day Saint literature contains diverse and even opposing statements on various points, in this case both positive and negative statements concerning Jews and Judaism. Steven Epperson’s 1992 book, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel*,<sup>25</sup> which promotes a positive attitude toward Jews, has been sharply criticized by Green and others for “dishonest” and selective use of Mormon sources, and for ignoring or underplaying negative stereotypes of Jews and Judaism also found in LDS literature.<sup>26</sup>

Nevertheless, despite some negative elements, the Latter-day Saint record, both literary and historical, is more consistently positive than the record of much of Christianity of the period, or indeed of other

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25. Steven Epperson, *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992); based on Steven Epperson, “Gathering and Restoration: Early Mormon Identity and the Jewish People” (PhD dissertation, Temple University, 1991).

26. Such criticism of Epperson may be found in Green, “Gathering and Election,” 220–22, and is also discussed by Seth Ward in his “Appendix: A Literature Survey of Mormon-Jewish Studies,” in *Covenant and Chosenness*, 195–211. See Frank F. Judd Jr. and Terrence L. Szink, “The Restoration of Israel in the Book of Mormon,” review of *Mormons and Jews: Early Mormon Theologies of Israel*, by Steven Epperson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 17/2 (1995): 106–22.

pre-Vatican II periods. This also applies to early Latter-day Saint proto-Zionism. Orson Hyde was sent by Joseph Smith to the Holy Land. Hyde himself tended toward the universalism of Orson Pratt, for whom the ultimate conversion of the Jews would take place prior to their final gathering, or at least prior to the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem, because Jews and Gentiles alike have the same sins and require the same redemption.<sup>27</sup> Nevertheless, as Stephen Ricks has noted, Orson Hyde's prayer on the Mount of Olives on 24 October 1841 for the return of the Jews to the promised land and the rebuilding of Jerusalem, "unlike Christian expectations for the return of the Jews . . . did not include a prayer for affirmative preaching to them there."<sup>28</sup> Hyde expressed the desire

to dedicate and consecrate this land unto Thee, for the gathering together of Judah's scattered remnants, . . . for the building up of Jerusalem again after it has been trodden down by Gentiles so long, and for raising a Temple in honor of Thy name.<sup>29</sup>

Referring to the nations and governments of the world, Hyde prayed:

Let them know that it is Thy good pleasure to restore the kingdom unto Israel—raise up Jerusalem as its capital, and constitute her people a distinct nation and government, with David Thy servant, even a descendant from the loins of ancient David to be their king.<sup>30</sup>

However, Hyde's proto-Zionism and prayer for the restoration of the Jews and of the land of Israel did not prevent him from also referring to Jewish "unbelief" in terms familiar from Christian anti-Jewish stereotypes: "Let Thy great kindness conquer and subdue the unbelief

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27. Green, "Gathering and Election," 202–4.

28. Stephen D. Ricks, "From Joseph to Joseph: Covenant and Chosenness in the Revelations and Writings of Joseph Smith," in *Covenant and Chosenness*, 99.

29. The complete prayer is found in Johnson and Leffler, *Jews and Mormons: Two Houses of Israel*, appendix 1, 207–12; quotation on 208.

30. Johnson and Leffler, *Jews and Mormons*, 210.

of Thy people. Do thou take from them their stony heart, and give them a heart of flesh.”<sup>31</sup>

In summary, Latter-day Saint teachings, from the time of Joseph Smith to our own day, contain a tension between universalism—which, like classical Christianity, sees all people, including the Jews, in need of the gospel and which regards linkage to Abraham as spiritual and as conferred upon all believers in Christ—and an emphasis on physical lineage and identification with the ancient Israelite tribe of Ephraim, resulting in a special and positive regard for their “cousins” of the house of Judah and leading to benevolent relations with the Jews in Utah, a general lack of anti-Semitism, and a proto-Zionist interest in the return of the Jewish people to rebuild their homeland and state in the land of Israel.

Finally, the second aspect of the Latter-day Saint tension between universalism and physical lineage relevant to Jewish-Mormon relations is a certain parallel tension in Jewish thought. As mentioned before, Mormon philo-Semitism is attributable, at least in part, to Latter-day Saints’ sense of kinship with the Jewish people because of their belief that they, too, are physically linked to ancient Israel. On the other hand, in recent decades, the 1978 priesthood revelation has accelerated the universalist tendency. While physical lineage is still widely affirmed, it has also been perceived as leading to racist practices and doctrines (especially regarding Blacks, who prior to the 1978 change were negatively stereotyped and excluded from the ranks of priesthood).<sup>32</sup> And so the tension continues in Latter-day Saint teaching, and Green concludes that the late twentieth century reconfirmed the original “unsettled openness” and “multivalence” present in Mormon thought going back to the Prophet Joseph Smith.<sup>33</sup>

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31. Johnson and Leffler, *Jews and Mormons*, 209. Orson Hyde’s language here is a paraphrase of Ezekiel 11:19 and 36:26, passages understood by Jews as referring contextually and explicitly to Jewish national restoration (cf. Ezekiel 11:17) and to renewed Jewish fidelity to the Torah and observance of its laws (cf. Ezekiel 11:20), and not in terms of Christological faith or of a new covenant replacing the Torah.

32. Green, “Gathering and Election,” 222–27.

33. Green, “Gathering and Election,” 195.

A similar tension continues down to our own day in Jewish teaching. According to ancient rabbinic law (*halakhah*), Jewish identity is conferred to one born to a Jewish mother. It is, in the parlance of the nineteenth-century origins of Mormonism, a matter of “blood” (although, following Nazi racist doctrine, most Jews today would have a strong aversion to such terminology). In that regard, Jewish identity is, or resembles, nationality. One is born a Jew; with the exception of converts, no ceremony is required to confirm that identity. An infant boy does not become a Jew because he is circumcised—rather, he is circumcised as a sign of his being a Jew and thus a member of the covenant community. Girls at the age of twelve and boys at the age of thirteen respectively become bat-mitzvah or bar-mitzvah (“daughter of the commandment” or “son of the commandment”), meaning legally responsible for their own behavior as adults and, as responsible adults, liable to observe the commandments, regardless of whether they celebrated the occasion with some religious ceremony or social party. Conversely, Jewish identity, while a matter of birth, is also religious in character (although many, perhaps most, Jews today, affirm their religion minimally, if at all). The national and religious components of Jewish identity, while organically inseparable, create a certain tension, paralleled by a conflicting emphasis on particularism and universalism in Jewish teaching. For all the concern for universal justice in the teachings of the biblical prophets of Israel, much of rabbinic Judaism is overtly particularistic in its outlook—which is not a value judgment (especially since I regard the universal and the particular to be correlative and not contrary concepts), but a simple recognition of historical facts. In rabbinic teaching, the commandment to “love your neighbor” is overwhelmingly understood to refer specifically to a fellow Jew, not in general to any other human.<sup>34</sup> In much of rabbinic opinion, even the principle that “saving life (*pikuaḥ nefesh*) takes precedence over the Sabbath”—namely, that the Sabbath must be violated when there is danger to life—technically applies only to

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34. See the discussion by Ernst Simon, “The Neighbor (*Re’a*) Whom We Shall Love,” in *Modern Jewish Ethics: Theory and Practice*, ed. Marvin Fox (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 29–56.



saving the life of a Jew (although virtually all authorities would extend that technicality on other grounds to all people). So which element more truly represents Judaism—the particularist or the universalist? Who is correct—those thinkers, like Judah Ha-Levi, who regarded the capacity for prophecy to be an inborn, biological trait only of Jews (what a friend of mine has termed “hardware”), or those thinkers, like Maimonides, who regarded the truth as essentially universal and who believed that Jewish identity is fundamentally a matter of affirming the truth (what my friend has termed “software”)?

In short, Jews, like Mormons, continue to live with a dynamic tension: at any given point in their lives as individuals and as a community, which element becomes dominant—birth or belief, physical lineage or spiritual affirmation, or particularist focus on the chosen people or universalist extension of concern to outsiders?

In all these tensions, we discern similarities between Jews and Mormons. These similarities, however, at the same time illustrate the fundamental differences between the two communities. For Mormons, the “unsettled openness” exists only so long as “continual revelation” has not yet decided the issue one way or the other, as it did with the 1978 priesthood revelation. For the Jews, the tensions have remained unresolved for many centuries, and the absence of revelation as an active category precludes their being resolved. Therefore, in the words of the rabbis, “an argument which is for the sake of heaven will continue without end (*sofah le-hitkayyem*),”<sup>35</sup> and “these and those are the living words of God (*elu va-elū divrei elohim ḥayyim*).”<sup>36</sup>

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35. Mishnah *Avot* 5:17.

36. Babylonian Talmud *Eruvin* 13b; *Gittin* 6b.



## REFLECTIONS ON SECULAR ANTI-MORMONISM

Daniel C. Peterson

Anti-Mormonism of the evangelical kind has come, with a few exceptions, to bore me intensely. It is not only that it tends to be repetitious and uninteresting. (My friend and colleague William Hamblin and I have laughed about doing an autobiographical film entitled *Bill and Dan's Excellent Adventure in Anti-Mormon Zombie Hell*.) It is not merely that the same arguments reappear ad nauseam, no matter how often they have been refuted, and that reviewing essentially the same book for the thirty-second time grows tiresome. (One definition of *insanity* is that the insane one keeps doing the same thing over and over and over again and expects to get different results.) It is also the deep streak of intellectual dishonesty that runs through much of the countercult industry, the triumphalism that exaggerates and even invents problems on the Mormon side while effectively pretending that no problems remain to be addressed on the so-called "Christian" side. (This could not possibly be more clearly illustrated than in recent evangelical and fundamentalist Protestant use of DNA data to cast doubt on the Book of Mormon. In what can only be described as a display of either stunning ignorance or appalling cynicism, these anti-Mormon crusaders ignore the fact that the assumptions fundamental to current deep-historical DNA studies flatly contradict traditional

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and widely held conservative Protestant understandings of the book of Genesis.)<sup>1</sup>

I believe that secular anti-Mormonism, which I often find much more interesting and intellectually challenging, will constitute the real locus of action in coming years. I call this essay “Reflections on Secular Anti-Mormonism”; oddly, the descriptor that actually came to my mind for it was the title that the great nineteenth-century German biblical scholar and orientalist Julius Wellhausen gave to one of his publications: *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten* (“Sketches and Preparatory Studies”), and my ruminations should really be seen as merely preliminary thoughts. I will be discussing mostly people who happen to be on the political “left,” simply because secularism tends to be associated with that political tendency; evangelical anti-Mormonism, by contrast, is often found among people who trend politically rightward (a fact that may cause difficulties for the Latter-day Saint governor of Massachusetts, Mitt Romney, should he seek the Republican nomination for the U.S. presidency in 2008).<sup>2</sup>

### A Message Board Jam-Packed with Angry Apostates

One message board that I like to monitor is, in its way, a kind of wildlife preserve for secular anti-Mormons. Although it is of unquestionable sociological and psychological interest, it offers little if anything of intellectual merit. What was once said of William Jennings Bryan could be said of even many of the star posters on this message board: “One could drive a prairie schooner through any part of his argument and never scrape against a fact.”<sup>3</sup> Several, even, of the

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1. See Daniel C. Peterson, “Of ‘Galileo Events,’ Hype, and Suppression: Or, Abusing Science and Its History,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): xvi–xxxi, where I discuss the video-cassette *DNA vs. the Book of Mormon* (Brigham City, UT: Living Hope Ministries, 2003).

2. Why seemingly unrelated positions in politics and beyond are, in fact, commonly associated in clusters, so that if a person’s opinion of one issue is known, her opinion of another is often fairly predictable, is a fascinating question. Thomas Sowell, *A Conflict of Visions: Ideological Origins of Political Struggles* (New York: Basic Books, 2002), attempts to address the issue from a politicoeconomic point of view.

3. Reportedly said by David Houston, one of Bryan’s colleagues in Wilson’s Cabinet. See John A. Garraty, “Bryan: The Progressives, Part I,” *American Heritage* 13/1 (1961): 6.

contributors with the greatest intellectual pretensions on the board have consistently demonstrated themselves incapable of accurately summarizing Latter-day Saint positions and arguments, let alone of genuinely engaging them. Even the most learned and widely respected Latter-day Saint authors are mocked and denigrated and their positions caricatured. Thus, for instance, Richard L. Bushman, winner of the Bancroft Prize and Gouverneur Morris Professor of History, Emeritus, at Columbia University in New York City, recently had the temerity to publish a fine biography of Joseph Smith that does not toe the board's militantly anti-Mormon line.<sup>4</sup> Accordingly, one of the regulars at the site declares him "an out-and-out flack 'historian,'" "no more a genuine historian than Hulk Hogan is a real wrestler." As another critic put it, Dr. Bushman's book has merely "a veneer of credibility." These remarks are typical of what one finds taking the place of argument and careful analysis on this board. To disagree with these people is to confess oneself either a ridiculous buffoon or a mendacious scoundrel, or both. No evidence or analysis is required to demonstrate guilt. That is simply assumed.

It is hard not to think in this context of Groucho Marx. "From the moment I picked up your book until I laid it down," Groucho wrote to the novelist Sydney Perelman, "I was convulsed with laughter. Someday I intend reading it."<sup>5</sup> Many on this particular message board seem to be of the same mentality as the academic who was asked whether he had read the new book by Professor Jones. "Read it?" he replied. "Why, I haven't even reviewed it yet!"<sup>6</sup>

What the board does offer are displays of bravado and strutting, of believers' arguments completely misunderstood and misrepresented, of bold challenges hurled out to those who are systematically barred

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4. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (New York: Knopf, 2005).

5. Attributed to Julius Henry "Groucho" Marx. See, for example, the Wikimedia Foundation, "Groucho Marx," *Wikiquote*, at [wikiquote.org/wiki/Groucho\\_Marx](http://wikiquote.org/wiki/Groucho_Marx) (accessed 6 January 2006).

6. Sydney Smith (1771–1845), English clergyman and essayist, reportedly said, "I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so." See Hesketh Pearson, *The Smith of Smiths: Being the Life, Wit, and Humour of Sydney Smith* (London: Harper, 1934), ch. 3.

from responding, and of guffaws of triumph over enemies who are not permitted to reply. Dissent is rigidly excluded from this board, even as its denizens criticize the church for its supposed “repressiveness.” However, notwithstanding the rigorous exclusion of all troublesome dissent from their domain, the faith these posters have in their own unanswerably brilliant selves is oddly refreshing to see in atheists, whom you would not expect to believe in any God at all.

Voltaire once explained that “My prayer to God is a very short one: ‘Oh, Lord, make my enemies ridiculous.’ God,” he said, “has granted it.”<sup>7</sup>

But this does not exhaust the pleasures of that message board. It is rife with personal abuse and bloodcurdling hostility, not uncommonly obscene, directed against people the posters do not know and have not met—against President Hinckley, Joseph Smith, the Brethren, the general membership of the church, and even, somewhat obsessively, against one particular rather insignificant BYU professor. Ordinary members of the church—*Morgbots* or *Morons* or *Sheeple*, in the mocking jargon of the board—are routinely stereotyped as insane, ignorant, tyrannical, emotionally impoverished, cheap, bigoted, ill-mannered, irrational, sexually repressed, stupid, dishonest, greedy, foolish, rude, sick, brain-dead, and uncultured. There was once even a thread—and I am not making this up—devoted to discussing how Mormons noisily slurp their soup in restaurants. Posts frequently lament the stupidity and gullibility of church leaders, neighbors, parents, spouses, siblings, and even offspring—who may be wholly unaware of the anonymous poster’s secret double life of contemptuous disbelief. It is a splendid cyber illustration of the finger-pointing and mocking found in the “great and spacious building” of 1 Nephi. Whenever the poisonous culture of the place is criticized, however, its defenders take refuge in the culture of victimhood, deploying a supposed need for therapeutic self-expression as their all-encompassing excuse.

Contemplating a depressing number of the posters on that board, I have thought to myself, “If this is what liberation from the Mormon ‘myth’ makes you—a vulgar and sometimes duplicitous crank, cack-

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7. Voltaire, letter to Étienne-Noël Damilaville, 16 May 1767.

ling with malice and spite—then I would prefer to spend the few brief years left to me (before I dissolve into the irreversible and never-ending oblivion many of the board’s atheistic contributors prophesy for me and all humankind) with people who have not been liberated.” I think of the apostates of Ammonihah, mocking Alma and Amulek in prison, “gnashing their teeth upon them, and spitting upon them, and saying: How shall we look when we are damned?” (Alma 14:21). Surely the damned will not look much different from this.

But I am troubled by the capacity even of far less malevolent message boards to supply a supportive sort of ersatz community as an alternative to the fellowship of the Saints, and I worry about what participation on even relatively benign boards does to some Latter-day Saint souls. I have in mind one frequent poster in particular, who claims simply to be doubting and troubled, but who in fact never misses an opportunity for a snide remark about his church, in which he remains active, and its teachings. However, the question of the truth or falsity of Mormonism—and of Christianity and theism generally, however one ultimately answers it—does not appear to deserve laughter and cheap jokes. These teachings involve weighty matters of utmost import. Millions have placed their hopes in the gospel’s message, and, if this were false, it would be tragic and unutterably sad. Perhaps the cynicism that this poster and many others cultivate is no more than a psychologically understandable defensive shell, a self-protective whistling past the graveyard of doubt. But, even so, it is a shell that will, I fear, block the Spirit. I am not optimistic about his long-term prospects, barring a fundamental shift in attitude (and, even less likely, I fear, perhaps in personality).

Characteristic of much secularizing anti-Mormon participation on the Web is a corrosive cynicism that, in my experience, will erode *anything* with which it comes in contact. It is not so much a reasoned intellectual stance as an attitude, or even, perhaps, a personality type. Those afflicted with such cynicism are like the dwarfs toward the end of the last book in C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, who are, as Aslan expresses it, so afraid of being taken in that they cannot be taken out of the walls in which they have enclosed themselves. Such

people claim to know the price of everything and everyone, although they seem to recognize the value of nothing. But the problem may well be in the cynic rather than in the object of his scorn. “No man,” as the French saying goes, “is a hero to his valet.”<sup>8</sup> Why? The German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel is surely right when he responds: “Not because the former is not a hero, but because the latter is a valet.”<sup>9</sup>

### European Secularism

A more interesting form of secular anti-Mormonism springs out of, or at least is related to, elite European secularism generally.

Some years ago, with time on my hands following the close of an academic gathering in Graz, Austria, I spent the better part of a day looking through the city’s bookstores. The dollar being weak, prices being high, and my luggage being cramped, I did much more looking and browsing than buying. I soon discovered an extraordinarily interesting topic: The treatment of Mormonism in travel books published for America-bound Europeans. Since then, I have enjoyed many similar books in French and Italian bookstores as well as across Germanic Europe. Almost uniformly, the tone is one of astonishment—subtly expressed or, often, quite open—at the stupidity and gullibility of the Latter-day Saints. Additionally, Mormon history and doctrine are plainly deemed too patently absurd to justify much effort at accuracy.

But Latter-day Saints represent merely an opportunity for a more general European attitude to focus on a particularly ludicrous target. In a recent book attempting to explain the American mind to bemused German speakers, Professor Hans-Dieter Gelfert observes that,

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8. “Il n’y a pas de grand homme pour son valet-de-chambre.” Ascribed to the French wit and woman of letters Mme A. M. Bigot de Cornuel (1614–94). See Charlotte Élizabéth Aïssé, *Lettres de Mademoiselle Aïssé à Madame Calandrini*, 5th ed. (Paris: Dentu, 1853), 161.

9. Georg W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 87–88. Hegel was born in 1770 and died in 1831. A variant of Mme de Cornuel’s observation also appears in the German poet Goethe (1749–1832): “To a valet, no man is a hero” (*Es gibt für den Kammerdiener keiner Helden*). See Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, ed. Hugh B. Nisbet and Hans S. Reiss (Oxford: Blackwell, 1971).



To Europeans, American religiosity must necessarily seem naïve, if not primitive. Here [in Germany], educated people are assisted, above all, by enlightened [*aufgeklärte*] theologians who reinterpret Christian teaching as an ethical doctrine suited for the everyday, but at the same time philosophically abstract. In the meanwhile, there are pastors who believe that they can get by altogether without mentioning God's name. It's completely different in America, where the Bible is still the Word of God.<sup>10</sup>

According to Phil Zuckerman, of Pitzer College, rates of agnosticism or atheism in Scandinavia, the Czech Republic, and France reach levels higher than 50 percent.<sup>11</sup> There and elsewhere, underused churches are being converted into concert halls, museums, art galleries, stores, restaurants, condos, even nightclubs. In Scandinavia, for some reason, it is popular to transform churches into carpet stores.<sup>12</sup> It is well known that the late Pope John Paul II believed that the future of Catholicism lay, not in spiritually dying Europe, but to the south, in Latin America and, perhaps even more so, in Africa. Benedict XVI appears to share that view, with reason.

"In the eyes of many if not most Europeans," Professor Gelfert observes, "American taste is equivalent to tastelessness."<sup>13</sup> (One is tempted to suggest that, given their own still relatively recent history of something rather worse than poor taste, a bit of humility might be in order for the Germans, at least. And I say this as something of a Germanophile.) Thus, European disdain for American religiosity functions as part of a broader contempt for American culture, nicely embodied, as a surprisingly large number of residents of both the

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10. Hans-Dieter Gelfert, *Typisch amerikanisch: Wie die Amerikaner wurden, was sie sind* (Munich: Beck, 2002), 17, translation by the author for all Gelfert quotations.

11. Phil Zuckerman, cited in Joel Kotkin, "Sects and the City: The New Urbanists Have Forgotten Thousands of Years of History," *Weekly Standard*, 2 May 2005, 32. In Japan, which, obviously, has a very different cultural and religious background, roughly 65 percent of the population is atheistic, whereas, by contrast, just under 10 percent of Americans so identify themselves. See Kotkin, "Sects and the City," 32.

12. Kotkin, "Sects and the City," 33.

13. Gelfert, *Typisch amerikanisch*, 136.

Continent and the British Isles see it, in George Bush—our religious fanatic cowboy president. And what could be more American than the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known for its freshly scrubbed, naïve, nineteen-year-old missionaries, often hailing from the American West.

Anti-Mormonism in Europe is overwhelmingly of the secular variety; evangelical anti-Mormonism, on the whole, is no more than a minor irritant because the same general European secularism that directly challenges missionary success on the Continent and in the British Isles also confronts and hampers evangelicals. But secularist anti-Mormonism is doing real damage to many fragile testimonies there, and an adequate response has still not materialized. This is a challenge that apologists in Europe itself but also in the church's American home base urgently need to address.

### The Media

The eminent German-American sociologist of religion Peter Berger once famously observed that, if India was the most religious of nations and Sweden the most secular, the United States appeared to be a nation of Indians ruled by Swedes.<sup>14</sup> For the gap between ordinary Americans and the American elite on religious matters is vast, and perhaps growing.

At least since the famous study by Stanley Rothman and Robert Lichter of attitudes among elite journalists,<sup>15</sup> it has been clear—and the finding has been replicated in several studies since—that the chattering classes, as they have been termed, are far to the “left” of the American mainstream in terms of social attitudes, political preferences, and religious beliefs. Congregated, for the most part, along the two coasts (and notably in New York and Los Angeles), elite journal-

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14. Peter L. Berger, in an interview with Krista Tippet; see “Globalization and the Rise of Religion,” the 19 May 2005 episode of the public radio program *Speaking of Faith*. For a transcript, go to [speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/globalization/transcript.shtml](http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/globalization/transcript.shtml) (accessed 6 January 2006).

15. See, for example, S. Robert Lichter, Stanley Rothman, and Linda S. Lichter, *The Media Elite* (Bethesda, MD: Adler & Adler, 1986).

ists, screenwriters, producers, and directors are isolated—liberated?—from much of the rest of America, which they term “fly-over country.” Its ways are strange, foreign, and threatening. As shown in probably a dozen or more films during the terrifying Reagan years of the 1980s, innocent urbanites whose cars broke down in, say, San Bernardino County, were very likely to fall prey to corrupt southern-accented fascists in murderous small-town police states where rampant intermarriage was obvious in the very faces of the slack-jawed yokels. A friend of mine, born and raised in New York City and educated at Johns Hopkins and Princeton, caught the spirit of the outlook beautifully, if unintentionally, when he told me, years ago, of what was to that point his only transcontinental journey, a jet airplane jaunt to visit his girlfriend in Berkeley: “There really *isn’t* anything,” he said in an awestruck voice, “between the East Coast and California.” I thought immediately of those maps that show the United States as seen from New York: a rather detailed image of Manhattan, with the Great Plains stretching out featurelessly behind until the Golden Gate Bridge appears to break the monotony.

In a recent magazine article, Joel Kotkin, an incisive observer of social trends, supplies a nice, concrete example:

When Fargo, North Dakota, businessman Howard Dahl boards a plane for the East Coast or flies to Europe and beyond, he is often struck by the views of the people he encounters, especially their preconceptions about his part of the country. “There’s a lot of condescension. You’d think no one here ever read a book,” Dahl says, “or ever had a thought about anything. They think we’re religious fanatics.”<sup>16</sup>

How much more so, then, Salt Lake City? Since, as studies have shown, journalists strongly tend, on the whole, to be secular, politically liberal, anticorporate, and socially and morally “progressive,” Mormonism constitutes a perfect target. They will be naturally antipathetic to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, a church

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16. Kotkin, “Sects and the City,” 30.

that is widely regarded as socially retrograde, politically conservative, and hierarchically corporate.

“Still today,” writes Gelfert,

Americans promote a striking hero cult with regard to the great figures of their history. In England, a tendency to dismantle onetime heroes set in after the First World War, with Lytton Strachey’s book *Eminent Victorians* (1918). The same thing happened in Germany after the Second World War. Whenever, among us, an article appears in *Spiegel* about a once-revered heroic figure from German history, one can just about wager that this person will have lost his luster thereafter.<sup>17</sup>

In this regard, American journalism seems very, very European. Since the days of Woodward and Bernstein and Watergate, it has tended to be adversarial, very often operating on the presumption of a guilty cover-up. What could be a more inviting target for contemporary journalists than a church with a highly controversial, very visible, and widely documented history, and wielding considerable economic power, that claims to be led by living prophets and apostles? It is heroes and valets, all over again.

The prominent Pennsylvania State historian of religion Philip Jenkins, commenting on secularism among political and social liberals, notes

a rich vein of bilious anti-clericalism, that class-based contempt that imagines every pastor as Elmer Gantry, every believer as a budding recruit for the Christian Taliban, and every Catholic as a mind-manacled helot of a pederastic priesthood. This tendency reached its apex at the [Democratic] party’s

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17. Gelfert, *Typisch amerikanisch*, 76. One wonders whether the psychosocial character of the “Bloomsbury group,” to which Strachey belonged, helped to motivate a desire to “unmask” erstwhile heroes (and whether it was related to the striking lack of interest in long-term consequences encapsulated in the notorious remark by John Maynard Keynes, another member of the “group,” that, “*in the long run we are all dead*”; see John M. Keynes, *A Tract on Monetary Reform*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Writings of John Maynard Keynes* [London: Macmillan, 1971], 65). If so, one might speculate even further about certain contemporary secularist ex-Mormon groups.

1992 convention, at which liberal and pro-labor Pennsylvania Gov. Bob Casey was excluded from the rostrum because of his opposition to abortion, while feminists handed out badges caricaturing Casey in papal robes.<sup>18</sup>

Amusingly, every element of the attitude toward mainstream Christianity mentioned by Jenkins, down to the very language, can be paralleled—indeed, finds almost daily parallels—on my laboratory message board with regard to Mormonism. But this attitude is not confined merely to the fever swamps of Web bigotry. In an article published as recently as 15 July 2005, in a New Zealand periodical but evidently also in many other venues, the American leftist journalist Suzan Mazur, reporting on the corporate machinations of us Mormon theofascists, even included purported illustrations of the Latter-day Saint endowment ceremony. They were reproduced from that essential and utterly reliable 1882 classic, J. H. Beadle's *Polygamy; or, The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism*,<sup>19</sup> and were accurate right down to details like the bishop's miters—clearly modeled on the pope's hat—worn by temple officiators.<sup>20</sup> (To those who have actually attended the temple yet have seen no such garb and no such rituals, Mr. Beadle might well say, as Groucho's brother, "Chico" Marx, once demanded, "Who you gonna believe, me or your own eyes?").<sup>21</sup>

### General Secular Antitheism

Agnosticism (or atheism) is the default setting in most circles of elite opinion, in the United States nearly as much as in Europe. To an

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18. Philip Jenkins, "Prophets on the Right—and Left," review of *God's Politics*, by Jim Wallis, and *Exodus*, by Dave Shiflett, *American Conservative*, 6 June 2005, 31–32. See also the book note on Philip Jenkins, *The New Anti-Catholicism: The Last Acceptable Prejudice*, in *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 361–62.

19. J. H. Beadle, *Polygamy; or, The Mysteries and Crimes of Mormonism* (Philadelphia: National, 1882).

20. See Susan Mazur, "Diebold and the Mormon Mason Handshake," *Scoop*, 15 July 2005, at [www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0507/S00222.htm](http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/HL0507/S00222.htm) (accessed 12 December 2005).

21. Often mistakenly attributed to Groucho Marx, but really said by his brother, Leonard "Chico" Marx, in the 1933 film *Duck Soup*, while impersonating Groucho's character.

extent, secular anti-Mormonism is merely an illustration, or even an echo, of that broader phenomenon. An important articulation of this view is the British philosopher Antony Flew's essay "The Presumption of Atheism,"<sup>22</sup> though I note with considerable satisfaction that Professor Flew—probably the most vocally atheistic English-speaking philosopher since the death of Bertrand Russell in early 1970—recently announced that, compelled by what he sees as evidence for intelligent fine-tuning in the universe, he has abandoned his atheism and come to embrace a form of deism.<sup>23</sup>

Some nontheists are rather passive about their unbelief—one wit recently coined the term *apatheism* to describe the indifference to religion and religious issues that he regards as a distinguishing mark of modern intelligence—but some are extremely aggressive, even if they rarely descend to the crudity of the message board that is my preferred research location for field studies in intellectual pathology.

It is not uncommon, for example, to hear and read references to faith as "religious insanity."<sup>24</sup> "Religiosity," said the psychologist Albert Ellis,

is in many respects equivalent to irrational thinking and emotional disturbance. . . . The elegant therapeutic solution to emotional problems is to be quite unreligious. . . . The less religious they are, the more emotionally healthy they will tend to be.<sup>25</sup>

In this, Ellis was only following the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud. Religion, Freud wrote, is "the universal obsessional neurosis of humanity."<sup>26</sup>

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22. See Antony Flew, *The Presumption of Atheism and Other Philosophical Essays on God, Freedom, and Immortality* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1976). Julian Baggini, in his *Atheism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), sets out a similar argument.

23. See [www.biola.edu/antonyflew](http://www.biola.edu/antonyflew) (accessed 25 January 2006).

24. As cited, for example, by James R. Lewis, *Legitimizing New Religions* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 184–85.

25. Albert Ellis, "Psychotherapy and Atheistic Values: A Response to A. E. Bergin's 'Psychotherapy and Religious Values,'" *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 48 (1980): 637.

26. Sigmund Freud, *The Future of an Illusion*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 55.

Religion . . . imposes equally on everyone its own path to the acquisition of happiness and protection from suffering. Its technique consists in depressing the value of life and distorting the picture of the real world in a delusional manner. . . . At this price forcibly fixing them in a state of psychical infantilism and by drawing them into a mass-delusion, religion succeeds in sparing many people an individual neurosis. But hardly anything more.<sup>27</sup>

This is more sophisticated than the description of Morgbots constantly employed in my message board laboratory, but its general content is remarkably similar. Yet it is demonstrably wrong. The data rather consistently demonstrate that Latter-day Saints who live lives consistent with their religious beliefs experience greater general well-being, greater familial and marital stability, less delinquency, less depression, less anxiety, and less substance abuse than those who do not, and there is very little evidence that religious belief and practice are harmful to mental health.<sup>28</sup>

As James R. Lewis argues in his 2003 book *Legitimizing New Religions*, “attacks on alternative religious groups are attempts to psychologize—to *medicalize*—a controversy that, on deeper examination, is clearly a controversy over ideology and lifestyle.”<sup>29</sup> In language that cannot possibly fail to remind Latter-day Saints of evangelical anti-Mormonism but that, oddly, forms a point of contact with the most virulent forms of secular anti-Mormonism as well, Thomas Langham, reviewing Lewis’s book for the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, remarks that

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27. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, ed. and trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), 36.

28. See Daniel K. Judd, “Religiosity, Mental Health, and the Latter-day Saints: A Preliminary Review of Literature (1923–95),” in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members*, ed. James T. Duke (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1998), 473–97. This article was originally published as “An Overview of Mormonism and Mental Health,” in *Mormon Identities in Transition*, ed. Douglas J. Davies (London: Cassell, 1996), 112–24.

29. Lewis, *Legitimizing New Religions*, 185.

opponents of new religious movements have worked to delegitimize them through acting as “moral entrepreneurs” who have used anti-cult ideologies to market negative stereotypes, like the “cult” label, to the broader community. Such activities have led new religious groups . . . to be classified as illegitimate “dangerous organizations.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet, Lewis says,

it is not self-evident that secularism should be the standard by which religion is evaluated. . . . [A] humanistic methodology . . . should attempt to describe religionists as acting out of reasonable motives rather than from errors of judgment or psychopathology.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, as is increasingly recognized nowadays, religious people tend to be healthier, not only mentally but even physically, than their irreligious counterparts.

With specific regard to Latter-day Saints, Utah death rates are below rates in the nation at large and in the Mountain States for most major causes of death, including heart disease, cancer, cerebrovascular disease, accidents, pulmonary disease, pneumonia/flu, diabetes, liver disease, and atherosclerosis. Utah suicide rates are higher than the national average, but lower than the Mountain States as a whole. Studies of specific LDS populations in California; Utah; and Alberta, Canada, show that Latter-day Saint men are about half as likely to die of cancer as other men. Latter-day Saint women also have lower cancer mortality, but the difference is not as great as for men. Death rates are lower for Latter-day Saints who have higher levels of religious participation. In short, adherence to the Mormon code of health appears to lower death rates from several diseases.<sup>32</sup> The benighted Morgbotts seem to be doing rather well.

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30. Thomas C. Langham, review of *Legitimizing New Religions*, by James R. Lewis, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 73/2 (2005): 555.

31. Lewis, *Legitimizing New Religions*, 226.

32. Tim B. Heaton, “Vital Statistics,” in *Latter-day Saint Social Life*, 114–15. Compare James E. Enstrom, “Health Practices and Cancer Mortality among Active California Mor-



But what of the atheists and the agnostics? We need to take a look at another laboratory: contemporary Europe, which has not altogether unfairly been called a “godless continent.” Europe is in a state not only of demographic but, arguably, of cultural barrenness, and it is certainly afflicted, these days, with a profound historical amnesia as its churches grow empty and the central role of Christianity in creating Europe and defining its identity is forgotten.

A striking drop has occurred in European birth and marriage rates, which Zuckerman connects with the equally striking decline in religious belief. “Religion,” he says,

seems to be critical to people’s decision to raise children. People in these advanced industrial societies see children more and more as a liability. Some realize that this life is better without children. And you don’t even need to get married since there is no legal advantage to doing so.<sup>33</sup>

Consider the following statistics out of the former Soviet republic of Latvia, drawn from remarks presented by Inese Slesere at the Sixth Annual World Family Policy Forum, held at the J. Reuben Clark Law School of Brigham Young University during the summer of 2005. Slesere, a member of the Latvian Saeima (Parliament), said that, between 1989 and 2004, the Latvian population decreased by 13 percent, from 2.6 million to 2.3 million. During the same period, the number of children aged seventeen and younger decreased by nearly 30 percent, from 681,000 to 469,000. In the meantime, other, less desirable, parameters are dramatically rising. With 61 percent of Latvian

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mons,” *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 81 (1989): 1807–14, reprinted in *Latter-day Saint Social Life*, 441–60. Also James E. Enstrom, “Health Practices and Cancer Mortality among Active California Mormons, 1980–93,” in *Latter-day Saint Social Life*, 461–71; John W. Gardner and Joseph L. Lyon, “Cancer in Utah Mormon Men by Lay Priesthood Level,” *American Journal of Epidemiology* 116 (1982): 243–57; George K. Jarvis, “Mormon Mortality Rates in Canada,” *Social Biology* 24 (1977): 294–302; Joseph L. Lyon, John W. Gardner, and Dee W. West, “Cancer Incidence in Mormons and Non-Mormons in Utah during 1967–75,” *Journal of the National Cancer Institute* 65 (1980): 1055–61; James E. Smith, “Mortality,” in *Utah in Demographic Perspective*, ed. Thomas K. Martin, Tim B. Heaton, and Stephen J. Bahr (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 59–69.

33. Cited in Kotkin, “Sects and the City,” 32.

marriages ending in divorce, the nation's divorce rate is among the highest in Europe. More and more children are being born out of wedlock each year. Fully 39 percent of the Latvian children born in 2003 were illegitimate, as contrasted with only 17 percent in 1990. Yet, at the same time, the Latvian abortion rate is chillingly high. In 2003, for example, there were 691 abortions for every one thousand live births. As Slesere analyzes the situation, the bottom line is that half of the Latvian women aged between twenty-five and thirty-nine years have chosen not to give birth to children.<sup>34</sup>

But Zuckerman, who is himself professedly antireligious, is alarmed at the contrast of the low European birthrate with the high birthrates of the rapidly growing Muslim minorities within Europe. Muslims already make up at least a quarter of the residents of Rotterdam, Marseilles, and Malmö, Sweden, and 15 percent of the residents of Brussels, the capital of the European Union. Within the next few decades, several European cities will probably acquire Muslim majorities.<sup>35</sup> Observers have begun to speak of "Eurabia," and "Europistan." Others have alluded to what seems to be a "collective death wish" among Europeans, as their birthrates have fallen below levels required simply to replace themselves.<sup>36</sup>

During a trip to England a few years ago, I went beyond my habitual haunts into certain relatively nondescript parts of the country. While I have long been accustomed to the large Muslim population of London, I was astonished to see *halal* butcher shops and Muslim garb in the most ordinary towns. Virtually everywhere. Immediately after his assassination a few years ago, the Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn was portrayed in the media as anti-immigration, which was true. But he was also portrayed as right wing, which was false. The reality was considerably more interesting than initial stereotypes suggested:

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34. See Inese Slesere, "Latvia—Implementation of the Principles of the Doha Declaration," in *The Natural Family in the Third Millennium: Global Insights*, ed. A. Scott Loveless and Thomas B. Holman (Westport, CT: Praeger, forthcoming). I am grateful to A. Scott Loveless (JD, PhD) of the World Family Policy Center for providing the Latvian information to me.

35. Kotkin, "Sects and the City," 32–33.

36. See the information provided above on Latvia.

He was, in fact, a man of the left, and a practicing homosexual, who feared that the demographic ascendancy of scarcely assimilated conservative Muslims in his country would doom the ultrafree sexuality that he and many others currently value as essential to the culture of the modern Netherlands. And, surely, the recent murder of the filmmaker Theo Van Gogh on a midday street in Amsterdam by a Dutch Muslim, and the very recent London bombings carried out by British Muslims, seem to bear out his worries. “The best lack all conviction,” wrote the Irish poet William Butler Yeats, “while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”<sup>37</sup>

But, of course, however much she may wish she could, and however clearly she may see the benefits of belief, an unbeliever probably cannot, in most cases, simply will herself to believe. It simply does not work that way.

One vocal ex-Mormon critic explained at the most recent Sunstone symposium that it was a specific case of God’s apparent failure to intervene to prevent evil that, rather suddenly, killed his faith. I take him at his word. I find his reaction plausible, even understandable, and see his subsequent arguments against Mormonism as derivative from that initial conclusion, which serves as their presupposition.

But, here, an observation needs to be made: If, as in this case, the unbeliever’s loss of faith stems from what he might well regard and characterize as a particular, almost revelatory, realization, then whatever arguments he puts forward afterward will be, to some degree or other, *ad hoc*, designed—no less than those of apologists for *belief*—to support a paradigm that was actually chosen on different grounds.

For example, Dan Vogel’s take on the witnesses<sup>38</sup> strikes me as embarrassingly strained and almost desperate. From his presupposed atheistic point of view, however—having conceded that the witnesses were both sane and sincere, but still unwilling to grant the accuracy of their statements—it is necessary, almost unavoidable, that he explain

37. William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Richard J. Finneran, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribner, 1996), 187.

38. 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), 79–121.

them away as nineteenth-century visionaries to some extent culturally incapable of distinguishing fantasy from reality.

It is a matter of what are sometimes termed “prior probabilities.” As Sherlock Holmes said to Dr. Watson, “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, *however improbable*, must be the truth.”<sup>39</sup>

The problem of evil itself—so lethal to the faith of that Sunstone atheist—will serve as an illustration of how paradigms and prior probabilities function in these matters. To an agnostic or an atheist, someone who assigns a very low probability (or even none at all) to the existence of God, the existence of massive human and natural evils in this world constitutes a serious and perhaps fatal, if not merely redundant, blow against theistic belief. To someone, however, who regards the existence of a benevolent and powerful God as probable, even highly probable or certain, on other grounds, the existence of such massive evils represents merely a problem to be worked out in the light of her theistic presuppositions. Her proposed solutions will seem gratuitously *ad hoc* to atheistic critics, but, from within her paradigm, function much the same way as refinements to broad scientific theories function under the stimulus of new data and problems. Similarly, defenders of the Book of Mormon are sometimes accused of *ad hoc* improvisations when, from their point of view, they are merely refining and making more precise a paradigm that they regard as reasonable and supportable on other grounds. However, as I have tried to illustrate, such refining is not restricted to theistic paradigms; it occurs just as clearly in naturalistic attempts to explain away claims of the divine. It is not a matter of black and white, but of relative plausibility and richness of explanation.

Some atheists are positively giddy with the good news of unbelief. One reason, of course, is the sadly checkered history of religious believers. “When one considers how much blood has been shed in the name of faith—in whatever God it might be—one might perhaps wish,” says Gelfert, speaking this time not as a mere observer of the Americans

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

but as himself, a religiously skeptical European, “that the founders of expansionist religions, among which Christianity figures, had recommended not faith but humble doubt as the royal path to God.”<sup>40</sup>

The very notion of strong religious belief has become suspect in the modern era, particularly since 9/11. Take, for example, the words of Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY), a very intelligent man who represents, in more ways than one, one of the bluest of the blue states, during a June 2003 hearing on the nomination of William Pryor to serve as a judge in the United States Court of Appeals:

In Pryor’s case, his beliefs are so well known, so deeply held, that it’s very hard to believe, very hard to believe that they’re not going to deeply influence the way he comes about saying, “I will follow the law.” And that would be true of anybody who had very, very deeply held views.<sup>41</sup>

“Deeply held views,” you see, is frequently a code term for *religious* views these days and savors of a dreaded theocracy. During a visit a few years ago to Iran, under the auspices and with the sponsorship of the regime there, I was pressed by more than a few of the two dozen or so other American academics who were part of the group to acknowledge the allegedly strong similarities between Utah and the Islamic Republic. It is fashionable in some circles to speak of Utah as a theocracy, and even of the Latter-day Saints as America’s Taliban or, for short, the “Utaliban.” Which is, of course, utter nonsense. But the avowedly antireligious Jon Krakauer’s *Under the Banner of Heaven*, which portrays Mormons and Mormonism essentially as a violent threat to non-Latter-day Saints, was a recent bestseller.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, as I write, a new Hollywood film (entitled *September Dawn*), which will apparently use 1857’s tragic Mountain Meadows Massacre to reinforce that image, is shortly to appear.

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40. Gelfert, *Typisch amerikanisch*, 151.

41. Cited in Charles Krauthammer, “In Defense of Certainty,” *Time*, 6 June 2005, 96. Krauthammer’s article is well worth reading in this context.

42. Jon Krakauer, *Under the Banner of Heaven: A Story of a Violent Faith* (New York: Doubleday, 2003); see the review of Krakauer’s book by Craig L. Foster, “Doing Violence to Journalistic Integrity,” *FARMS Review* 16/1 (2004): 149–74.

Critics of religious belief point recently to al-Qa'ida, the Taliban, and Wahhabism. But they should not be permitted to forget Josef Stalin, nor, for that matter, the entire murderous twentieth century, in which atheists and quasi atheists killed tens of millions. Hitler, a virulent anti-Christian, regarded humanity as a bacterium on the earth's surface. And Stalin railed against God even on his quite horrible deathbed in March of 1953. He had suffered a severe stroke that had left his right side paralyzed, and his last hours were spent in virtually unbearable pain. As his daughter Svetlana later reported, her father choked to death while those around his deathbed looked on. Although, at the very last, he had seemed at most merely semiconscious, he suddenly opened his eyes and looked about the room, plainly terrified. Then, according to Svetlana, "something incomprehensible and awesome happened that to this day I can't forget and don't understand." Stalin partially lifted himself in the bed, clenched his fist toward the heavens, and shook it defiantly. Then, with an unintelligible murmur, he dropped motionless back onto his pillow and died.<sup>43</sup>

I confess that I find those who rejoice in atheism baffling. It is not merely the thought of the atheist's funeral: "all dressed up with nowhere to go." I think of Beethoven, hiding down in the basement with pillows to his ears, desperately trying to save his fading sense of hearing as he was working on his majestic "*Emperor*" *Concerto*. Or, a little later, conducting the magnificent *Ninth Symphony*, which he never heard, having to be turned around by the concertmaster because he did not know that the audience was applauding him. I think of Mozart, feverishly trying to finish his own *Requiem*—dead at thirty-five and thrown into an unmarked pauper's grave. So many lives have been cut short, leaving so many poems unwritten, so many symphonies uncomposed, so many scientific discoveries unmade.

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43. See Svetlana Alliluyeva, *Twenty Letters to a Friend*, trans. Priscilla J. McMillan (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 5–11. See also the account given by Ravi Zacharias in his Harvard Veritas Forum, 19–20 November 1992. Alliluyeva, Stalin's daughter, was an eyewitness to the scene. Zacharias heard the story from Malcolm Muggeridge who, in his turn, based his report on three weeks of interviews with Alliluyeva, conducted for a three-part BBC series.

In fact, it is hard to think of *anyone* who has achieved his or her full potential in this life. Tragic foreshortenings do not only happen to geniuses. A neighbor and friend was stricken with multiple sclerosis in her midtwenties and now, in her thirties, lies bedridden in a rest home. Barring some incredible medical breakthrough, this is her life. Absent hope for a life to come, this is all she will *ever* have to look forward to. My own father, for the last six years of his life, blind from an utterly unforeseen stroke suffered during routine and relatively minor surgery, was incapable of any of the activities in which he had once found satisfaction and pathetically asked me, every few weeks, whether he would ever see again. What comfort would there be in saying, “No, Dad. This is it. Nothing good is coming. And then you’ll die.”

Of course, something may be unpalatable and unpleasant yet accurate. I can certainly understand coming to the sad conclusion that this is in fact the truth about the human condition: That we live briefly, then we die and we rot. That so, too, do our children and our grandchildren. And that so, also, does everything we create—our music, our buildings, our literature, our inventions. That “all we are is dust in the wind.”<sup>44</sup>

But I cannot understand those who regard this as glorious good news.

Perhaps, on second thought, though, I can understand those who might see it as a liberation. “If there is no God,” says Dostoevsky’s Ivan Karamazov, “that means everything is permitted.”<sup>45</sup> Why? Because nothing matters at all. Everything is meaningless. However, this liberation comes at a very, very high price. “If we believe in nothing,” said the great French writer and Nobel laureate Albert Camus,

if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any

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44. Kansas, “Dust in the Wind” (’70s lyrics), *Point of Know Return*, album, Epic/Legacy Recording, ZK 34929 © 1977 Don Kirschner.

45. It appears that Ivan never actually says this in the book; however, the *idea* is attributed to him by several characters. See, for example, Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, trans. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1990), 69, 81–82, 263, 589, and 625.

importance. There is no pro or con: the murderer is neither right nor wrong. We are free to stoke the crematory fires or to devote ourselves to the care of lepers. Evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice.<sup>46</sup>

At the point where it is no longer possible to say what is black and what is white, the light is extinguished and freedom becomes a voluntary prison.<sup>47</sup>

Consider, too, this supremely complacent remark, offered by a vocal atheist critic of Mormonism during a 2001 Internet discussion: “If there were a God,” he reflected, “I think (s)he’d enjoy hanging out with me—perhaps sipping on a fine Merlot under the night sky while devising a grand unified theory.” Only someone very comfortably situated could be so marinated in smugness about the question of the reality of God.

But the vast majority of the world’s population is *not* so situated, and, for them, atheism, if true, is very bad news indeed. Most of the world’s population, historically and still today, does not live, well fed and well traveled, to a placid old age surrounded by creature comforts. Most of the world has been and is like the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, the slums of Cairo, the backward rural villages of India, the famine-ridden deserts of northeastern Africa, the war-ravaged towns of the southern Sudan and of Rwanda. If there is going to be a truly happy ending for the millions upon millions of those whose lives have been blighted by torture, starvation, disease, rape, and murder, that ending will have to come in a future life. And such a future life seems to require a God.

Yes, the problem of evil is a huge one. But to give up on God is to give evil the final say. It is to admit that child rapists and murderers dictate the final chapters in the lives of their terrified and agonized victims; that Hitler and Stalin and Pol Pot really did triumph, forever, over the millions they slaughtered; that, in the rotting corpses of Darfur and Iraqi Kurdistan, we see the final, definitive chapter of thousands of lives;

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46. Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 5.

47. Camus, *Rebel*, 71.



that there *is*, really, no hope for those whose health is in irreversible decline; that every human relationship ends in death, if not before.

This would not be good news, and I see no compelling reason to accept it. In fact, I see numerous persuasive reasons to reject the claim. But that is a subject not just for another occasion but, necessarily, for a great number of other occasions.

Secular anti-Mormons typically criticize the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints on two broad grounds. First of all, they say that its claims are untrue. Second, they accuse it and its leaders of wrongdoing—with respect, for example, to the origins of plural marriage, its supposed manipulation of history, and the Mountain Meadows Massacre. But it is not clear that, on a purely secular and naturalistic basis, either form of critique can be coherent. In order for one or both types of criticism to be coherent, it may be that theism is a necessary precondition.

Permit me to explain, very briefly. I will take them in reverse order.

First, the critics' basis for criticizing Mormonism on moral grounds is unclear, and its coherence needs to be demonstrated. "Rebellion cannot exist," observes Camus, "without the feeling that, somewhere and somehow, one is right."<sup>48</sup> But on what basis can a materialist, whose universe is exhausted by material particles and the void, claim that something is objectively wrong? Do right and wrong not become matters merely of personal preference and, perhaps, of power? Not only existentialists but many superficial "life counselors" suggest that we should construct our own "meaning" for life. But is such a self-constructed meaning really meaning at all? Or is meaning not, rather, something that can only be *received* from another intelligence? And why should anybody else pay even the slightest attention to somebody's self-constructed "meaning"?

Camus observes of the atheistic French revolutionaries of 1793 that, when they effectively guillotined God, "they deprived themselves forever of the right to outlaw crime or to censure malevolent instincts."<sup>49</sup> "From

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48. Camus, *Rebel*, 13.

49. Camus, *Rebel*, 39.

the moment that man submits God to moral judgment, he kills Him in his own heart. And then what is the basis of morality? God is denied in the name of justice, but can the idea of justice be understood without the idea of God?"<sup>50</sup> If those who deny any objective basis for morality nonetheless go on behaving morally and invoking morality, we can only be grateful that they have not pursued the implications of their position to their logical end and that they continue to live on borrowed moral capital. Of the nihilistic revolutionaries who are the subject of his brilliant meditation in *The Rebel*, Camus remarks that

All of them, decrying the human condition and its creator, have affirmed the solitude of man and the nonexistence of any kind of morality. But at the same time they have all tried to construct a purely terrestrial kingdom where their chosen principles will hold sway.<sup>51</sup>

It is not surprising that, just prior to his tragic and early death in a 1960 automobile accident, Albert Camus was evidently giving serious consideration to being received into the Roman Catholic Church. He was, I am guessing, horrified by the revolutionary excesses of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and had come to suspect that only theism could provide an objective basis for moral judgments. It is precisely the same kind of reasoning that led the Anglo-American poet W. H. Auden to embrace Christianity: He found himself sitting in a movie hall in the late 1930s, in an area of New York City then heavily populated with German immigrants. As a newsreel played, depicting acts of Nazi barbarism toward European Jews, the audience around him erupted with cheers and surges of pleased laughter. Shaken by what he had witnessed, Auden realized that his secular worldview could not provide him with a firm moral ground from which to protest that Nazi brutality was objectively evil.

Camus and Auden may have been right. On the basis of what moral principles do secularizing critics pronounce the church wanting? How were those principles chosen, and why should anybody else

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50. Camus, *Rebel*, 62.

51. Camus, *Rebel*, 100.

defer to them? Even if one were to grant the factual claims on which they stake their moral judgments, it is not at all clear that those moral judgments are capable of bearing any objectively real weight.

But then, neither is it clear, given secularizing principles, that concepts like “factual claims” and “personal preference” are even coherent—which brings us to the second type of secular objection to Mormonism: The critics’ basis for criticizing Mormonism on intellectual grounds, saying that it is untrue, is unsure, and its coherence needs to be demonstrated.

Why? We all know essentially what it would mean to say that an astronomer’s thinking about the atmosphere of Jupiter was correct, and what it means to say that the conclusion of a syllogism follows from, or is entailed by, the *premises* of the syllogism.

However, on a completely secularist, naturalistic view, it seems that “thoughts” are really merely neurochemical events in the brain, able (in principle, at least) to be described by the laws of physics. But the laws of physics are deterministic—I will leave quantum indeterminacy out of consideration here because I do not think it helps either side much—such that, if “thoughts” are merely physical, it is unclear how we can really say that a conclusion follows from premises. Why? Because any given brain state seems to be causally determined by the preceding brain state. And it is hard, moreover, to see how the neurochemical condition of the brain can have a relationship of either truth or falsity with the atmosphere of a distant planet—or, for that matter, with anything else. A lump of cells is neither true nor false. It is not “about” anything else. It just is.

Thus, truly consistent secularist critics of Mormonism may have sawed off the limb on which they were sitting. They may have deprived themselves not only of a standard of moral judgment that cannot be dismissed as merely subjective, but of a coherent claim to be able to address questions of truth and falsity (with respect to Mormonism and every other topic). Some form of theism, or, at least, of nonnaturalism, may be required to save their position from being merely self-refuting. (If it is not, this will have to be demonstrated.) But if they

adopt theism, or even mere nonnaturalism, they will no longer be *secularist* critics, but will have become something else.

Many years ago, as missionaries in Switzerland, another elder and I met a woman at the door while we were tracting. When we told her that we represented the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, she smiled quite oddly and, even more oddly by Swiss standards, invited us in. She immediately fetched her husband, and asked us to tell *him* the name of the church that we represented. He too smiled oddly when he heard it, and I began to wonder what sort of people we had found. But then he explained that he was a Yugoslavian-born physician who had once been a Melchizedek priesthood holder in our church. And he told us a story that, I confess, I have never checked since; I may have some of the details wrong, but the gist of it is as follows: Decades before, he had served as a counselor to a priesthood leader in his native country as the communists were consolidating their power there. Several times, he said, this priesthood leader had dreams warning him that members of his congregation needed to flee because the secret police would soon be coming for them. And the man was right every time. However, the former counselor, with whom I was speaking, had eventually made his way to medical school in Switzerland, where his studies had taught him that revelation was an illusion. But how, I asked, did he account for his former priesthood leader's remarkably accurate record of forecasting visits from the secret police, a record of which I knew (and know) nothing but what he had told me? "Brain chemistry and chance," he replied. There was, in other words, no substantial or necessary link between the various brain states of the priesthood leader and external events. That they coincided was just sheer good luck for those who thereby escaped the clutches of the commissars. (I might add that the German missionary with whom I was working that particular day, a converted German merchant sailor who was, to put it mildly, plainspoken, thereupon asked if he could visit the home again with his tape recorder because, he said, this man furnished an unforgettable specimen of how Satan deceives people. Visibly surprised by such bluntness, the man agreed that he could return.)

If there were powerful arguments compelling us to forsake religious belief, and if there were no persuasive arguments for such belief, we might feel ourselves obliged to accept what I, at least, regard as the bleakness of the secular, naturalistic worldview. But we are not so compelled, and there are persuasive arguments for belief. The question is *at the very least* equally balanced. And in such a situation, as William James brilliantly argued against W. K. Clifford, religious belief represents a rational choice.<sup>52</sup> Even if one thinks the matter only fifty-fifty—which I emphatically do not—the advice that is sometimes attributed to James, to “choose the sunny side of doubt,” strikes me as eminently reasonable. Besides, as we now know, it is healthier.

I am grateful to Louis Midgley for drawing my attention to an anecdote related by the eminent Protestant church historian Martin Marty with reference to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It involves the famous eighteenth-century French hostess Marie de Vichy-Chamrond, the Marquise du Deffand, a friend of Voltaire and other leading intellectuals of the day. When Cardinal de Polignac informed her that the martyr St. Denis, the first bishop of Paris, had walked a hundred miles after his execution, carrying his head in his hand, Madame du Deffand replied that, “In such a promenade, it is the first step that is difficult.” She meant, of course, that it is not the claim that St. Denis walked a hundred miles that poses a difficulty. Perhaps he actually walked only ninety-nine miles. Or perhaps he walked a hundred and two. Such differences are immaterial. The fundamental question is whether, after his beheading, he walked at all. As soon as that essential point has once been granted, the rest is mere detail.<sup>53</sup>

Marty uses the story to identify what is fundamental in Latter-day Saint claims, particularly as they have come under the lens of what he terms “the crisis of historical consciousness”—by which he intends the skepticism and intense scrutiny of modern historical scholarship, which has been directed against virtually all traditional claims, religious and otherwise, around the world. “By analogy,” he writes,

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52. See William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956).

53. See Louis Midgley, “The First Steps,” *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xi–xiv.

if the beginning of the promenade of Mormon history, the First Vision and the Book of Mormon, can survive the crisis, then the rest of the promenade follows and nothing that happens in it can really detract from the miracle of the whole. If the first steps do not survive, there can be only antiquarian, not fateful or faith-full interest in the rest of the story.<sup>54</sup>

Whatever may be said about church involvement with the Equal Rights Amendment and California Proposition 29, or about Brigham Young's personality, or about the church's history with racial issues, or about church finances or the Indian placement program, or about possibly imperfect local leaders, or about any number of other matters in which we sometimes become lost, the fundamental issues are really quite few.<sup>55</sup> But they *are fundamental*. And, on them, I believe we fare quite well. We simply need to keep our eyes, and so far as possible, our critics' eyes, on the ball.

Just the other night, I was rereading the classic tale from the *Thousand and One Nights* of "Aladdin and the Magic Lamp." (I had to work the Arabs in here, somehow.) You probably remember the story: By means of the genie in his magic lamp, the impoverished young Aladdin has achieved unparalleled wealth and married the beautiful princess Badr al-Budur. But an evil magician from north Africa covets the lamp and, one day while Aladdin is out hunting, comes to his palace disguised as a merchant who wishes to trade "new lamps for old." The princess, knowing nothing of the power of the lamp and regarding such a trade as a ridiculous no-brainer, surrenders her husband's nicked old lamp for a bright and shiny new one. We would, I firmly believe, be just as mistaken as she was to trade the lamp of the gospel for a new lamp that lacks its miraculous power.

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54. Martin E. Marty, "History: The Case of the Mormons, a Special People," in Martin E. Marty, *Religion and Republic: The American Circumstance* (Boston: Beacon, 1987), 311.

55. Davis Bitton, "I Don't Have a Testimony of the History of the Church," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 337-54.

# THE EARLIEST TEXTUAL SOURCES FOR JOSEPH SMITH'S "NEW TRANSLATION" OF THE KING JAMES BIBLE

Royal Skousen

## Introduction

In 1975, Brigham Young University published a significant first in Latter-day Saint research on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible (hereafter referred to as the JST)—namely, Robert J. Matthews' *"A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible—A History and Commentary* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975). Matthews' work provided a careful examination of the manuscripts and other textual sources that had provided the basis for the publication of the JST (the Inspired Version of the Bible) by the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (now renamed the Community of Christ) and stimulated an increased appreciation for the work that Joseph Smith had done in preparing his "New Translation" of the Bible. Matthews' efforts saw fruition in the

Review of Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds. *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004. x + 851 pp. \$99.95.

With some commentary on Kent P. Jackson. *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005. x + 180 pp., with index. \$19.95.

1979 publication of the King James Bible by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when it included citations from the JST in footnotes and in a specially prepared appendix (for longer citations). Now, within the last couple years, we have seen the publication of source materials for the JST, namely the joint work of Scott Faulring, Kent Jackson, and Robert Matthews in producing a careful transcript of the manuscripts for the JST. In addition, Jackson has used these materials to construct a text for the Book of Moses (the vision of Moses plus the initial part of the JST version of Genesis that has been canonized in the Church's scripture, the Pearl of Great Price). We can be especially thankful to the Community of Christ, as owners of the manuscript materials, for their continuing and crucial support for this project.

### Accessing the Sources

In an important sense, this work on the JST is part of a much larger movement within the last thirty years in Latter-day Saint scholarship—namely, the desire to produce in transcript all the foundational scriptural and historical documents of Mormonism. Although not coordinated, what we have been getting is access to all the original sources for the LDS scriptures as well as the documents dealing with Joseph Smith, the Mormon prophet and revelator for nearly all of those scriptures. These transcripts provide an accurate record of how the sources actually read. They are not cleaned up grammatically, nor are they doctrinally massaged, unlike some of the previous publications of these original sources.

Besides the work on the JST, we can identify other key Latter-day Saint publications in the following areas:

#### 1. The Speeches and Papers of Joseph Smith

Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook. *The Words of Joseph Smith*. Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980.

This volume presents the documentary sources for most of Joseph Smith's discourses during the Nauvoo period. Of particular value is the editors' presentation of the separate docu-



ments that serve as the textual sources for the highly significant King Follett Discourse that Joseph Smith gave near the end of his life. In Ehat and Cook there is no amalgamated text for this discourse; instead, the reader is allowed to analyze each of the separate accounts and evaluate how they differ in their representation of what Joseph said.

Dean C. Jessee. *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984; revised edition, 2002.

Dean C. Jessee. *The Papers of Joseph Smith*, 2 vols. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989, 1992.

Dean Jessee's extremely valuable work has provided transcripts of Joseph Smith's own histories, diaries, and letters, thus allowing the reader to see what Joseph actually wrote or dictated to his scribes. Such information has been particularly valuable in reconstructing Joseph Smith's history.

## 2. The Book of Mormon

Royal Skousen. *The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Extant Text*. Provo, UT: FARMS and Brigham Young University, 2001.

Royal Skousen. *The Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon: Typographical Facsimile of the Entire Text in Two Parts*. Provo, UT: FARMS and Brigham Young University, 2001.

These two volumes, prepared by this reviewer, provide precise transcripts of the extant portions of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon (about 28 percent of the current text) and the entire printer's manuscript, owned by the Community of Christ.

## 3. The Doctrine and Covenants

Prompted by the 200th anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth, the Church will be publishing the most extensive work done

thus far to assist scholars in examining Joseph Smith's papers,<sup>1</sup> including the earliest form of sections from the Doctrine and Covenants (which had to be omitted in Dean Jessee's earlier publications). In this regard, I should mention the groundbreaking work done by Robert Woodford in his PhD dissertation, "The Historical Development of the Doctrine and Covenants" (Brigham Young University, 1974). His important findings will now reach a larger audience through the publication of transcripts of the sections of the Doctrine and Covenants.

#### 4. The Book of Abraham

There is ongoing work being done on the Book of Abraham, with transcripts and analysis by John Gee, Brian Hauglid, Michael Rhodes, and John Tvedtnes, in conjunction with FARMS.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, the primary sources for all the scriptures of the Church will, it appears, be made available to scholars. This is a wonderful development in scriptural research.

### Comments on the JST Transcription

The volume under review is a first-rate, accurate, and carefully constructed transcription of the JST that has involved years of work. For this review, I made an independent transcript of the first page of Moses 1 from the photographic reproduction of the first page of Moses 1 (on plate 2 following page 406). Then I compared my transcript against the editors' and found no substantive disagreements (only minor differences involving overwriting and partially missing letters or hyphens at the page margins). Although all transcriptions

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1. The Family and Church History Department in Salt Lake City is supervising this project, which should begin coming out in 2007. Over two dozen volumes are planned for the series.

2. Brian Hauglid, ed., *A Textual Study of the Book of Abraham: Manuscripts and Editions* (Provo, UT: FARMS, forthcoming).

probably have some as-yet-undiscovered errors, this transcription of the JST appears to be very reliable, and I therefore highly recommend it. Ultimately, a CD of the images and other related material will be made available from FARMS and the Religious Studies Center, which will also help in checking any unclear or especially interesting cases.<sup>3</sup>

I would like to mention two specific recommendations that might be implemented in a second edition of these JST transcripts:

1. *Provide a full typographical facsimile rather than the linear (diplomatic) transcript chosen by the editors.*

The editors state that “Our transcription is a facsimile of the manuscripts” (p. 51), which is essentially true except in one important respect: namely, supralinear insertions are not placed interlinearly in the transcript (as they are found in the actual manuscripts) but instead are inserted inline, with the use of angled brackets to show the inserted material and where it was inserted. Outside of this exception, everything else follows what one might expect for a typographical facsimile: initial and corrected readings, original spellings, and other accidentals such as punctuation and capitalization, with line breaks maintained. By making the transcript linear, the editors actually created more of a diplomatic transcript than a facsimile transcript.<sup>4</sup>

The basic motivation, it would seem, for making the entire transcript linear is to save space. Yet by choosing a better paper and with only a minor increase in the leading (but only where necessary), the supralinear insertions could be directly shown in the transcript. This would greatly facilitate the ability of the reader to immediately identify where insertions and similar corrections occur in the manuscripts, including places where the insertion was perhaps in the wrong place! Such a decision, of course, would have increased the thickness of the book but only slightly. It would appear that the editors went to some trouble to save page space, but then the publisher selected a thick, rough paper that ends up making the book enormously thick

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3. Cosponsored by FARMS and the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University, a CD with JST images and text will be forthcoming in 2006.

4. For the difference between the two, see chapter 6 of Mary-Jo Kline, *A Guide to Documentary Editing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 132–51.

(2.3 inches thick for 864 pages). The selection of a more standard paper (and with an improved opacity) would lead to a volume that would be 1.6 inches thick, a saving of almost one-third in the thickness of the book. In other words, a more judicious control over the physical aspects of manufacturing the book would allow the editors to create an actual typographical facsimile rather than a diplomatic one.

*2. Provide in the headers for each transcription page an indication of the corresponding passage from the King James Bible.*

The verso and recto headers for any given spread in the printed transcript are always identical—namely, the headers give the name of the manuscript in all caps and on both pages but without any scriptural location. As a result, one has to look down the page (and sometimes to previous pages) to find what King James chapter is actually being covered on a specific page of the transcription. This problem is especially noticeable for those portions of the JST where photographs of the marked Bible are given on the verso of the page spread, with the corresponding recto giving the actual transcript. Sometimes for a given page spread, there is no clear indication of where the transcript is from. For instance, in looking at the page spread on pages 540 and 541 (with its heading “NEW TESTAMENT MANUSCRIPT 2, FOLIO 4”), we have no idea from this spread where we are in the New Testament. We are forced to turn to the previous page to discover that this part of the transcript is from page 140 of manuscript 2 and that that page corresponds to Hebrews 7:18–9:26. Maybe including something like “Hebrews 7–9” in the header on pages 540 and 541 of the transcript would help the reader more easily find a specific reference in the transcription.

### **On the Revelatory Nature of the JST and the Question of Its Canonization**

As described in this book under review, there has been some ambivalence among Latter-day Saints regarding the JST (even though the JST has frequently been referred to as the Inspired Version, following the RLDS terminology). Nonetheless, the Book of Moses and

the JST version of Matthew 24 are canonized in the Latter-day Saint scriptures. A further step towards acknowledging the value of the JST was the inclusion in the 1979 LDS Bible of some references to where the JST differs from the King James Bible. Over the years, some LDS researchers have advocated a full-scale acceptance of the JST, including some who have felt that the LDS Bible itself should incorporate the changes directly within the biblical text, thus replacing the King James text with the JST. One significant problem with this latter solution is that it could provide opponents of the Church with one more argument that Mormons are not Christians. From a practical point of view, it would be much better to consider the JST as representative of some of Joseph Smith's insights into the biblical text, but not to allow the JST to replace the traditional biblical text.

A related question is whether the JST should be accepted *in its entirety* as a revealed text from the Lord. The editors of the volume under review continually make statements to this effect, although never with any explicit argument. The assumption seems to be that since Joseph Smith was in charge, every change was under his direction and also inspired. Consider the following statements in the volume under review:

We have attempted to present the transcription with the dignity that the manuscripts deserve as revealed texts. (p. vii)

The Prophet Joseph Smith was instructed by the Lord to undertake a careful reading of the Bible to revise and make corrections in accordance with the inspiration that he would receive. (p. 3)

Some remarkable passages in the New Translation were revealed in doctrinal and grammatical clarity the first time and had little need for later refining. But other passages show that the Prophet struggled with the wording until he was satisfied that it was acceptable to the Lord. (p. 6)

It appears that the Prophet dictated most of the revisions to his scribes not long after the original dictation, when he

reviewed his work, corrected errors, added clarifications, and was inspired with additional insights. (p. 6)

Joseph Smith was called to provide a more accurate translation, and responding to divine inspiration, he made the necessary changes even if they corrected the words of ancient writers. (p. 10)

Because the Lord revealed the Joseph Smith Translation for the salvation of His elect, Latter-day Saints can embrace it as they do the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. (p. 11)

Additional statements can be found in Kent Jackson's *The Book of Moses and the Joseph Smith Translation Manuscripts* (here OT1 and OT2 refer to Old Testament manuscripts 1 and 2):

But OT1 is not the complete and final text of the Book of Moses, because that is found on OT2, on which Joseph Smith made further inspired corrections and additions. (p. 6)

Sometime after Genesis of OT2 was written, the Prophet revisited the manuscript to make further revisions. Some of those are editorial in nature and clarify and smooth out the words of the dictated text. But others are inspired additions and corrections that provide new insights or even change the meaning of what had been written before. Sidney Rigdon was the scribe for all but a very few of the corrections, recording the words dictated by the Prophet. (p. 9)

Behind these statements is the assumption that all the changes can be accepted as coming under the inspired direction of Joseph Smith. Yet when we turn from the JST to consider the two Book of Mormon manuscripts, we find that for some of the corrections made in the Book of Mormon text, the assumption that all Book of Mormon manuscript alterations are inspired must be firmly rejected. For instance, Oliver Cowdery emended the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon, especially when the original scribe was someone other than himself.

Yet in virtually all of these corrections in the Book of Mormon text, we can determine that the original reading was perfectly fine and in some instances even better than the correction made by Oliver.<sup>5</sup> Further, Joseph Smith himself made thousands of changes to the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon in preparing for the publication of the second edition of the Book of Mormon (1837, Kirtland, Ohio), yet virtually none of these changes restore the original text and otherwise show no sign of being anything more than human editing of the Book of Mormon text. In other words, it is going to take much more work than simply declaring that later editing of the JST is inspired by the Lord. A case-by-case analysis will be necessary, much like what is being done currently in volume 4 of the Critical Text of the Book of Mormon. Kent Jackson (personal communication) has expressed his intent to do such an analysis, which I believe is absolutely crucial to a full understanding of the JST.

### Specific Problems with the JST Manuscripts

A critical text analysis of the JST should deal with the following examples of specific issues regarding changes within the JST manuscripts themselves:

1. There are late changes in the number of years that the patriarchs lived. In OT1, we have some later corrections in Oliver Cowdery's hand that appear to be quite secondary, such as Adam living a full one thousand years instead of the original "nine hundred and thirty years" (p. 97). For some of the other patriarchs we get other additions: 69 years more for Seth, 35 years more for Enos, 47 more years for Cainan, 50 years for Mahalaleel, 31 years for Methuselah (so he too reaches 1000 years, like Adam; see pp. 97–98, 110). The immediate question that arises here is: What is behind these changes and how consistently do they hold up throughout the genealogies? Jackson accepts them as part of the final text (in his text for the Book of Moses), but surely one must do more than just accept such changes. One must argue for them.

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5. For an example, see the discussion regarding the phrase "and it fell" under 1 Nephi 11:36 in *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon*, part 1 of volume 4 of the Critical Text of the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 239–40.

2. One must be particularly suspicious of so many changes made in Sidney Ridgon's hand. Only after a careful analysis would it be possible to make some kind of evaluation regarding how significant these changes are and whether they should be accepted. Joseph Smith frequently allowed others a rather free hand in producing religious documents for the Church, as in the example of the Lectures on Faith that were included in the first edition of the Doctrine and Covenants (in 1835). Recent research has been quite clear in demonstrating that the Lectures on Faith derive from Sidney Ridgon rather than Joseph Smith.<sup>6</sup>

3. There is also the question whether OT1 actually represents the text written down by scribes as Joseph Smith dictated the text (presuming that he did dictate it). It is also possible that OT1 is actually a copy of an earlier form of the text (much like the printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon is a copy of the original manuscript). It would be valuable to analyze the text of OT1 from the perspective of whether any errors in OT1 might be due to mishearings (auditory errors) or misreadings (visual errors).

4. There is also a need for a systematic study of changes that might have been introduced by John Whitmer in copying OT1 to OT2—in other words, are these changes accidental or intentional? Some of these changes, possibly errors, were accepted, it would appear, by Joseph Smith in his later work on OT2.

5. Finally, there is a need for a computerized collation, with categorization of all the variants and who made them. Only with such a collation will one be able to systematically analyze and evaluate the multitude of changes in the JST manuscripts.

## Problems with the JST

In my mind, there are some serious difficulties in accepting the totality of the JST as a revealed text from the Lord. In many instances, the JST appears to represent Joseph Smith's commentary and explication of difficult readings in the Bible. Instead of simply declaring that

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6. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Case for Sidney Rigdon as Author of the *Lectures on Faith*," *Journal of Mormon History* 32/3 (2005): 1–41.



the entire JST is inspired, it would be better, I believe, to have a more open discussion of some of the difficulties that the JST presents to the researcher, especially when comparing the JST with other LDS canonized works.

Besides the difficulties in determining the actual text of the JST, there are more substantial problems that must be resolved before fully accepting the JST in its entirety as a revealed text from the Lord. Here I list some of these problems:

1. The first part of the JST looks like a word-for-word revealed text, in particular the vision of Moses and that first part of Genesis that has been canonized as the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price. The manuscript OT1, in many respects, looks much like the manuscripts for the Book of Mormon. But in switching to the New Testament and then in returning eventually to the Old Testament, Joseph Smith seems to have switched from providing a word-for-word revelation (much like the Book of Mormon) to making minor changes and relatively small additions to difficult readings in the Bible. It is not surprising that the more significant doctrinal items in the JST have, for the most part, already been canonized in the Pearl of Great Price (or indirectly accepted through various revelations found in the Doctrine and Covenants). Near the end of his work on the JST, Joseph resorted to marking up his Bible and having the scribes write only the changes in the associated manuscript. Even more secondary was his decision for the JST version of Isaiah 50 to have the text directly copied from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, thus leaving the corresponding page of his Bible totally unmarked for this chapter of Isaiah (pp. 820–23). And for that part of the JST, the text from the 1830 edition is slavishly copied, including all of the errors that had entered the Book of Mormon text during its earlier transmission:

**when I come** instead of **when I came**  
**their river** instead of **the river**  
**they die** instead of **they dieth**  
**waketh** instead of **wakeneth** (two times)  
**appointed mine ear** instead of **opened mine ear**

The original manuscript of the Book of Mormon is extant for each of these cases and reads according to the King James Bible. It is obvious that, as the work on the JST progressed, the revealed nature of the text was not sustained at the same level.

2. Two sections in the New Testament were translated twice, and they differ considerably in their specific language, although many of the changes are responses to the same perceived difficulties in the biblical text. Kent Jackson and Peter Jasinski have discussed this problem in a recent *BYU Studies* article.<sup>7</sup> The evidence clearly shows that the New Testament JST is not being revealed word-for-word, but largely depends upon Joseph Smith's varying responses to the same difficulties in the text.

3. After the work on what is now the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price, many of Joseph Smith's changes seem to be attempts at minimally changing the text to remove what are perceived as difficult or inappropriate readings:

- a. Pharaoh's heart is **not** hardened by the Lord (Exodus 4:21):

KJV

but **I** will harden his heart  
that he shall not let the people go

JST (OT2, p. 66)

and I will prosper thee  
but **Pharaoh** will harden his heart  
and he will not let the people go

The presumption here is that God himself would never influence Pharaoh to resist God's own command.

- b. Lot does **not** offer to turn his daughters over to the men of Sodom (Genesis 19:8):

KJV

behold now I have two daughters

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7. Kent P. Jackson and Peter M. Jasinski, "The Process of Inspired Translation: Two Passages Translated Twice in the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible," *BYU Studies* 42/2 (2003): 35-64.

which have not known man  
let me I pray you bring them out unto you  
and do ye to them as is good in your eyes

JST (OT2, pp. 47–48)

behold now I have two daughters  
which have not known man  
let me I pray you plead with my brethren  
that I may **not** bring them out unto you  
and ye shall **not** do unto them  
as seemeth good in your eyes

Here the text is minimally adjusted by inserting *not* twice, in an awkward attempt to salvage the reputation of Lot. Yet Lot serves as a contrastive foil to Abraham; earlier, for instance, Lot “pitched his tent toward Sodom” (Genesis 13:12) and eventually ends up living within the city. There is nothing particularly exemplifying about Lot and his family, including at least two married daughters who, with their families, perish in the destruction of the city (Genesis 19:14). And the events after Lot’s escape from the city suggest that Lot and his family are not worth emulating.

c. A holy kiss is a holy salutation (Romans 16:16):

KJV

salute one another with an holy **kiss**

JST (NT, p. 126)

salute one another with a holy **salutation**

A holy kiss seemed salacious, so the word *kiss* was euphemistically replaced by the nondescript word *salutation*. Interestingly, the holy kiss as a salutation was practiced early on in the British Mission by some of the members, with considerable enthusiasm by some of the young women towards George A. Smith, a member of the Twelve not yet married. Elder Smith was not pleased.<sup>8</sup>

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8. See James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin, and David J. Whittaker, *Men with a Mission: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles, 1837–1841* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 159.

d. We should **not** be like serpents (Matthew 10:16):

KJV

be ye therefore wise as **serpents** and harmless as doves

JST (NT, p. 19)

be ye therefore wise **servants** and as harmless as doves

For Joseph Smith's time, snakes are considered evil rather than wise. One particular problem with the JST reading is that the change to *servants* seems to be motivated simply on the basis of the visual and auditory similarity between the two English words *serpents* and *servants*, as if the JST corrects an error that would have occurred in the transmission of the English text rather than the original Greek (or perhaps the Aramaic).

4. Sometimes a change appears to be based on a misunderstanding of the English, as in Hebrews 6:1:

KJV

therefore leaving the principles

of the doctrine of Christ

let us go on unto perfection

not laying again the foundation of repentance

from dead works

and of faith toward God

JST (NT, p. 139)

therefore **not** leaving the principles

of the doctrine of Christ

let us go on unto perfection

not laying again the foundation of repentance

from dead works

and of faith toward God

Here the author of Hebrews is referring to moving on from the first principles of the gospel (namely, faith and repentance, the milk of the gospel, as discussed at the end of the previous chapter, in Hebrews 5:12–14). The author is definitely not suggesting that we reject these fundamental principles of the gospel, but he is talking

about moving on to discuss the meat (“solid food”) of the gospel, as listed in the following verse (Hebrews 6:2): “of the doctrine of baptisms and of laying on of hands and of resurrection of the dead and of eternal judgment” (all necessary parts of the gospel plan). Hebrews 6:1 is made considerably clearer in a modern translation that faithfully follows the Greek, such as (in this case) the New International Version:

therefore let us leave the elementary teachings about Christ  
and go on to maturity  
not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts  
that lead to death  
and of faith in God

Part of the confusion that led to the JST change for Hebrews 6:1 is the word *principles*, which seems to have been misinterpreted as meaning principles in general, but the Greek implies the *beginning* principles. Interestingly, the 1979 LDS Bible has a footnote here saying that the Greek means “having left behind the beginning of the doctrine.” Even though the JST reading with the *not* is also given in this footnote, the translation from the Greek shows that there was no need to insert the *not*.

5. Entire books are declared to be correct, but only in OT2 (near the end of the work on the JST): Ruth, Ezra, Esther, Lamentations, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi. Other books are declared virtually correct (with only a handful of changes):

Leviticus (all but chapters 12 and 21)  
Joshua (all but chapter 11)  
Judges (all but chapter 2)  
2 Samuel (all but chapters 12 and 14)  
1 Chronicles (all but chapters 10 and 21)  
Job (from chapter 3 to the end)

Joseph Smith definitely appears to be in a hurry to get this work done.

6. Secondary additions to the biblical text are left unchanged:

a. 1 John 5:7–8

for there are three that bear record **in heaven**  
**the Father the Word and the Holy Ghost**  
**and these three are one**  
**and there are three that bear witness in earth**  
the spirit and the water and the blood  
and these three agree in one

The text in bold derives from the Vulgate (the Latin translation made chiefly by Jerome) and is found nowhere else in the ancient textual sources for 1 John. The inserted text introduces a strong statement in favor of the doctrine of the Trinity and is clearly secondary. Erasmus later added this passage to his published Greek text of the New Testament, but only after some individuals had produced a New Testament Greek manuscript with this reading. This intrusive text ended up in the King James Bible.<sup>9</sup>

This passage has particular significance for evaluating the early part of the JST, namely that portion that is found in Moses 6:59–60. Here the JST has three occurrences of the triplet “water / spirit / blood,” the same language in the original text for 1 John 5:7–8, but there are no examples of the triplet “Father / Word (or Son) / Holy Ghost,” the secondary language that was not original to 1 John 5:7–8:

Moses 6:59–60

that by reason of transgression cometh the fall  
which fall bringeth death  
and inasmuch as ye were born into the world  
by **water** and **blood** and the **spirit** which I have made  
and so became of dust a living soul  
even so ye must be born again into the kingdom  
of heaven  
of **water** and of the **spirit** and be cleansed by **blood**

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9. For a thorough discussion, see Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: German Bible Society, 1994), 647–49.

even the blood of mine Only Begotten  
 that ye might be sanctified from all sin  
 and enjoy the words of eternal life in this world  
 and eternal life in the world to come  
 even immortal glory  
 for by the **water** ye keep the commandment  
 by the **spirit** ye are justified  
 and by the **blood** ye are sanctified

In other words, Enoch's record of Adam's baptism seems to be related to the original language in 1 John 5:7–8, but not to the secondary text that was later added in the Latin.

b. John 5:2–4

now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool  
 which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda  
 having five porches  
 in these lay a great multitude of impotent folk  
 of blind halt withered  
**waiting for the moving of the water**  
**for an angel went down at a certain season**  
**into the pool**  
**and troubled the water**  
**whosoever then first after the troubling of the water**  
**stepped in**  
**was made whole of whatsoever disease he had**

The portion in bold is not in the oldest Greek manuscripts.<sup>10</sup> One should wonder why the Lord would send an angel to heal people in such a cavalier fashion. It seems extremely unfair, although the man that Jesus healed may have believed in such, given the following text which is found in all the textual sources:

John 5:5–7

and a certain man was there  
 which had an infirmity thirty and eight years

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10. For discussion, see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 179.

when Jesus saw him lie and knew that  
 he had been now a long time in that case  
 he saith unto him  
 wilt thou be made whole  
 the impotent man answered him  
 sir I have no man when the water is troubled  
 to put me into the pool  
 but while I am coming another steppeth down before me

Jesus does not respond to this man's complaint about not being able to move fast enough, but instead Jesus directly heals him. (It should be worth pointing out that there is no reference in the man's explanation about heavenly intervention. Perhaps the people waiting there simply believed that a sudden bubbling of the spring had special healing powers, especially for the first one who could take advantage of the bubbles.) The King James reading in verses 3–4 sounds like magic, not how the Lord actually works. Yet this passage was not altered in any way by Joseph Smith in the JST.

### Using the JST

Perhaps the best way to view the JST (providing we can figure out what was Joseph Smith's finally intended text for the JST) is to consider the current position of the JST in the Church. First, the most significant part has already been canonized (namely, as the Book of Moses in the Pearl of Great Price). Second, Joseph Smith's reordering of the events of the last days (the JST for Matthew 24) is also found in the Pearl of Great Price. Third, the 1979 LDS Bible provided footnotes for shorter changes in the JST and longer passages in an appendix. In other words, the 1979 LDS Bible is a compromise as far as the JST is concerned, and one that I would agree with for the most part. My suggestion would be to put all the approved JST readings in the biblical appendix and typeset them alongside the King James text in parallel columns; thus the reader could readily compare the two texts. Of particular significance, I believe, was the Church's decision to place none of the JST readings in the actual biblical text for the 1979 Bible. In



other words, the 1979 LDS Bible avoided the kind of text that is found in the RLDS Inspired Version of the Bible.

Another point to note is that not every JST change is referred to in the 1979 LDS Bible. For instance, the change of *serpents* to *servants* in Matthew 10:16 was ignored. Undoubtedly, the scriptures committee and Church leadership weighed the various readings and made a selection of what they considered the more valuable or helpful readings. This selectivity is not surprising. For instance, we have a whole book of Joseph Smith's discourses and statements during the Nauvoo period,<sup>11</sup> but only a few of those statements have been canonized. Yet virtually all of Joseph Smith's works are available for our study. Canonization is not a *sine qua non* for gospel study. I might mention here Joseph Smith's very provocative King Follett Discourse, which is available in various forms to Church members, but canonizing that discourse would be problematic for at least two reasons. First, we do not have a definitive reading for his entire discourse, only notes that listeners took down. Second, some ideas that Joseph taught in that discourse have not been officially sanctioned by the Church (such as the idea that little children will be resurrected as children *and remain so for eternity*). There is no need to canonize everything that Joseph Smith ever said. He himself said that not everything he declared was doctrine. (Of course, neither should we assume from this statement that all his inspired teachings have already been canonized.) The evidence from the JST manuscripts themselves clearly suggests that not everything in the JST is of equal value. The beginning work appears to involve a word-for-word revelation; the later work often reflects very human methods that were applied to alter the text (such as copying into Isaiah a defective text from the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon).

One last consideration is my hope that there would be a more open forum for discussing the JST. It is important that textual critics feel free to analyze the various readings and to consider each of them from a scholarly point of view. It is a mistake, I believe, to automatically assume that every change in the JST is inspired or that the final

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11. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980).

version is in its entirety a revealed text. I myself believe that the long noncanonized additions to the biblical text are the most valuable and could well be revelatory, while the minor changes that involve altering simply a word or a phrase more often indicate a human reaction to perceived problems in the biblical text.

## THE BOOK OF BREATHINGS IN ITS PLACE

Kerry Muhlestein

Michael D. Rhodes's publication on the Hor Book of Breathings is an unusual book in many ways. It is a scholarly Egyptological work, dealing with an understudied type of text from an understudied era of Egyptian history, appearing in the midst of a series that has been dedicated to the exploration of a book considered to be scripture by the Latter-day Saints. Additionally, it deals with what many have incorrectly considered to be a text that can be used to test the revelatory ability of the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>1</sup> The nature of Rhodes's publication raises questions, only some of which can be entertained here: What does Rhodes's book claim to be? What is its value to the Egyptological community? What

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1. For examples of those who have asserted this, see Edward H. Ashment, "Reducing Dissonance: The Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 221–36; Grant S. Heward and Jerald Tanner, "The Source of the Book of Abraham Identified," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 92–97; and Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, "Solving the Mystery of the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Salt Lake City Messenger*, September 1992. For other points of view, see John Gee, *A Guide to the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000); and Hugh Nibley, "The Meaning of the Kirtland Egyptian Papers," *BYU Studies* 11/4 (1971): 350–99.

Review of Michael D. Rhodes. *The Hor Book of Breathings: A Translation and Commentary*. Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002. xv + 97 pp., with appendixes, bibliography, and index. \$39.95.

is its value to Latter-day Saint nonspecialist teachers of the scriptures, to the lay membership of the church, and to LDS Egyptologists?

### The Contents of the Book and Its Value to the Egyptological Community

The simplest, and yet most lengthy, answer is to the question about the nature of the publication. Closely associated with this question is its value to the Egyptological community since the nature of the book makes it apparent that this group of scholars is its most immediate audience. Rhodes wisely addresses only Egyptological issues, leaving discussions of the relationship between this text and the Book of Abraham, Joseph Smith's translation abilities, and other religious-centered topics for other more appropriate forums and venues. In this monograph Rhodes provides an admirable presentation of an ancient text. The Book of Breathings, also known as the *snsn* text, or a breathing permit, is an Egyptian text aimed at providing its owner with the knowledge, power, and transformation necessary to achieve a desired station in the afterlife. It is in the same tradition as the Book of the Dead, a more commonly used and usually larger collection of texts with essentially the same intent. The Book of Breathings increasingly replaced the Book of the Dead in the Theban area during the Ptolemaic and Roman eras of Egypt.<sup>2</sup> The particular text Rhodes translates has certainly been the most controversial of the twenty-three extant books of its type. The text under study was owned by one Hor—a priest from an influential Theban family—and is contained on three fragments of papyri designated as Joseph Smith Papyri I, X, and XI, as well as on several small fragments glued next to other portions of the Joseph Smith Papyri.

While Books of Breathings have received remarkably little academic attention, the Hor Book of Breathings has received an incongruent amount of scrutiny and translations because of its unique place

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2. Marc Coenen, "The Dating of the Papyri Joseph Smith I, X and XI and Min Who Massacres His Enemies," in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years, Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, ed. Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors and Harco Willems (Louvain: Peeters, 1998), 2:1103.

in a modern-day religion. Since the modern discovery of the Joseph Smith Papyri, the text has been translated by Richard A. Parker,<sup>3</sup> Klaus Baer,<sup>4</sup> Hugh W. Nibley,<sup>5</sup> Robert K. Ritner (twice),<sup>6</sup> and Michael D. Rhodes. As Ritner notes, Baer's translation has served as a basis for all subsequent translations.<sup>7</sup> Yet Baer himself affirmed that his translation was not a definitive edition but a preliminary study.<sup>8</sup> As recently as the year 2000, Ritner wrote that a full formal edition of the text had not been published.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, he declared this again in 2003,<sup>10</sup> after an announcement of Rhodes's publication had been made in a national meeting<sup>11</sup> and after the publication had actually appeared. *The Hor Book of Breathings* is incontestably a full formal publication of the text, executed with a precision and scope that rivals the formal edition of any ancient text. It is now the standard publication of these fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri.

In creating this edition of the text, Rhodes has maintained just enough mixing of older studies with recent scholarship to provide clarity without confusion. Unfortunately, as initial studies were made into Books of Breathings, there were misunderstandings about the Egyptian names

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3. Richard A. Parker, "The Joseph Smith Egyptian Papyri: Translations and Interpretations: The Book of Breathings (Fragment 1, the "Sensen" Text, with Restorations from Louvre Papyrus 3284)," *Dialogue* 3/2 (1968): 98–99.

4. Klaus Baer, "The Breathing Permit of Hôr: A Translation of the Apparent Source of the Book of Abraham," *Dialogue* 3/3 (1968): 109–34.

5. Hugh Nibley, *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2005). The first edition, published by Deseret Book, appeared in 1975.

6. Robert K. Ritner, "'The Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," *Dialogue* 33/4 (2000): 97–119; and Ritner, "The 'Breathing Permit of Hôr' among the Joseph Smith Papyri," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 62/3 (2003): 161–80; these are not really two translations but basically a reproduction of the same translation twice with slightly different commentary and prologue. For a review of these articles, see Larry E. Morris, "The Book of Abraham: Ask the Right Questions and Keep on Looking," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 355–80.

7. Ritner, "Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," 98.

8. Baer, "Breathing Permit of Hôr," 111.

9. Ritner, "Breathing Permit of Hôr' Thirty-four Years Later," 98.

10. Ritner, "Breathing Permit of Hôr' among the Joseph Smith Papyri," 163.

11. Rhodes presented his research and plans for publication in April 2002 at the annual American Research Center in Egypt conference held in Baltimore.

for the texts, and the resulting Egyptological terms for them became somewhat confusing misnomers.<sup>12</sup> Recently Marc Coenen has proposed a more precise terminology regarding Books of Breathing that is more reflective of the Egyptian names for the texts, a practice that is preferred when possible.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, Rhodes refers to Hor's Book of Breathing as a "Book of Breathing Made by Isis" (p. 13), the exact term used by the ancients, thereby conforming to Coenen's suggestions. Yet at the same time, Rhodes refers to the different fragments of the papyri by the numbers assigned to them in their initial publication in the *Improvement Era*,<sup>14</sup> a numbering system that clearly does not reflect the textual sequence of the fragments themselves. While there are minor drawbacks to using this system, they are fewer than the disadvantages that would follow a renumbering of the texts. When Baer first published his translation, he suggested the *Improvement Era*'s numbering system be followed until a definitive edition of the text was published.<sup>15</sup> However, in the nearly thirty-four years between his statement and the appearance of Rhodes's edition, the fragments have been referred to by the *Improvement Era* numbering system in so many publications that to change the designations now would result in far greater confusion than that which would result by numbering them in a manner reflective of their internal cohesion. Rhodes maintains the now standard system.

The book begins with a concise treatment of the necessary background information. Rhodes describes the discovery of the papyri, previous studies of the papyri, and their dating (pp. 1–3). While originally dated to the Roman period of Egypt, recent studies by Quaegebeur<sup>16</sup> and Coenen<sup>17</sup> point to the first half of the second cen-

12. See, for example, Jean-Claude Goyon, *Rituels funéraires de l'ancienne Égypte* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1972).

13. Marc Coenen, "Books of Breathing: More Than a Terminological Question?" *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica* 26 (1995): 29–38.

14. "New Light on Joseph Smith's Egyptian Papyri," *Improvement Era*, February 1968, 40.

15. Baer, "Breathing Permit of Hôr," 110.

16. Jan Quaegebeur, "Books of Thoth Belonging to Owners of Portraits? On Dating Later Hieratic Funerary Papyri," in *Portraits and Masks: Burial Customs in Roman Egypt*, ed. Morris L. Bierbrier (London: British Museum, 1997), 74.

17. Coenen, "Dating of the Papyri Joseph Smith I, X and XI," 2:1103–15.

tury BC, during the Ptolemaic period. Coenen has since refined this suggestion by gaining a greater degree of certainty on who the owners of the papyri were.<sup>18</sup> John Gee is currently in the process of clarifying and verifying the dating further. If Coenen's dating is correct, then the Hor Book of Breathings is the earliest known version of a datable Book of Breathings,<sup>19</sup> thereby increasing the importance of understanding this document.

Rhodes also includes a section on paleography, demonstrating that the style of signs used on the papyri matches most closely that of papyri from the Greco-Roman period (pp. 5–6). For the Egyptologist interested in paleographic transitions in the Late Period, this section is particularly useful—especially Rhodes's highlighting of signs that are unlike Möller's<sup>20</sup> and his discussion of the use of a Demotic sign instead of its hieratic equivalent. He also provides a very short section on Late Period orthography, which is helpful to the specialist but of little use to most readers. This section is followed by a discussion of grammatical forms. Such a discussion is helpful for scholars or students of the Egyptian language, especially for those seeking to refine their understanding of Late and Middle Egyptian. As the dating of the papyri becomes more precise, the grammatical forms section will help us to better identify and understand trends such as the use of *w* for *sn* as a third-person plural suffix pronoun (p. 7) or *n-ḥm=s* for the preposition *ḥm=s* (p. 8). More information would be helpful for novice students of Egyptian, so that they will know if the forms Rhodes describes are unusual in Middle Egyptian for this time period (for example, the *r* + infinitive uses described on p. 9, among others, are typical of Middle Egyptian). In some cases this information is provided, such as when Rhodes notes that the *r* is often omitted in the *r* + infinitive form (p. 9), or when he describes the use of the Late Egyptian/Demotic pattern of inserting *ḥw* before the circumstantial *sdm=f* (p. 10). Even with these notes, a further summary of how much

18. Marc Coenen, "Horus, Prophet of Min Who Massacres His Enemies," *Chronique d'Égypte* 74 (1999): 257–60.

19. Others are likely older but cannot be as securely dated.

20. See Georg Möller, *Hieratische Paläographie* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1936), vol. 3.

the grammatical forms differ from the norm for the time period would be a valuable contribution for the scholar. Rhodes supplies such a contribution for Greco-Roman vocabulary (p. 11) and, very informatively, in his list of scribal errors and additions (p. 11). This latter section carries with it the potential to make studies of scribal traditions possible. Future studies on textual criticism of Late Period afterlife books will be indebted to Rhodes for the work he has done.<sup>21</sup> For most readers, this section will be meaningless, yet its value for the specialist not only justifies its inclusion but is part of what makes this such a sterling example of the correct way to publish a text.

In order to fit the text under translation into its proper context, Rhodes discusses what Books of Breathings are, explores the terminological question raised by Coenen, and gives a brief outline of the contents of Books of Breathings, also comparing the Hor Book of Breathings with a more complete version in the Louvre (pp. 13–16). This contextual information allows the reader to make a better assessment of the meaning of the translation.

Next Rhodes discusses the vignettes, providing also a reproduction of their associated hieroglyphic texts, along with their transliteration and translation. A more in-depth investigation of the transliteration and translation is provided in appendix H. For the initial vignette known as Facsimile 1, Rhodes outlines both what it has in common with similar vignettes and what is unique about this particular version (pp. 18–20). For both Egyptologists and other scholars, as well as for the general Latter-day Saint audience, such a comparison allows for a better understanding of the place that the vignette and the Joseph Smith Papyri hold among Books of Breathings. That this is the only copy of any Book of Breathings with this vignette and that the position of the hands and legs is unique for this type of vignette, as well other singular elements, allows for the type of comparison that may help scholars piece together the reason for its inclusion with these papyri

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21. This is exactly the kind of information that would make possible an Egyptian equivalent to works like Emanuel Tov, *Textual Criticism of the Hebrew Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), or Frederick J. Mabie, "Ancient Near Eastern Scribes and the Mark(s) They Left" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2004).



and its relationship to similar scenes. Rhodes also refutes the proposition that the second hand of the deceased may instead be the remains of a wing tip (p. 19). While it may be true that Rhodes is able to make this assessment because he had access to the papyri and to better photos than those who have disagreed on this point, in the end that is part of the value of this publication: the descriptions are made by one who has had such access and are accompanied by photographs whose quality makes verification of his observations possible. Rhodes points out that the black skin of the standing figure in the vignette allows us to identify it with Anubis. Initial research shows that it is actually more common to picture Anubis with blue or flesh-colored skin than with black skin, but it is possible that black skin is most likely to appear on papyri dealing with funerary scenes. I am currently researching this matter and hope to provide even more comparative details regarding this aspect than those that Rhodes has already done.

In comparison with the discussion of Facsimile 1, the section on Facsimile 3 seems weak (p. 23), partially because the scene is less complicated. Moreover, the original has not survived, and less research has been done on this scene. Still, a clear need for conducting scholarly research into this type of vignette, along with its contexts, meanings, and uses, remains. The brevity of this section is reflective of the paucity of scholarly attention given to this type of scene in both Latter-day Saint and Egyptological studies overall. I expect Rhodes's work will engender further research.

The transliteration and translation of the text are well done. The diacritical apparatuses are clearly explained, the divisions in the text are easy to work with, and the notes not only explain translation choices but compare this Book of Breathings with others, making further comparisons and analyses easier to perform. This translation has been done with an eye toward further research along a number of avenues, making it exactly what a critical publication of a text should be. This is equally the case with appendix A, which includes high-quality color photographs of the papyri that are labeled according to columns and are accompanied by hieroglyphic transcriptions of the hieratic text pictured on the photographs of the papyri. This effort

is furthered by grayscale pictures of the papyri in appendix B. The grayscale photographs make some things more discernible than the color and vice versa—hence the importance of including both. The labeling of columns makes comparing the hieroglyphic transcription, the transliteration, and the translation much easier. Appendixes A and B must now be considered the standard reproductions of the papyri since they match the highest quality of any text publications in the discipline. If one had wanted to investigate the coloring of the Anubis-figure on Facsimile 1 in the past, determining the exact coloration would have been difficult. At this point it has become easy—the photographs in Rhodes’s publication are of such quality that one can be sure of the minutest shades of coloration. This is just one example of the many ways such reproductions will further future research.

In appendix C, Rhodes creates a chart that synchronizes the numbering systems of the papyri used by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, by Wilson, and by the *Improvement Era* (now the standard). While these differences can still be confusing, the chart will prove to be very helpful for those researching the history of publications regarding the papyri, thus avoiding further confusion. Appendix D is an excellent presentation of the hieratic text of Papyrus Louvre 3284, the most complete copy of a Book of Breathings Made by Isis, along with a hieroglyphic transcription. This is accompanied by appendix E, the translation of this text. Since the Hor Book of Breathings is fragmentary, a transcription and translation of this complete text provides the necessary broader contextual meaning for these documents. This translation and transcription, accompanied by the comparisons made in the footnotes of the translation of Joseph Smith Papyri I, X, and XI, clear the way for more comprehensive contextual studies and understandings of Books of Breathings, and of Late Period afterlife books in general. Appendix F’s list of other Books of Breathings Made by Isis, along with their owners’ names when known, provides further information for making broader textual and contextual comparisons. Because of the high quality of the reproduction of the text of Joseph Smith Papyri I, X, and XI, both in photographs and in transcriptions and translation, and because of all the broader contextual elements provided by Rhodes, no future study

of Books of Breathings will be complete without taking this work into account; concomitantly, all future studies of Books of Breathings will be facilitated by this publication. This is also true of any future studies of Late Period afterlife books in general, as well as Late Period orthography, paleography, and grammar.

The “Glossary of Gods, Place Names, and Egyptian Terminology” will be helpful for examining this text. (After reading that Osiris will be brought to the great pool of Khonsu and then learning from the glossary that Khonsu is the Theban god of the moon, however, lay readers will probably still wonder what Khonsu’s great pool has to do with anything.) While the “Complete Glossary of Egyptian Words in the Hor Book of Breathings” will probably not be used by the specialist, it may help the scholar who possesses some familiarity with Egyptian and certainly makes the entire publication a potential study text for those learning Egyptian.

Furthermore, the work put into making and using fonts for transcription and transliteration of hieroglyphs should prove to be valuable in future publications, particularly for anyone publishing with FARMS or BYU in the future. It will hopefully be true of other Egyptologists as well. Too often these mechanical difficulties are worked out time and again by different people in different places with varying degrees of success. I encourage Egyptological scholars to take part in a dialogue with Rhodes and others who have grappled with this issue and to share experiences and resources to better deal with this vexing problem.

In summary, Rhodes’s book is a well-done critical publication of an ancient Egyptian text. Rhodes has maintained a scholarly tone throughout.<sup>22</sup> The book has been created in such a way that it will be useful for ongoing and future research. Rhodes has been thorough

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22. This is not the case with Ritner’s articles in *Dialogue* and *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (*JNES*). Given the tenor of the *Dialogue* article, it is not surprising that Ritner’s *JNES* article continues with his caustic and thoroughly unscholarly tone. In any peer review done for a good journal, one is asked if the author maintains the canons of good scholarship, including the lack of personal attack and vituperative language. Clearly Ritner’s *JNES* article did not meet this standard, and yet the editors of *JNES* allowed its inclusion in their journal, thus neglecting to perform fully their editorial mandate.

and thoughtful in his compilation of tools necessary to examine not only the text itself but also its context.

### Value to Various Latter-day Saint Audiences

The usefulness of *The Hor Book of Breathings* to the teacher of the scriptures and members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints will be different from its value to Latter-day Saint Egyptologists and LDS scholars. While the former groups were clearly not the primary audience of this book, it still has some value for them. The sections of the book dealing with grammatical forms, orthography, and the transliterations will be of little use. The pictures of the papyri are of interest and can be valuable teaching aids. These, as well as the translation of the text—when coupled with Rhodes's other works on the Book of Abraham<sup>23</sup> and works by other scholars such as John Gee<sup>24</sup> or Hugh Nibley<sup>25</sup>—can round out a good understanding of the issues surrounding these papyri.

Perhaps the greatest value for the Saints stems from the mere existence of this book. We often underestimate the value of being public about our understanding of this text. The fact that a scholar understands what this text is, as well as the issues surrounding it, and does not find this to conflict with his faith as a Latter-day Saint speaks more eloquently than a dozen articles devoted to the subject. This publication makes a number of things apparent: Latter-day Saints understand

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23. For example, Michael D. Rhodes, "The Joseph Smith Hypocephalus . . . Seventeen Years Later" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1994); or Rhodes, "Teaching the Book of Abraham Facsimiles," *Religious Educator* 4/2 (2003): 115–24.

24. For example, see John Gee, "A Tragedy of Errors," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 93–119; Gee, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000): 175–217; and John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 63–98.

25. For example, see Hugh Nibley, "The Facsimiles of the Book of Abraham: A Response," *Sunstone*, December 1979, 49–51; and Nibley, *Abraham in Egypt*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2000).

what the Joseph Smith Papyri are; we are not hiding the contents of the papyri; we are very interested in what can be learned from the papyri; and these things are not incompatible with our faith in the restored gospel nor in the revelatory ability of Joseph Smith. Just a few weeks ago I was traveling from the Logan airport in Boston to Cambridge for the annual meeting of the American Research Center in Egypt. While in the airport shuttle I visited with other Egyptological scholars, one of whom was planning to mention something about the Joseph Smith Papyri in her presentation. She asked if anything was being “straightened out” about “those papyri.” In response, I showed her *The Hor Book of Breathings*, which I happened to have with me. Later that night, after a presentation, as I visited with a few Cambridge-area Latter-day Saint graduate students who had questions about the Joseph Smith Papyri, I also showed them the book. Both of these groups seemed to learn more from the existence of this publication than from its contents. A number of audiences can benefit from what Rhodes has done in this publication.

The smallest audience of *The Hor Book of Breathings*, that of LDS Egyptologists and like-minded scholars, may be the group with the greatest potential benefit from the publication. This group asks questions such as what is the relationship between these fragments, the rest of the Joseph Smith Papyri, and the Book of Abraham? Why would the Book of Abraham be interred with Egyptian mummies? What is the relationship between Egyptian traditions of representation and Abrahamic stories? What is the context of the interment of the papyri, and what light can that shed on why Egyptians had Jewish documents? What can these documents tell us about both the Book of Abraham and the gospel in Egypt? What is the relationship between the Jews of Egypt and these particular Egyptians, if any? Can we learn anything more about Abraham from the context of these papyri fragments? The Book of Breathings and Facsimile 1, as presented in Rhodes’s publication, may not be *the* key to answering these questions, but they may be *a* key. There is clearly a need to better understand the relationship of the Book of Abraham and the context from which it came; such an understanding will add to historical and religious studies. A better

understanding of the Book of Breathings will help in this quest, especially if coupled with more extensive studies of Egyptian thought on the afterlife, with studies of this time period, and perhaps with specific studies on the genealogy of the owners of these papyri. Rhodes's work will further research along all these lines.

Being able to examine a clear presentation of Facsimile 1, seeing how the Book of Breathings fits in with other afterlife books both historically and contextually, and searching for an understanding of the text itself takes us several steps forward. This book provides pieces to the puzzle so that as thinking progresses or as other pieces come to light (perhaps because of this study), those parts will more easily fall into place. The questions, both those listed above and those not yet posited, may thereby be more easily answered.

## Appendix

As Larry Morris has argued, a comparison of two nearly concurrent translations of the Hor Book of Breathings—those of Rhodes and Ritner—should be made.<sup>26</sup> I have made such a comparison and have not found variations that would suggest a remarkably different interpretation of the document or its context. Yet some differences are worth noting, and I do so below. Entries in the chart below appear only if I felt the differences merited comment. (Most do not.) I do not note general preferences, such as Rhodes's tendency to translate verbs in certain contexts as prospective as opposed to Ritner's tendency to translate them as indicatives, where the graphemes allow either translation. Neither of these tendencies is right or wrong, and neither preference essentially changes the nature of the meaning of the translation. In the variations I note in the chart, sometimes the translations are equally meritorious. Where I feel one choice is preferable, I indicate that preference and provide an explanation. Differences are highlighted in boldfaced letters. Differences in reconstruction are occasionally noted.

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26. Morris, "Ask the Right Questions," 357.

	Rhodes's Translation and Transliteration	Ritner's Translation and Transliteration
JSP I 1/1	priest of Min, who massacres his enemies <i>ḥm Mnw smꜣ ḥrwy.w=f</i> (p. 21)	prophet of Min who slaughters his enemies <i>ḥm Mnw smꜣ ḥrwy.w=f</i> <sup>27</sup>
JSP I 1/2–3	Hor, justified, the son of one of like titles, master of the secrets, <b>god's priest</b> , <sup>28</sup> Usirwer, justified, born of [the housewife, the musician of Amon-Re,] Taykhebyt. <i>Ḥr, mꜣꜥ ḥrw, sꜣ mꜣ nn, ḥry sꜣtꜣ, wꜣb nꜥr, Wsꜣr-wr, mꜣꜥ ḥrw, ṛr n nb[.t pr ḥy.t n ꜣImn-rꜥ] Tꜣḥy-by.t.s</i> (pp. 21, 23)	Hor, the justified, son of the similarly titled overseer of secrets and <b>purifier of the god</b> , Osorwer, the justified, born by the [housewife and sistrum-player of Amon]-Re, Taikhibit, <b>the justified!</b> <sup>29</sup> <i>Ḥr mꜣꜥ-ḥrw sꜣ mꜣ-nn ḥry-sꜣtꜣ ꜣb nꜥr Wsꜣr-wr mꜣꜥ-ḥrw ṛr.n n[b.t-pr ḥy.(t) n ꜣImn]-Rꜥ Tꜣy-ḥy-b(y).t mꜣꜥꜥ-ḥrw</i>

27. While the translations are essentially the same and the transliterations are identical, in his footnotes Ritner describes the glyphs incorrectly. He writes, in note 44, that *ḥrwy.w=f* is written “with knife, oar, plural strokes, enemy determinative, and flesh-sign (for =f).” However, the glyphs on the papyrus are the “s-cloth,” the sickle (Gardner sign-list U1), the lung and windpipe (Gardner sign-list F36), plural strokes, enemy determinative, and flesh sign for =f. It is difficult to know if this misreading is due to the quality of photographs Ritner used, which are from Charles M. Larson, *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri* (Grand Rapids, MI: Institute for Religious Research, 1992), or to not actually looking at the glyphs themselves, or for some other reason.

28. The fragment is somewhat broken here, but a comparison of the color and gray-scale photographs makes it appear that Rhodes's transliteration and translation are preferable here. In this case we see a leg, surmounted by a water pot pouring water over a horn. Normally the pot pours water over the horn, with the leg nearby, or the pot is atop the leg pouring water, but not over the horn. The particular arrangement present in this text is not addressed either in Adolf Erman and Hermann Grapow, *Das Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1926–63), or in Rainer Hannig, *Grosses Handwörterbuch Ägyptisch-Deutsch (2800–950 v. Christus): Die Sprache der Pharaonen* (Mainz: von Zabern, 1995), but is in Raymond O. Faulkner, *A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian* (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1986), which seems to have taken into account the various places in which this form appears. While the water pot being poured over the horn by itself (Gardiner sign-list F17) is usually transliterated as *ꜣb*, when the water pot is atop a leg (Gardiner sign-list D60), as is done here, it is usually transliterated as *wꜣb*, and thus translated as “priest.” Rhodes translates this as “priest,” and the printing of *wꜣb* instead of *wꜣb* seems to be a mechanical oversight, given the translation Rhodes provides.

29. Ritner's addition of “the justified” is not in the hieroglyphic text.

	Rhodes's Translation and Transliteration	Ritner's Translation and Transliteration
JSP I 1/4	... (pp. 21, 23)	["O Anubis(?), ...] justification(?) [... ] ... <i>m3</i> <sup>c 30</sup>
JSP XI 1/6–7	... left arm near his heart, <b>while the bearer of his cof- fin</b> works on its outside. <i>ḥ3by=f &lt;r&gt; mtr ḥ(3)ty=f ḥw</i> <i>ṛr p(3) rmn t3y=f qṛṛs m</i> <i>p(3y)=s bnr</i> (p. 27)	... left arm in the midst of his heart. The <b>remainder</b> <b>of his wrapping</b> shall be made over it. <i>ḥ3by n mtr ḥ3.ty=f ḥw ṛr=w</i> <i>p(3) mn n t3y=f qṛṛs.(t) r</i> <i>p(3y)=s bnr</i>
JSP XI 2/1	The beginning [of the Document of Breathing], which [Isis] made [for her brother ... ] <i>ḥ3.t-<sup>c</sup> m [š<sup>c</sup>(.t) sn]sn ṛr.[n</i> <i>3s.t n sn=s ... ]</i> (p. 28)	Beginning of the [Breath]ing [document] that [Isis] made [for her brother ... ] <i>ḥ3.t-<sup>c</sup> m [š<sup>c</sup>y.t n sns]n</i> <i>ṛr.t.[n<sup>31</sup> 3s.t n sn=s ... ]</i>
JSP XI 2/3	... Osiris Hor, justi- fied [born of Taykhebyt, justified.] <i>Wsṛr Ḥr, m3<sup>c</sup>-ḥrw, ms.[n</i> <i>T3y-ḥy-by.t, m3<sup>c</sup>-ḥrw.]</i> (p. 28)	Osiris Hor, the justified, <b>son [of ... Osorwer, the</b> <b>justified</b> , born of Taikhibit, the justified.] <i>Wsṛr ḥr, m3<sup>c</sup>-ḥrw, s[3 ...</i> <i>Wsṛr-wr m3<sup>c</sup>-ḥrw<sup>32</sup> ms.n</i> <i>T3y-ḥy-by.t, m3<sup>c</sup>.t-ḥrw]</i>

30. As Morris, "Ask the Right Questions," 361, has pointed out, here Ritner provides a reconstruction with essentially no explanation, failing to note that Baer and others felt that a reconstruction was not wise, and then proceeded to use his reconstruction in an argument against Gee that is of little or no meaning in the first place. It is interesting to note that Ritner does not make the reconstruction in his transliteration.

31. The "t" transliterated by Ritner does appear to be in the papyrus text. Rhodes translates it as a relative (the "t" would indicate thus), and in his hieroglyphic transcription he includes the "t loaf."

32. Here Ritner sees the word *s3* where Rhodes does not. The characters support Rhodes's reading, although it is extremely difficult to make out the characters here. However, the physical space for the missing text (given the reconstructions of lines 4 and 5) seems to indicate there is more to be reconstructed than Rhodes provides. While Ritner's reconstruction seems to make sense, he provides no evidence, and the initial character does not support his proposal.



	Rhodes's Translation and Transliteration	Ritner's Translation and Transliteration
JSP XI 2/3	Hide (it)! <b>Keep (it) secret!</b> <sup>33</sup> <i>h3p sp 2, imn sp 2.</i> (p. 28)	Hide [it! Hide it!] <i>h3[p sp-2]</i>
JSP XI 2/5	[ . . . your front is in] (a state of ) purity . . . <i>h3t=k m] w<sup>c</sup>b</i> (p. 28)	[ . . . Your front is in] a state of purity . . . <i>h3t=k m] <sup>c</sup>bw</i> <sup>34</sup>
JSP XI 2/7–8	May Wadjet and Nekhbet purify you in the <b>fourth</b> hour of the night and the [ <b>fourth</b> ] hour [of the day]. (p. 29)	Edjo and Nekhbet have purified you in the <b>third</b> hour of night and in the <b>third</b> <sup>35</sup> hour [of day].
JSP X 3/1	. . . may] your name [endure] and may your body last, then [your mummy] will flourish. <i>mn] rn=k, dd h3.t=k rwt.</i> <i>hr</i> <sup>36</sup> [ <i>s<sup>c</sup>h=k</i> (p. 29)	May your name [end]ure, may your corpse abide, and may your mummy thrive. <i>m]n rn=k d[d] h3.t=k rwd</i> <i>s3h=k</i> <sup>37</sup>
JSP X 3/3	. . . Your flesh is on] <your> bones, <b>made</b> like your form on earth. <i>h<sup>c</sup>.t=k hr] qs.w&lt;=k&gt; irw</i> <sup>38</sup> <i>m? q(i)=k h-tp t3.</i> (p. 30)	[Your flesh is on] your bones <b>in accordance</b> with the form that you had on earth. <i>h<sup>c</sup>.w=k hr] qs.w=k m? q? =k</i> <i>hr-tp t3</i>

33. Here Rhodes notes a word missed by Ritner.

34. In this case, the sign indicates only the water pot being poured over the horn, thus suggesting that the transliteration should be *b* as opposed to *w<sup>c</sup>b*.

35. On the papyrus, this section is poorly preserved. When the hour of the night is mentioned, it looks as if three strokes are present, indicating that it was the third hour, though there may be remains of a fourth stroke. When the hour of the day is mentioned (which should be the same number as that for the night), the section is very poorly preserved, and yet the remnants of four strokes seem to be barely discernible. Reconstruction from other Books of Breathings is not possible, since other hours, such as the eighth or ninth hour, are listed. Thus, we can draw no firm conclusion as to which hour is represented in this papyrus.

36. This is probably a *hr*.

37. Here the transliteration *s<sup>c</sup>h* is preferable to *s3h* because the former translates as “mummy,” which makes the most sense, and since it matches parallel texts.

38. The papyrus text includes *irw* here, though this is different from parallel texts and is difficult to make sense of grammatically. While Ritner leaves it out, Rhodes includes it in his transliteration, makes sense of it in the translation, and includes a note as to the

	Rhodes's Translation and Transliteration	Ritner's Translation and Transliteration
JSP X 3/6	... your heart being the heart of Re, and your <b>limbs</b> ... <i>ib=k ib n R<sup>c</sup>, h<sup>c</sup>.t=k</i> (p. 30)	Your heart is the heart of Re; your <b>flesh</b> ... <i>ib=k ib n R<sup>c</sup> iw<sup>f</sup>=k</i> <sup>39</sup>
JSP X 4/7	You] have arisen in your form <i>iw=k] h<sup>c</sup>.tw m t<sup>l</sup>.t=k</i> (p. 32)	... appearing gloriously in your proper form. <i>iw=k] h<sup>c</sup>.tw m qd=k</i> <sup>40</sup>
JSP X 4/9	... your <b>ka, may it live, prosper, and be healthy.</b> May the Document of Breathing cause you to flourish. <i>k3=k 'nh, wd3, snb.</i> <sup>41</sup> <s> <i>w3d.tw=k m š3.t</i> <i>snsn.ty</i> (p. 32)	... your ka-spirit and has made you flourish by means of the Breathing Document. <i>k3=k sw3d=f tw=k m š3.t</i> <i>snsn</i>
JSP X 4/10–11	May you enter into the <b>god's [very] great hall</b> in Busiris ... (p. 32)	[Come,] may you enter into the <b>very great embalming [booth]</b> in Busiris. <sup>42</sup>

difficulty of dealing with the grapheme and what he has done with it. The latter treatment is preferable.

39. Here Ritner notes that Nibley had transliterated this according to P. Louvre 3284 and not according to JSP X, which has a parallel in P. Louvre 3291. Rhodes apparently follows Nibley and P. Louvre 3284. After a careful examination of how the scribe in JSP X draws the “f snake” (Gardiner sign-list I9) and the “flaxen cord” (Gardiner sign-list V28), as well as looking at the characters before the one in question and at the end of the papyrus fragment just after it, it seems to me that Ritner is correct in his transliteration, and that this scribe has used the *iw<sup>f</sup>* variant.

40. Here the papyrus text indicates that *qd=k* is the correct transliteration, as Ritner argues. The curious thing is that in his hieroglyphic transcription, Rhodes records the glyphs for *qd=k*, but in his transliteration he writes *t<sup>l</sup>.t=k*.

41. While Ritner complains about Nibley's transliteration and translation here, Nibley, and now Rhodes in turn, have included a full transliteration of this section. Ritner does not account for all of the signs in his transliteration and leaves out the standard formula for life, prosperity, and health that is written on this papyrus (though it does not appear on parallel texts). Rhodes notes this variation, accounts for all of the signs, and restores the “s” in *sw3d.tw=k* that was omitted due to haplography.

42. Either translation is valid.

## BOOK NOTES

**Susan Easton Black and Andrew C. Skinner, eds. *Joseph: Exploring the Life and Ministry of the Prophet*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005. xiii + 448 pp., with bibliography and index. \$23.95.**

In this edited volume, thirty-three Latter-day Saint scholars examine the life and mission of Joseph Smith in thirty-nine essays. Enhanced by artwork from numerous artists, these essays are organized in a generally chronological fashion to inform readers how various events prepared Joseph for his greatest trials and accomplishments. The companion DVD, available separately, features six episodes, currently being aired on television, highlighting different eras from Joseph's life. In reflecting on the recent bicentennial year of the Prophet Joseph Smith's birth, readers can gain insights into the scriptural prophecies that foretold Joseph Smith's mission and even his name as well as the circumstances of the Smith family that drew them to the area of New York where Moroni had buried his sacred record. Further topics include continuing revelations to the Prophet, the outward persecutions and internal struggles of the fledgling church, and the martyrdom of Joseph and his brother Hyrum. This book is intended to nourish testimonies of Joseph's works as a prophet and of the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**E. Douglas Clark.** *The Blessings of Abraham: Becoming a Zion People.* American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2005. 331 pp., with appendix, chart, abbreviation list, and bibliography. \$29.95.

This is not E. Douglas Clark's first publication on Abraham. In addition to two previous books on other gospel-related topics, he wrote the entry concerning the great patriarch in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* (1992), furnished the foreword for the revised and expanded FARMS second edition of Hugh Nibley's *Abraham in Egypt* (2000), and contributed a chapter to the most recent volume in the FARMS series *Studies in the Book of Abraham, Astronomy, Papyrus, and Covenant* (2005). An Arizona lawyer who has devoted decades of study to this subject, Clark draws not only on the Bible but on the uniquely Latter-day Saint scriptures, rabbinic texts, early Christian materials, the Qur'an, scholars ancient and modern, and the prophets of this final dispensation to tell the story of Abraham and to draw out for today the principles to be learned from the life of the ancient "friend of God" (James 2:23), commonly called "the father of the faithful" (D&C 138:41; compare Romans 4:11). This book comes impressively recommended, with jacket-cover endorsements from John A. Tvedtnes, Robert J. Matthews, and M. Catherine Thomas and a foreword by Truman G. Madsen. For Latter-day Saints, who understand themselves to be children and heirs of Abraham (D&C 84:34; 86:9) who have been called to do "the works of Abraham" (John 8:39; D&C 132:32), few lives could possibly be more worthy of serious and sustained reflection.

**John R. Conlon.** *Mormonism: A Christian Response.* Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2002. 96 pp., with 2 appendices, glossary, and bibliography. \$9.99.

This slim book is the work of a Nazarene who is currently an assistant pastor in Spokane, Washington. He also pastored in Utah, where he came to believe that he faced demonic forces—"a pantheon of spiritual influences" (p. 16). He believed that he was deeply involved in "spiritual warfare" (p. 45). He is not, however, "saying that individual Mormons are demon possessed any more than we may say that of any other group of people" (p. 45). However, he thinks it likely that "Joseph Smith and

others were indeed visited by beings masking their true identity” (p. 15). Hence, for him, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is a very dangerous cult (pp. 13–14 and elsewhere) that challenges “mainstream Christianity” (pp. 14, 22). “Why does the LDS movement,” he agonizes, “sustain such rapid growth, even in areas that are hostile to their cult? Why are Evangelical Protestants unable to plant a church under similar circumstances in the heart of Mormon Utah?” (p. 73).

Conlon does not, however, attribute everything done by the Saints to evil spirits. During those seven lean years in Utah he developed, in addition to an overpowering resentment, much envy. He admits that “the most flagrant failure” among mainline Christians “is a dereliction in following Christ’s admonition to love and support one another” (p. 51), and he also noticed that “the wards [in Provo, Utah] looked out for everyone in the neighborhood, not just the LDS faithful” (p. 74), and hence “what they are doing is not just a cult thing, but a Christian action that has long been absent in many Christian churches and neighborhoods” (p. 74). But, with what we might call the fear factor, Conlon insists that there is a “threat of a Mormon flood sweeping over the heart of professing Christendom” (p. 44). Latter-day Saints threaten “world domination,” very much like Islam, as “Mormon missionaries sweep across the civilized world,” harvesting, of course, mostly “professing Christians” (pp. 75–76).

Conlon grants that “we are not called to bash and batter Mormons” (p. 16). “Few Mormons,” he senses, “will be won over by bashing their beliefs, picketing their temples, or trashing their neighborhoods with tracts” (p. 56). But his book is filled with bashing. For example, he claims that “LDS doctrine and structure parallel that of the end-time apostate church known as the beast of Revelation” (p. 76), though “whether or not there is a parallel between Mormonism and the beast of Revelation will only be realized by history, but the earmarks of the end-time religion are solidly implanted in LDS structure and theology” (pp. 76–77). And he insists that “the Mormon god is not the God of the Bible” (p. 22); “a Mormon god is a man who has human weaknesses” (p. 21). He holds that Latter-day Saints worship a “god” who “is nothing more than a hindrance to the human potential of

achieving godhood” (p. 19). And, much like what can be found in many anti-Mormon handbooks, he claims that the Saints believe that “Jesus came only to pay for Adam’s sin” (p. 33). Unfortunately, during his years in Utah he learned little about the faith of the Saints; hence, what he reports is offensive, inaccurate, or garbled.

**Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, Michael D. Rhodes, eds. *The Pearl of Great Price: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005. xi + 447 pp., with index. \$27.95.**

This resource fills the need for an up-to-date commentary on the Pearl of Great Price that draws on both ancient and modern sources. Employing the latest research on the Book of Abraham and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible, the editors have assembled an excellent resource for scholars and students. The scriptural text is broken up into logical sections, each followed with verse-by-verse notes, comments on the entire section, and suggestions for further reading. The book draws heavily on Hebrew etymologies in its analysis of the Book of Moses. The material on the Book of Abraham examines the history, age, and meaning of the Joseph Smith Papyri. The facsimiles receive their own treatment, considered in context of their relation to the Book of Abraham and the Book of Breathing. A separate chapter compares the creation events described in Genesis, Moses, and Abraham and frankly addresses the age of the earth, evolution, death before the fall, and the varying sequences of events in the creation literature. Biblical textual development is discussed, and varying theories are weighed. This is an important and timely contribution to understanding the Pearl of Great Price.

**E. T. A. Hoffmann. *The Golden Pot and Other Tales*. Translated by Ritchie Robertson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. xl + 410 pp., with a translator’s introduction, select bibliography, a chronology of E. T. A. Hoffmann, translator’s note, and explanatory notes. \$10.95.**

Some might be interested in Robertson’s 1992 translation of five tales written by the German Romantic polymath E. T. A. Hoffmann.

One of those tales is *The Golden Pot*, which may have been the source of the salamander figure in one of Mark Hofmann's sensational forgeries. Those forgeries and *The Golden Pot* provided Grant H. Palmer with something upon which to ground his rejection of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith's claims. Palmer was enthralled with the many references in *The Golden Pot* to elemental powers, one of which—fire—was symbolized by the salamander (the word *salamander* appears twenty-eight times in *The Golden Pot*). In 1985, Palmer considered this as proof of Joseph's mendacity. Signature Books eventually published Palmer's claims that Joseph Smith (and his family) borrowed the story of the recovery of the Book of Mormon from Hoffmann's bizarre tale. However, by 2002 the salamander had virtually disappeared from Palmer's only original contribution to Mormon studies.

Since Thomas Carlyle's English translation of *The Golden Pot* appeared in 1827, it was necessary for Palmer to claim that Luman Walter(s), about whom virtually nothing is known, might have visited France, where he might have read Hoffmann's tale in the German original or in French, if he could read either language. He might also have absorbed the details of that tale, and then he might have passed them on to Joseph Smith. Palmer seems, though, to have suppressed that speculation. Instead, he now insists that Joseph (with his family) staged an American version of *The Golden Pot*, which they had morphed into a story about visits by a heavenly messenger and an ancient history. Joseph is said to have begun at least by 1822 to draw on the precise language Palmer found in 1985 in Thomas Carlyle's 1827 translation of *The Golden Pot*. Palmer insists that the links he (but no other Mormon historian) sees between Hoffmann's tale and Joseph Smith's radically different story cannot be found in the Robertson translation. But Robertson's translation is remarkably similar to Carlyle's translation on all the crucial issues.

Palmer continues to ignore the fact that the Carlyle translation was available far too late to have had much, if any, influence on the story of the recovery of the Book of Mormon. One also has to assume that Joseph Smith somehow encountered Hoffmann's tale very soon after it was published and then misunderstood it in exactly the odd way

that Palmer does. It appears that none of the authors whom Signature Books publishes has adopted Palmer's confused and confusing speculation about *The Golden Pot*, although Signature still attempts to shield his book from much deserved criticism.

***Joseph Smith and the Doctrinal Restoration: The 34th Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium.* Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and BYU Religious Studies Center, 2005. ix + 413 pp., with index. \$24.95.**

When the 34th annual Sperry Symposium was held in October 2005, those attending were probably surprised to find that the proceedings had already been published. Attendees thus had a unique opportunity not only to carefully choose which sessions they wanted to attend but also to study the text of the presentations before attending. All of this made for a uniquely fulfilling symposium experience.

This year's symposium was devoted to exploring the impact that the doctrines and scriptures restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith have had on the world in the past 175 years. Keynote speaker Andrew C. Skinner, for example (in a presentation entitled "The Impact of the Doctrinal Restoration: How the World Was Different after Joseph Smith"), noted that "the Prophet Joseph Smith single-handedly changed the theological landscape of the world" by reintroducing the world to a true knowledge of God, making known the full potential of Christ's atoning power, and putting back into operation the "powers that enable all who so desire to reenter the Father's presence" (p. 9).

Among the other twenty-five contributors to this volume are Richard L. Bushman ("Joseph Smith and Abraham Lincoln"), Mary Jane Woodger ("Joseph Smith's Restoration of the Eternal Roles of Husband and Father"), Richard E. Turley ("The Calling of the Twelve Apostles and the Seventy in 1835"), and Jill Mulvay Derr and Carol Cornwall Madsen ("‘Something Better’ for the Sisters: Joseph Smith and the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo"). Along with covering a wide variety of topics, the book also includes well-documented notes at the end of each chapter.

Daniel B. McKinlay spoke on "Joseph Smith on the Body as a Fallen or Blessed Vessel," pointing out that Joseph Smith did not



arrive at his conception of the Father and the Son as a result of biblical cross-referencing or speculation. His witness came through a direct encounter with the divine and through confirmatory canonical revelations on the subject. It was a reiteration of what the Bible had said all along—namely, that God is embodied and his Son remains embodied. This verification of the Bible was necessary due to the Platonic assumptions superimposed on the Christian scripture. In another interesting presentation, Kent P. Jackson (“The Scriptural Restoration”) concluded that “the Restoration is bigger and greater than most Latter-day Saints have imagined. Most of us undervalue it and do not appreciate what it has done. It was with good reason that the future founder of the Disciples of Christ, Alexander Campbell, complained in 1831 that the Book of Mormon dealt with, and provided answers for, all the important gospel controversies of his generation” (p. 234).

Unfortunately, at least three excellent presentations (by Richard L. Anderson, Truman G. Madsen, and John W. Welch) did not make it into this volume. Hopefully they will soon be published elsewhere. *Joseph Smith and the Doctrinal Restoration* is nevertheless a valuable book for anyone interested in Joseph Smith’s prophetic calling.

**Christian Leitz, ed. *Lexikon der ägyptischen Götter und Götterbezeichnungen*, 8 vols. Louvain: Peeters, 2002–2003. lvi + 6,405 pp., including register. 990 €.**

This invaluable reference work lists known ancient Egyptian deities and divine epithets. Although not exhaustive, it is marked by typical Teutonic thoroughness and is a gold mine of information on ancient Egyptian gods. Entries list attested spellings, dates of attestation, iconography, functions, references, and associations with other deities in series. Individual words in epithet strings are listed separately and cross-referenced to appropriate main entries. The information provided can be very helpful: For example, the entry on Anubis (1:390–94) lists twenty-two different spellings and shows that he is attested in every major time period (early period, Old Kingdom, Middle Kingdom, New Kingdom, 21st–24th Dynasties, Saite period, Late period—meaning Persian period, Greco-Roman period, and uncertain date). Human-headed, lion-headed,

jackal-headed, ram-headed, falcon-headed, snake-headed, and other forms of Anubis are known. The human-headed form, though known at other times, is particularly common starting in the Persian period and continuing through the Greco-Roman period; it is not as unusual as some would have us believe. Knowledge of German and ancient Egyptian is necessary to make full use of the material. The cost is prohibitive for most people, but, considering the amount of information in the volumes, the sturdy clothbound covers and bindings, and the publisher, it is a bargain.

**Wilbur Lingle.** *Approaching Mormons in Love: How to Witness Effectively without Arguing.* Fort Washington, PA: CLC Publications, 2005. 205 pp., with two appendixes. \$11.99.

Wilbur Lingle arrived in Japan from the United States in 1954. Twenty years later he started bashing Latter-day Saint missionaries with proof texts from the Bible. He returned to the United States in 1989 to begin "Love to Share Ministries," an "outreach" in which, among other things, he teaches others how to witness to Latter-day Saints "without arguing." When he started attacking the faith of Latter-day Saints in Japan in 1975, he admits that he "used many scripture passages in order to prove them wrong" (p. 155). He argued, but he eventually "found that this was not very effective" (p. 155). So he began showing LDS missionaries that "the verses *they* were quoting . . . did *not* prove their point" (p. 155, emphasis in original). For Lingle, this is witnessing "without arguing," though those Saints he corners with his arguments, which include an array of biblical proof texts, may see it quite differently.

Lingle claims that "when a Mormon is defeated," presumably by him in a nonargument, "he will cunningly start attacking your character and motives" (p. 85). He then proceeds to attack the character and motives of Latter-day Saints: "Mormons are well-trained in character assassination" (p. 85). And he also claims that "the Mormons will not always tell you the truth, nor will they tell you what they actually believe. They only tell you what they want you to hear" (p. 128), which presumably is not what they really believe. Lingle asserts that,

“through repeated contact with numerous Mormons, I have found that telling the truth is not one of their virtues. Lying is quite commonly practiced. Not only do missionaries lie, but also the officials who run the Mormon church” (p. 85). “Sometimes they lie out of ignorance—or it might be Mormon ‘double talk.’ However,” he insists, he has “had them deliberately lie” (p. 128) about their beliefs.

Lingle senses that “it is best not to let them pray, because they sound very pious when they pray. This tends to deceive people into thinking they are sincere. However, their prayers are memorized and most Mormons will pray the same prayers” (p. 107). “Furthermore, they do not pray to the God of the Bible” (p. 107). Under the heading “Intimidation,” he concedes that “Mormons may be sweet and kind when you first meet them, and will continue so if you listen meekly and agree with everything they say. However, if you ask them thought-provoking questions they become frustrated and resort to special tactics to get you off course” (p. 129) in the noncontentious nonargument you are having with them. They will first “tell you to hold out your hand, to see if you are trembling. Even if your hand is as steady as possible, they will still accuse you of being nervous. They say that this is caused by the devil that is in you” (pp. 129–30). Then they will frequently “say, ‘I command you . . .,’ or they “may call down the curse of God upon you. They are apt to be very dramatic! It is only a trick.” Finally, “if you don’t believe what they say, they may accuse you of being insincere, contentious, etc.” (p. 130). Lingle contentious? Never—he no longer even argues. But he also admits that he is a bit contentious, since that is what he thinks the Bible tells him to be (pp. 125–26).

How well does Lingle understand the faith of the Saints? Not at all well. The following illustrates the level of his misunderstanding: “Mormonism teaches salvation by human good works” (p. 203). The death of Jesus merely yields a resurrection, so “becoming a god,” in his version of LDS beliefs, “is a matter of one’s own works” (p. 133). He insists that the Saints believe that “Jesus was no different from any of the other spirits in the previous world [premortal existence], but just happened to be the first one born” (p. 196). And, of course, “the Mormons have very little respect for the Bible. They do everything in their power to tear it

down and attempt to prove it false” (p. 138). “The LDS Church might talk a lot about Christ, but in reality he plays no part in their personal salvation” (p. 45). “When the Mormons use the word ‘redemption,’ they mean that all men will be resurrected” (pp. 67–68). And, though they say much about faith, “in most cases they have no idea what this ‘faith’ is. Their religion is one of ‘works’” (p. 105). However, Lingle thinks that “faith and works are both very important,” but he teaches “that works ought to follow faith” (p. 104). Such a thought, of course, never occurred to a Latter-day Saint. “If their literature is taken at face value, they seem to come close to true Christianity. This is part of their plan for deceiving the public” (p. 81).

Lingle describes himself on the cover of his book as a “world-renowned expert on Mormons.” He boasts that, after one has lured LDS missionaries into a Bible-bashing brawl (p. 201), one can witness effectively to them “with the information in this book and a lot of love” (p. 202). He fails on all counts.

**David L. Rowe. *I Love Mormons: A New Way to Share Christ with Latter-day Saints*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005. 190 pp., with 3 appendixes, notes, a selective glossary of LDS terms, and resources. \$12.99.**

David Rowe, of the Salt Lake Theological Seminary, indicates that, when he arrived in Utah in 1975, he quickly became a kind of “Mormon slayer” who loved a “Bible bash.” Back then “we were,” he now admits, “attacking them instead of their doctrine” (p. 17, emphasis deleted). Eventually he realized that all he got out of his aggressive, adversarial, confrontational anti-Mormon polemics was a sense of having trounced a miserable cultist. He claims to have eventually discovered what he calls a “new way” of “witnessing” to the Saints—that is, of attacking their doctrine rather than them. This is still what Latter-day Saints see as proselyting since they regard themselves as disciples of Jesus Christ, who has provided for them the only means of salvation.

As an alternative for the more overtly adversarial sort of “cult-busting” approach he employed earlier in his career, Rowe now offers a presumably kinder, gentler, more culturally sensitive kind of anti-

Mormonism. His is, however, a minor voice in the cacophony of anti-Mormon voices. What he offers still is blatantly anti-Mormon. Why? One reason is that he asserts that the Jesus that the Saints know is merely “‘a two-dimensional cutout paper doll’ Jesus Christ” (p. 159) and not the real Jesus of the Bible. And when the Saints offer thanks for the atonement, Rowe, like many other sectarian anti-Mormons, insists that we do not really mean what we pray, say, or sing (pp. 53–56), since we do not have the proper “worldview” (p. 55), and so forth.

This book was obviously not written for Latter-day Saints. It is another in a long line of handbooks that promise a new and improved way of proselyting the Saints and thereby meeting the Mormon challenge. Rowe proudly describes his book as a “new way” of “transforming” the Saints. It is “new” in that it is a presumably less adversarial and abrasive, and, hopefully, a more effective way of seducing the Saints away from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and into some unidentified sectarian ideology.

Rowe hopes that others, following his advice, will somehow “come to understand Latter-day Saints and their culture [as he has] and wed this understanding to a profound love and respect for them” (p. 9). Love is thus recommended as a means to an end. What end? He very much wants to see his contemporary conservative Protestant culture, his own religious language and lore, his worldview, and his version of “the biblical gospel” (as opposed to what the Saints have) “built into their world, their lives, and even their worldwide church” (p. 9). Rowe’s “new way” is endorsed by such evangelicals as David Neff (editor of *Christianity Today*), Craig Blomberg (Denver Seminary), Vernon Grounds (chancellor, Denver Seminary), and two fellow employees of the Salt Lake Theological Seminary.

Rowe is said to have, “beyond his family and Jesus,” a passion for “incendiary worship, fine cuisine, acoustic music, elegant discourse, and sheer grace” (p. 191). He claims that Mormonism is a culture and not a cult and he teaches something called “cross-cultural ministry,” in addition to worship theology, homiletics/communication, and spiritual formation. His new way of proselyting Mormons involves learning their mind-set and their language, since Mormons are a

culture (or ethnic group) and not a cult as commonly understood by countercultists (pp. 27–29 and elsewhere). In order to spread the message encrusted in the language and lore of his variety of contemporary conservative Protestant culture, Rowe believes that one must learn the language, stories, and modes of thinking of the Mormon culture if one is to effectively communicate the “real Jesus” to the Saints (p. 107). According to Rowe, there is “a characteristically Mormon way of knowing about God and spiritual matters” (p. 13). He urges conservative Protestants “to adapt our communication style to their [LDS] way of knowing so the Good News can sound like good news” (p. 13). One must appear to have a deep love for the Mormon people “despite deep disagreements with some of their distinctives” (p. 9), or what he calls “a profound love and respect” for lost Mormon souls.

But Rowe’s “new way” is not without its critics. There is currently a donnybrook taking place among conservative Protestants over how best to proselyte Latter-day Saints. Both sides in this internecine struggle quote—out of context—a phrase from Paul’s letter to the Ephesians (4:15) to describe their approaches as “speaking truth in love.” The Saints, of course, often have a difficult time recognizing either truth or love in what is said and done. One camp practices a confrontational, adversarial, aggressively Bible-bashing mode of “evangelizing” the Saints. The other faction, aware that such tactics yield very poor results, has fashioned a slightly more irenic and less openly adversarial approach, which Rowe advocates in his handbook for luring the Saints away from their faith.

**Andrew C. Skinner. *Prophets, Priests, and Kings: Old Testament Figures Who Symbolize Christ*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005. vi + 152 pp. \$16.95.**

Viewing the Old Testament as the first witness of Jesus Christ (preceding both the New Testament and the Book of Mormon), Andrew Skinner, a thoughtful and careful scholar, presents examples from the lives of individuals who foreshadow the coming and atonement of Christ. Skinner examines the witness of prophets, priests, kings, and exemplary women as they point us to the Savior, who is

the Great Prophet, Priest, and King. Beginning with Adam and Abel, Skinner closes with the lives of Esther, Deborah, and Huldah. The Old Testament, or covenant, anticipates the New in witnessing of Christ and in bringing souls to him.





## ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

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## EDITOR'S PICKS

**S. Kent Brown**, *Voices from the Dust: Book of Mormon Insights*

**James T. Duke**, *The Literary Masterpiece Called the Book of Mormon*

**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*

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