

Introduction

John L. Sorenson,
Melvin J. Thorne

During the 1980s, LDS scholars did a great deal of research on the Book of Mormon. The result was a bumper crop of serious scholarly studies that shed new light on this sacred scripture. For example, the first (1989) annual issue of a new periodical, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, listed more than a dozen books and fifty articles of a scholarly nature. The second issue (1990) listed another impressive set.

Despite the insights these studies contain, most of them have remained unknown to anyone outside the academic fields of the authors, including scholars in other fields. The officers of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.) have long felt that the results of these research studies ought to be made available to a larger audience.

This book begins to meet that need. It presents exciting new studies without the technical language that scholars sometimes use to communicate with each other in their specialized fields. No special background is required to appreciate these essays—just a desire to rediscover the value of the Book of Mormon by learning new things about it.

This collection of essays focuses on one type of recent research: studies demonstrating that the Book of Mormon contains complex patterns not previously recognized—patterns of style, ideas, history, and actions. Hugh Nibley has correctly observed that the Book of Mormon describes the Nephite civilization “with due attention to all the complex factors that make up an exceedingly complicated but perfectly consistent picture.”¹ He has argued persuasively that one strong evidence of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is that it interweaves dozens of complex stories and patterns with an uncanny consistency that is never caught in a slip or contradiction.²

Not only are many of these patterns complicated, they are so subtle or hard to detect that they become visible only through careful analysis. Once visible, however, these complexities help us appreciate better the power of the book and its messages for us. The essays in this book help to make some of these patterns clear.

A few examples will clarify what we mean. In one of the first pieces, Grant Hardy discusses the effect that Mormon had on the Book of Mormon in his role as editor. By his choices of what to include and what to leave out, Mormon shaped the book decisively. Hardy shows that Mormon’s influence was both sweeping and consistent throughout the book. Once we see the patterns in what Mormon did as he edited, we understand better how he desired the book to affect us.

In another essay, John Tvedtnes shows another complicated pattern we had not seen before; he identifies traces of the Hebrew language that were left behind when the book was translated to English. There are dozens of places where, as Tvedtnes reveals to us, awkward or atypical English phrases give us clues that Joseph Smith translated these “Hebraisms” literally.

Stephen Ricks looks at King Benjamin’s great assembly (Mosiah 1-6) and the way in which Benjamin’s son Mosiah became the next king. He shows us how similar these events were to what is known about kings and their ways in the ancient Near East. Thus this part of the Book of Mormon accurately and consistently reflects the culture that it claims to come from.

William Hamblin discusses the Book of Mormon's descriptions of warfare. He gives us insights into how Lehi's descendants adapted their Israelite military heritage. The details he points out form a complicated but realistic picture without any of the contradictions that a modern writer would inevitably have fallen into.

The articles in this book teach us about unexpected concepts, images, or cultural facts in the Book of Mormon that become obvious once they are pointed out but that we were blind to previously. In this sense, these essays help us "rediscover" the Book of Mormon. In each case we gain new insights into the richness of the Book of Mormon and its messages for us. Each essay reveals unsuspected strands and threads that run through the Book of Mormon as through a huge, rich tapestry. These new studies reveal remarkable designs deserving our careful examination. When we look in greater detail at the tapestry and at the weavers' (writers') techniques and motives, we see their creation in new ways—we rediscover the book.

We also see new evidence that the book is the ancient record it says it is. These patterns are so intricate and yet so consistent that it seems highly unlikely that Joseph Smith (or any writer of his day) could have created them. By showing us these patterns, the essays in this collection focus on internal evidence and turn our attention primarily to the scripture itself. As President Gordon B. Hinckley has observed, key evidence for the truth and validity of the Book of Mormon "lies within the covers of the book itself."³

We heartily thank the authors who contributed these essays, whom we editors occasionally pressed with vigor. We also express gratitude to the officers and staff at F.A.R.M.S.

Our labors will be rewarded if this book sheds new light upon the Book of Mormon, Another Testament of Jesus Christ, and stimulates new appreciation and respect for it. We also hope readers will share our conviction that scholarly research is producing exciting new discoveries in the Book of Mormon and that scholarship is not a frill but a valuable activity in its own right.

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Footnotes

1. Hugh W. Nibley, "The Book of Mormon: True or False?" *Millennial Star* 124 (November 1962): 276; reprinted in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* 8:225.
2. Nibley considers this question in several of his writings. See in particular "The Book of Mormon: True or False?" in *CWHN* 8:219-42; and "New Approaches to Book of Mormon Study," in *CWHN* 8:54-126.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Cornerstones of Our Faith," *Ensign*, November 1984, p. 52.