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REVIEW OF BOOKS ON THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies
Editor's Introduction

Daniel C. Peterson

The first volume of this *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* covered items published during a year in which the adult curriculum of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was devoted to the Book of Mormon. That fact yielded a bumper crop for review. But many of us frankly wondered whether there would be enough material to fill successive issues. Our fears have proved unjustified. With our second volume, nearly twice as bulky as the first and covering more than twice as many books, doubt about our ability to produce an annual collection of reviews vanished. The present volume, the third, is even longer. We begin to confront an *embarras de richesses*. Our great worry this year has actually been how long the *Review* can grow before it becomes physically unwieldy.

The most appropriate editorial role for me, then, seems to be to get out of the way of our reviewers. In any case, no divine afflatus has settled upon me, no hobbyhorse demands to be ridden; readers will thus be subjected to no long-winded introduction—this year, at least.

There remains, however, my obligation to thank some of those who have helped in the production of this volume of the *Review*: Andrew Teasdale’s bibliography significantly enhances the publication’s usefulness. James E. Faulconer, Dennis J. Packard, Stephen D. Ricks, Matthew Roper, John W. Welch, and the staff at the F.A.R.M.S. office have each been extraordinarily helpful. As in the previous two volumes, Shirley S. Ricks did most of the hard editorial work. Without her competent efficiency, this volume would remain (as so many other worthwhile projects do) mere scattered piles of paper on the desks, shelves, and floors of my offices.

As always, the reviews are arranged in alphabetical order, according to the last name of the book’s author. Where more than one review is provided of a given book, these are arranged according to the last name of the reviewer. Again, no attempt has been made to harmonize the views of our writers. Alert readers will, in fact, note some points of minor disagreement. By the same token, where similar positions are taken by two or more authors—and there are, as it happens, one or two places
where the resemblances extend even to verbal similarities—this should not be ascribed to collusion or to the editor’s heavy hand. Finally, it must be clearly understood that the opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, nor of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Ancient Studies, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, or the employers of the respective review authors.
Maya Harvest Festivals and the Book of Mormon

Annual F.A.R.M.S. Lecture
27 February 1991

Allen J. Christenson

Introduction

Throughout the history of the Maya, who dominated southern Mesoamerica, the most important public festival of the year was timed to coincide with the main corn harvest in mid-November. For the most part, this also served as the New Year's day of the solar calendar, when kingship was renewed. The celebration of this harvest festival has remained remarkably consistent through the centuries due to the extreme conservatism of the Maya people. As a result, study of the festival over time reveals a great deal about the Maya view of the importance of New Year's Day and perhaps hints at concepts which may appear in Book of Mormon events, since most Book of Mormon scholars believe that Nephite and Lamanite history took place in the general area of Mesoamerica.1

The Harvest Festival and the San Martín Cult

Since the arrival of the Spanish conquerors in the early sixteenth century, the Maya have progressively integrated components of European Catholicism into their own indigenous world view. A notable example of this religious syncretism is the observance of the harvest festival of San Martín by the Tzutujil Maya Indians of Santiago Atitlán, a small village in the Guatemalan highlands.

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The harvest festival is observed on November 11, the traditional day of the Catholic calendar dedicated to Saint Martin of Tours, a fourth century Roman soldier who suffered imprisonment for becoming a Christian. As a monk, and later as a bishop, Martin was believed to have worked many miracles, including raising the dead.

In Santiago Atitlán, the day of San Martín on November 11 is considered the most important ritual day of the year, even more powerful than Easter or the festival of the village’s patron saint. San Martín is considered “King San Martín,” the ruler of the world, more ancient than any other god or saint, and father to them all. Although the name of San Martín is venerated by the Indians on this day, the festival bears little resemblance to traditional Christian liturgy and is in fact merely a continuation of ancient Maya ritual. The cult figure worshiped under the name San Martín is a red cloth bundle measuring 24” x 12” which is normally kept in a wooden case to the left of the altar in the shrine of the village’s patron saint, San Juan. Despite their importance, the most sacred elements of the San Martín ritual are not performed as a public ceremony. Non-priests know little about them, and for the most part they take place in the dead of night behind closed doors.

On the evening prior to November 11, the San Martín bundle is removed from its case and laid on an altar. The Dance of San Martín is then conducted before it. Two young men wearing jaguar costumes repeatedly paw the backs of two others wearing deer costumes, one of whom is the chief priest of the San Martín cult. The priest wearing the deer costume is finally “killed” by a jaguar and carried back to the altar as a sacrificial offering.

At midnight, the doors and windows are shut and the chosen priest who had been killed as a deer opens the San Martín bundle. It is believed that only at midnight can the bundle be safely opened, otherwise winds would rush out and

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devastate the world. From the bundle he first removes a beige garment with a flamelike design on it. While he puts on this garment, candles are distributed to those present. With the garment on, the priest dances to the four corners of the room in a crucifixion-like pose, with his knees flexed and his arms held out with palms straight and facing inwards. One Indian specifically associated this portion of the dance with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The priest then returns the first garment, crosses himself to the four directions, takes out a second garment, and the process is repeated. A third garment is considered the most powerful and is never removed. Although not specifically mentioned, it may be assumed that the priest represents the god rising from the dead, while dancing with the garments of San Martín. The priest who opens the bundle holds great power in Santiago Atitlán and is believed to hold the power to rise from death. The deceased priests are often referred to as San Martíns and are believed to maintain their power after death.

Standing in opposition to San Martín's power over life and fertility is another idol at Santiago Atitlán called the Mam ("ancient one"); cf. fig. 1). This idol consists of a flat piece of wood with two legs and a head attached to the main trunk. A carved wooden mask is tied around the head to serve as its face, and a cigar is inserted in its mouth. When seen in public, the idol is dressed with several layers of fine clothes. For example, in 1936 this consisted of six shirts, six pairs of pants, numerous sashes, twelve scarves, and two Stetson hats, one worn on top of the other. There are rumors that the core of the idol contains a smaller, very ancient image. Due to the zealous guardianship of the idol by the Indians, however, this has never been confirmed. The Mam represents death and the destructive power of the underworld. The jaguars, which symbolically

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5 Ibid., 125.
6 Ibid., 58.
7 Ibid., 89-90.
“kill” the deer during the Dance of San Martín, do so under his authority. His appearance always calls for normal business and activity to cease. But since he is believed to usurp the place of
the village’s political leaders as well, these cannot function when he is placed on display.

On the day of the San Martín festival, the Mam is publicly brought out to stand on the north end of the village square to oppose the renewal of life and fertility by the saint. The placement of the shrine to the north is significant. In the cycle of legends regarding the creation of the Mam “at the beginning of time,” the tree from which the Mam idol was made was found on the “north edge of the village.” To the Maya, the north is associated with death, cold winds, the color black, and other expressions of the destructive elements of the universe.

Following the symbolic “resurrection” from death of the priest of San Martín, the Mam idol is taken away and dismantled to “render it harmless.” Although the mask is packed away right side up, the head itself is turned backward so as to “leave him without power of speech.” In most other highland Maya areas the figure is torn apart and scattered on the ground. I saw one particularly evil-looking Mam on the outskirts of Sololá thrown onto the highway so that cars would run over it.

The Harvest Festival and the Highland Maya prior to the Conquest

The festival of San Martín is apparently a continuation of ancient harvest rituals observed by the highland Maya of Guatemala before the arrival of the Spanish conquerors. At the time of the Conquest, the Guatemalan Highlands were dominated by the Quiché-Maya. Their supreme god was called Tojil, a god associated with the sun, life-giving rain, and sacrifice. The Maya believed that gods periodically underwent auto-sacrifice, offering themselves as a blood atonement so as to preserve world order in times of crisis. At appropriate times, sacred animals were ritually sacrificed and their skins were worn by priests in imitation of the slain god. The token of the god


Mendelson, *Las Escándolas de Maximon*, 123.

Tojil was the bloody skin of a deer, slain in his name.\textsuperscript{15} The sacred deer skin, wrapped in a bundle and kept hidden in a wooden chest, was called "Our Lord of the Stags" and was venerated as the symbol of power of the Quiché royal family.\textsuperscript{16} Sacred bundles of the type worshiped by the Quichés under the name of Tojil were well known by Mesoamerican Indians prior to the Spanish Conquest and directly relate to the bundle of San Martín at Santiago Atitlán.

The temple of Tojil stood at the symbolic center of the Quiché capital of Utatlán, facing east toward the rising sun (cf. fig. 2). Ximénez wrote that certain days were dedicated to the

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure2.png}
\caption{Figure 2}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{16} Popol Vuh, tr. Adrián Recinos et al., 205.
festival of Tojil in which special sacrifices were offered in his name. During this festival, people from throughout the region gathered at Utatlán, living in temporary shelters near the temple. Sacred deer were sacrificed by priests mimicking jaguars, and their blood was offered to the four cardinal directions and then finally to the "heart of earth" at the center. As the representative of Tojil on earth, the priest-king of the Quichés reenacted the symbolic death and descent of the god into the underworld, where he was confronted by the lords of death.

The crisis of witnessing the ritual descent of their legitimate rulers into the underworld must have been extremely frightening. It was believed that death was then given permission to afflict mankind. Ximénez wrote that because of the ritual passage of these kings through the underworld, the days of the festival were considered "closed" days, when there were no legitimate rulers. In the days of the Quiché king Quik’ab, a revolt was staged during the festival of Tojil, in which the king’s enemies tried to kill him during the dance of the deer sacrifice, the point at which the king’s supernatural powers would be considered weakest.

While the king was symbolically in the underworld, carved idols were prepared in the image of underworld gods and ceremonially wrapped in richly decorated mantles and covered with much gold. These images were brought forward and honored as temporary kings, taking the place of the legitimate leaders of the community. As such they were carried through the streets to the accompaniment of music and were given

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19 Popol Vuh, tr. Adrián Recinos et al., 89, 194.
21 Ximénez, Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala, 1:84-85.
22 Ibid., 1:101.
23 Carmack, The Quiché Mayas of Utatlan, 36.
As usurpers of political authority, the images represented the reversal of the customary order of society and therefore functioned much as the Mam does in modern highland Maya villages.

Ultimately, the priest-kings ceremonially returned from the underworld in triumph, having defeated the lords of death. The idols of underworld lords were taken away or destroyed, while the victorious kings were confirmed in their reign as representatives of Tojil and danced publicly before the people. A sign was given to the people to assure them that the "great god was in his proper place." The rulers were then carried through the streets as saviors of the world and providers of new life.

According to the Título de Totonicapán, the Great Dance of Tojil took place in the month of Tziquin K’ij, just prior to the harvest in November. The Festival of Tojil also originally marked an ancient New Year’s celebration. The Totonicapán document says that the conclusion of the Tojil festival represented the close of the 360-day solar year, and that at that time "lordship" changed, as with the symbolic renewal of rule or the actual accession of a new king.

When worshipped as the sun, Tojil has been identified as the manifestation of another Quiché Maya god, Jun Junajpu. The cycle of legends surrounding Jun Junajpu is found in the Popol Vuh and indicates that this god journeyed north along a black road toward the underworld. There he was confronted by a wooden image of the death god. After a number of trials, Jun Junajpu was eventually overcome and sacrificed by the lords of the underworld. The head of Jun Junajpu was then hung in a dead calabash tree, which miraculously bore fruit resembling the head of Jun Junajpu. Eventually, the twin sons of Jun Junajpu also journeyed to the underworld where they defeated

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24 Ximénez, Historia de la provincia de San Vicente de Chiapa y Guatemala, 1:82.
25 Ibid., 1:85.
28 Carmack, The Quiche Mayas of Utatlan, 201, 299.
29 Popol Vuh, tr. Adrián Recinos et al., 118-19.
and sacrificed the lords of death, rescued the head of their father, and raised it to the sky where it became the sun.\textsuperscript{30}

The mythological components of this legend were applied in a very practical way to the political life of the kings of highland Guatemala. The ancient Quiché ruling dynasty traced their descent from these gods, as did many other highland Maya groups.\textsuperscript{31} It is known that deceased rulers were equated with Tojil and Jun Junajpu and their bodies were revered in special sepulchres.\textsuperscript{32} Living rulers were correspondingly identified with the sons of Jun Junajpu.

**The Origin of the San Martín Cult following the Spanish Conquest**

The question arises, how did the festival of Tojil become associated with that of San Martín? The supremacy of the festival of San Martín cannot be explained by Christian tradition alone, since its observance was rather minor in sixteenth-century Spain. Its significance must therefore be due either to some importance attached to the tradition of the saint by early Maya converts to Christianity, or to coincidence that the day of the saint’s festival happened to fall on a day of importance in the ancient Maya calendar. As will be seen, both of these possibilities may be true in the case of the San Martín cult.

Bunzel wrote that San Martín was arbitrarily selected as the patron of the earth’s fertility by the first Christian missionaries, thereby replacing the name of an earlier Maya god.\textsuperscript{33} I think it unlikely that this association was arbitrary. It is known that the Festival of Tojil, from which the San Martín cult derived, was celebrated in mid-November, at the same time of year as the day of San Martín on November 11. It was therefore easy for the priests at Santiago Atitlán to continue to venerate the old god at

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 163.
\end{itemize}
the appropriate time of year by transferring his festival to the day of a Christian saint.

The characteristics of San Martín also made this association logical in the eyes of early Maya converts. With the Spanish Conquest, images of native gods were forcibly replaced by those of Christian saints. These adopted, in the eyes of the Indians, the powers and status of the older Mayan deities. Thomas Gage, who visited Guatemala in the 1630s, wrote that the saints' images were worshiped like ancient idols:

> They yield unto [Roman Catholicism], especially to the worshipping of saints' images, because they look upon them as much like unto their forefathers' idols; and secondly, because they see some of them painted with beasts ... and think verily that those beasts were their familiar spirits .... The churches are full of them. ... Upon such saints' days, the owner of the saint maketh a great feast in the town.34

Over time the cult of the animals came to take precedence over the saint himself. This may explain the curious identification of the god Tojil and his deer-skin bundle with San Martín. San Martín was universally depicted in Christian iconography riding a horse and dividing his cloak to clothe a naked beggar. The Maya have consistently confused horses with deer. When the Spaniards arrived, they mistook the horses they rode as giant deer and therefore named them quej, the same word for deer. Even today both animals bear the same name in Maya languages.

Despite the imposition of Christianity on the populace, the Indians felt that at least the form of their ancient traditions had to be maintained so as to effect the regeneration of the earth. The highland Maya quickly adapted the most important aspects of their harvest festival of resurrection into a new Christian context, in this case the cult of San Martín.

Jesus Christ as the supreme God of the conquering Spaniards soon was equated with the ancient gods also. The early Quichés identified Christ with both Tojil and Jun

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This process of religious syncretism almost triggered a revolt in Guatemala:

It happened in this kingdom shortly after being conquered that, upon hearing the [life] of Christ which the friars taught them, that there arose a Mexican Indian, a pseudo-prophet. He taught them that Huhapu (Junajpu) was God and that Hununapu (Jun Junajpu) was the son of God; . . . For this cause, there was such a commotion among the Indians that the work was nearly lost, for they came to imagine that our Holy Gospel told them nothing new.\(^{36}\)

Jesus Christ was undoubtedly equated with Jun Junajpu because both were sacrificed by their enemies and hung in a cruciform tree before rising from death. This association did not end with the defeat of the Mexican pseudo-prophet. Because of its ancient association with rain, and the resurrection of their god, the cross was adopted as the symbol of the pre-Columbian tree of life.\(^{37}\) Early Christian conquerors and missionaries habitually set up crosses in places of pagan worship to symbolize the victory of the cross over heathenism. Indians apparently attributed the virtues of the defeated gods to the cross itself and gave offerings to it. This explains why modern Maya Indians often paint crosses green or decorate them with foliage. It should be remembered that the San Martín dance also is equated with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Among the Maya, the resurrection of Christ following his crucifixion is often equated with the rising of the sun, similar to the apotheosis of Jun Junajpu as the sun. At Santiago Atitlán, the cross and other Christian images are returned to the church with the rising of the sun on the day following the defeat of the Mam. Many refer to Christ as "Our Father Sun,"\(^{38}\) or "Lord


\(^{36}\) Ibid., 1:57.


Sun.” The church monstrances carried during the procession at Santiago Atitlán bear the image of Christ on a cross surrounded by a sunburst pattern.

To the Maya, this curious blending of seemingly disparate beliefs does not seem unnatural. Periodic attempts by the Catholic clergy to suppress pagan elements has been met with great resistance and even violence. On at least two occasions, in 1914 and 1950, Catholic priests conducting Easter Mass at Santiago Atitlán attempted to destroy the Mam image. On both occasions, the priests were driven forcibly out of the village.

For the most part, village priests today tend to wink at “irregularities” in Christian ceremonies as practiced by the Indians, so long as they maintain their central emphasis on Christ and the other Christian saints. This tolerance has resulted in the survival of a surprisingly rich array of beliefs and practices which can be traced to pre-Columbian antecedents.

The Harvest Festival and the Yucatec Maya

The most important chronicler of Yucatec Maya tradition was Father Diego de Landa, a Franciscan who labored in Yucatán immediately after the Conquest and was therefore an eyewitness to Indian rites which were for the most part still untainted by Western influences. His chief native informant was Nachi Cocom, whose bones he later had dug up and cast into the fields on the suspicion that he had practiced pagan rituals after he had been baptized a Christian.

In an expanded description of the Uayeb, or New Year’s rites, Landa described the image of a demon which he called “the evil one” created during the final “unlucky days” of the year. This idol was carried to the house of the ruler of the village, where he usurps his political authority. The same demon appears often in Yucatec sources as a jaguar deity who is responsible for famine and the death of rulers.

The Uayeb New Year's rites are known to have been celebrated in Yucatán long before the Spanish Conquest, as demonstrated by the surviving pre-Columbian Maya hieroglyphic codices (cf. fig. 3). Pages 34-37 of the Madrid Codex
illustrate the Uayeb New Year's rites. Centered within the lower registers are cinerary urns set on the coils of serpents, representing the idea that "the years are closed, or dead, and... the ashes of the years rest within them."43 The prefix for the Uayeb glyph may represent the idea of evil, and its presiding deity was the Mam.44 To the left of the urn on page 21b is a jaguar, the representative of the underworld lords and harbinger of human sacrifice.

Father Pío Pérez wrote that the Indians of Yucatán referred to the festival at the end of the calendar year as the feast of the god Mam, the same name used for the evil idol at Santiago Atitlán, and said that the days of his reign carried danger of sudden deaths, plagues, and other misfortunes.45 López de Cogolludo, who lived in Yucatán during the Seventeenth Century, described the Mam which presided over the Uayeb, or New Year's rites: "They had a wooden (idol) which they... placed on a bench over a mat, and [he] was offered things to eat, and other gifts in a festival called Uayeyab, and at the end of the festival, they undressed him and threw the pieces on the ground without giving him any more reverence."46

According to Landa's account, while the image of the evil demon sat at the house of the village ruler, the image of the god of life was taken down from its usual place and kept hidden from view. An arch of leaves and branches was set up in connection with this ceremony, associated with the tree of life, or Yaxche.47 Landa wrote that the Indians believed that the Yaxche was a tree growing in the underworld beneath which the dead rest. The lord of this underworld realm was called "Hunhau," the lowland Maya form of the Quiché god Junajpu.48

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44 Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing*, 118.
47 *The Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, 64, nn. 5-6.
The defeat and descent of Hun Ahau is connected with political kingship, each ruler having descended from this god. According to Kelley, Hun Ahau is in fact equivalent to the patron deity of the Maya kings and a manifestation of the supreme lowland Maya god of life and resurrection, the feathered serpent god Itzamna. This is confirmed by the Yucatec Maya codices. On page 34b of the Madrid Codex, the disembodied head of Itzamna as god of life rests among the leaves of a tree growing from the central urn of New Year’s day. The god of death, seated on a sign for the 360-day year, reaches out to seize the head while the god of sacrifice presides on the other side. The implication is that during the Uayeb days the god of life is sacrificed and his severed head is placed in a tree, just as in the Jun Junajpu myth. The tree of life is also a prominent motif on page 33c of the Dresden Codex, which depicts Itzamna seated within its trunk.

In the Chilam Balam of Mani, the standard of Itzamna was the tree of life in the form of a cross:

The Itza (people of Yucatan) will see ... the sign of the one God, the erect tree which will be shown so that the world will be enlightened. Lords, console yourselves, discord and confusion will be finished, when the bearer of the cross comes to us. In the future, priests everywhere will be enlightened. Mighty Itzamna, your master will come ... to arrange the day of resurrection.

The cross as a symbol of the tree of life is a major component of the name glyph of Itzamna himself. In the glyphs placed within the horizontal strip of each of the pages dealing with the Uayeb rite in the Madrid Codex, the cross glyph is prominently displayed, representing wind, breath, and life itself.

Landa concludes his description of the New Year’s rites saying that “once the ceremonies were ended and the evil spirit

50 The Codex Pérez and the Book of Chilam Balam of Maní, 74; see also Morley, Brainerd, and Sharer, The Ancient Maya, 465, 470.
51 Thompson, Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, 73.
was chased away, according to their mistaken views, they considered the year as a good one."52

The Uayeb New Year's Festival is connected with the month of Xul, which fell in the latter part of October and continued through much of November, when the principal harvest season was observed.53 Xul carried the meaning of "end" in Yucatec Maya, further hinting at an original designation as the end of the calendar year. Xul is also used to represent the sun in the underworld. Deer sacrifices were observed at that time, the deer representing the death of the sun.54 The following month is Yaxkin, meaning "new sun," or "new day," as at dawn when the sun reemerges from the underworld.55

**Classic Maya Architectural Evidences of a November Festival**

In tracing the festival of regeneration into the Maya Classic period, from A.D. 300-900, it must be recognized that no codices or eyewitness descriptions of religious ceremonies exist from that period. Nevertheless, the iconography of Classic Maya architecture indicates that virtually the same pantheon of gods was worshiped as at the time of the Spanish Conquest. In the final days of the year, ritual conflict between the lords of the underworld and the king, as representative of the god of life and resurrection, was the predominant motif in the art and architecture of Palenque.

The impressive Temple of Inscriptions at Palenque was built as a funerary monument for Lord Pacal, the ruler of the site from A.D. 615-684.56 The elaborately carved lid of the king's sarcophagus depicts the deceased lord lying atop the sun at the critical moment when both sink into the open jaws of the underworld. From the body of Pacal grows a huge cross-shaped tree decorated with foliage, and draped with the body of the two-headed feathered serpent god, Itzamna. His role as a god of resurrection, associated with the underworld tree of life,

53 Ibid., 158, nn. 808, 811.
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has already been mentioned. Pacal’s association with this god indicates that the ruler is recapitulating his descent into the underworld to be confronted by the lords of death and sacrifice. The stucco images of these evil lords decorate the walls of the tomb chamber.

A complex of three temples on the southeastern periphery of the site continues this ritual passage of Pacal through the underworld as the personification of Itzamna. On the western side of the complex is the Temple of the Sun, dedicated to the lord of the underworld,57 and the setting of the sun. The carved panel within the shrine commemorates the underworld’s jaguar patron, as well as sacrifice, warfare, and death. The dead and rigid body of Itzamna rests beneath the night sun, held by lords of the underworld.

The largest of the three temples is the Temple of the Cross, located on the northern edge of the complex. This temple is dedicated to the passage of the sun beneath the earth, with the resultant death of the world and loss of fertility.58 The Temple of the Cross was constructed in such a way that only during the months of November to January does the light of the setting sun strike its interior and illuminate the carved panel within (cf. fig. 4). On the left or western side of the panel, Pacal is depicted holding the head of the sun before him. On the right, or eastern side, stands Pacal’s son and successor, Chan Bahlum. Between them is the partly skeletonized head of the setting sun. A large barren cross-shaped tree grows from this head, and is draped with the partially skeletonized body of Itzamna, symbolic of the god hanging on the underworld tree of life.

The piers flanking the entrance to the shrine are also intricately carved. The right pier depicts the principal lord of the underworld as an aged, toothless deity wearing a jaguar pelt cape and a belt buckle shaped into a mat symbol, indicating his authority and lordship.59 The iconography of this figure is remarkably similar to the Mam image at Santiago Atitlán, with whom he is identified. His headdress is heavily laden with tobacco leaves and he is smoking a very large cigar.60 It is significant that his image appears most prominently in this

57 Ibid., 476.
58 Cohodas, “The Iconography of the Panels,” 96.
60 Ibid.
temple, as it occupies the north end of the complex, the symbolic location of the entrance into the underworld.

To the east, the direction of rebirth and the rising sun, is the Temple of the Foliated Cross. This temple is dedicated to the manifestation of Itzamna as patron of the various ruling Maya dynasties.\(^6^1\) The inscribed birth date of this god at the beginning of time is Hun Ahau, which also appears as a name for the god in Maya texts.\(^6^2\) The shrine of this temple commemorates the rebirth of the sun and maize from the underworld. It also recognizes the renewal of earthly rule among the living in the guise of Pacal's son, Chan Bahlum. The central panel of the shrine is again dominated by a cross-shaped tree, however it is now laden with disembodied heads nestled in

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61 Cohodas, "The Iconography of the Panels," 95.
corn leaf clusters with life signs emanating from their mouths. The rejuvenated sun appears above it. The tree itself is heavy with abundant foliage. The head of Itzamna, from which the tree grows, now is surrounded by corn elements and bears a prominent Kan cross on his forehead, the glyphic symbol of rain and new life.63 The Kan cross is interchangeable with the glyph Yax, indicating completion or newness.64 It also signifies the end of one temporal cycle and the beginning of a new one.65 The celebration of the renewal of kingship at Palenque therefore must have taken place at New Year’s. Cohodas believes that the shrine served as the center of a harvest festival about the time of the autumnal equinox.66

The November Festival and Classic Maya Ceramics

The conflict between underworld lords and the god of life is a common motif on Maya funerary vessels buried with important personages, particularly kings. Inscriptions found on these ceramics are believed to have been taken from a long hymn which was sung over the bodies of dead or dying lords, describing the descent of the sons of Jun Junajpu into the underworld.67 This hymn was meant to prepare the dead for his passage into the underworld where he, like the sons of Jun Junajpu before him, might overcome death and rise again.

A very early depiction of this conflict may be seen on the Early Classic “Box of God K and L Smoking” from the northern

64 Thompson, Maya Hieroglyphic Writing, 252.
66 Cohodas, “The Iconography of the Panels,”96.
Peten (cf. fig. 5). The left-hand panel on the front of this box depicts the god of life holding a cross-shaped glyph with foliage growing from it. This god is being threatened by the lord of the underworld in the right-hand panel. The iconography of this god is remarkably similar to that seen at Palenque. He is depicted as an aged, hump-backed man smoking a large cigar.

The Mayan vessel known as Grolier 49 also depicts the underworld god on a jaguar throne, wearing a jaguar cloak, and smoking a large cigar.69

The vessel known as the "Carved Vase Chocola Style and God L Seated"70 depicts a seated underworld god, smoking his cigar and holding in his right hand the severed head of the life god, who has apparently been recently sacrificed.

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The finest series of ceramic vessels are those painted in "Codex Style." It is believed that these were decorated by the same priests or scribes who painted the hieroglyphic codices, none of which has survived from the Classic period. All of these Codex Style vessels come from Calakmul in southern Campeche, or sites which were under its control. Calakmul was located furthest north of the important Classic Maya sites, occupying the traditional location of the entrance to the underworld. Its ceramic art therefore placed particular emphasis on underworld themes and the power of its lords.

Perhaps the finest of the vases produced at Calakmul is Grolier 42. It depicts the lord of the underworld seated on his jaguar throne. Three of the women surrounding him are preparing his wine, probably the powerfully intoxicating balche drink. Facing the jaguar throne, a bound god identified as Jun Junajpu is being beheaded.

A "World Tree," or tree of life, grows from the decapitated head of the serpentine life god in Princeton 16, a motif remarkably similar to the depictions of Itzamna on the cross panels at Palenque. The head bears the glyph representing the sun. He also wears the quadripartite headdress indicative of Maya royalty. A serpent winds down the branches of the tree in a manner reminiscent of the directional trees in the Dresden Codex which are associated with the New Year's rites. A jaguar deity, apparently the sacrificer, is seen above and to the right of the tree, with the severed head of the life god on his back.

The Vase of the Falling Lord depicts the skeletal god of death leading a procession through the underworld carrying a decapitated human head with serpentine features in his right hand. A jaguar follows the death god, presumably the sacrificer. Behind the jaguar is a composite serpent with deer antlers and a head emanating from its mouth and tail, identifiable

71 Coe, Lords of the Underworld, 28.
72 Coe, The Maya Scribe, 91-92; Coe, Lords of the Underworld, 16.
73 Ibid., 91-92.
74 Coe, Lords of the Underworld, 107.
as Itzamna.76 The glyphic sequence concludes with the Xul Emblem Glyph.77 The presence of the Xul glyph may indicate that the scene takes place in the month of Xul, corresponding to the month of November and the end of the calendar year.78

Princeton 3 depicts a similar scene with a jaguar of sacrifice grasping the head of Itzamna which has a deer antler growing from it.79 Itzamna is often depicted with both deer and serpentine features.

As in the Popol Vuh, the defeat and decapitation of the life god at the hands of the lords of the underworld does not go unavenged. Maya ceramic vessels frequently depict the descent of the two youthful sons of Jun Junajpu into the underworld, where their father's head is hung within a tree, and where they ultimately defeat the lords of death.80 Grolier 20, a polychrome vase from the Guatemalan highlands, depicts these youthful gods along with two underworld gods around a tree which grows from a disembodied head.81

The victory of the sons of Jun Junajpu over the underworld lords is dramatically represented on Princeton 10. On this vessel, one of the young gods drags God N from his underworld shell while hiding a knife behind his back ready to sacrifice him.82

The November Festival and Izapan Art

Izapa is an important site situated near the Guatemalan border in the extreme southwestern corner of Mexico in the modern state of Chiapas. Its main period of occupation took place prior to the birth of Christ, in the Late Preclassic period. Despite its early date, its artistic iconography displays a number of elements common to the harvest festivals described in later periods and which seem to have dominated a widespread area of southern Mesoamerica. Fagan writes concerning the period:

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77 Quirarte, "The Representation of Underworld Processions," 144.
78 Robiesek, The Smoking Gods, 120.
79 Coe, Lords of the Underworld, 28.
80 Robiesek, The Smoking Gods, 121, 123; Coe, The Maya Scribe, 13; Coe, "Death and the Ancient Maya," 97; Coe, Lords of the Underworld, 12.
81 Coe, The Maya Scribe, 53.
82 Coe, Lords of the Underworld, 70.
We believe that the spread of [Izapan Art] at the beginning of the Late Preclassic period in approximately 500-300 B.C. signals the period during which a common religious system and ideology began to unify large areas of Mesoamerica. A powerful priesthood congregated in spectacular ceremonial centers, commemorating potent and widely recognized deities.83

The arrangement of Izapan carved monuments follows a pattern reminiscent of the ancient Mesoamerican ritual calendar, with each stela aligned with topographic features, horizon-line solstice, equinox, and other celestial markers.84 The site apparently served as a complex ritual center for the observance of various calendric and agricultural cycles. Lowe believes that the main focus of these rituals was related to the timing of planting and harvesting.85

Altar 60, located on the northern margin of Group A at Izapa, is believed to represent the critical endpoint of the calendric cycle.86 The altar depicts a deity with a jaguar mask who may be identified with the malignant god of the underworld.87

Stela 25 stands in association with this altar (cf. fig. 6). It depicts a sacrificed reptilian beast from whose body grows a tree of life. The body of a double-headed serpent winds around the sacrificed beast as well as a stylized cross held aloft by a human figure standing on the right. The presence of a conch in close approximation with both figures indicates that the scene takes place in the underworld. The double-headed serpent, as well as

85 Ibid., 35, 271, 317.
86 Ibid., 296.
the common motif of a tree sprouting from the body of a sacrificed reptilian beast, identifies the subject of this stela as the
life god Itzamna,88 or Jun Junajpu,89 both gods of life and resurrection.

Similar depictions of a tree of life sprouting from the head of the god of resurrection are also seen in Izapa Stelae 5, 10, and 27. The trunk of the tree of life depicted on Stela 27 is marked by a prominent Kan cross encircling the figure of a life deity.90 The tree itself has four branches, another cross motif.

In the case of Stela 2, this tree is identifiable as a calabash tree91 and is flanked by two figures floating above the ground. Both Norman and Lowe associate this scene with the calabash tree of Jun Junajpu in Xibalba, the two raised figures being the “sons” of the tree.92

A large fruit-laden tree of life is the dominant element of Stela 5, the richest of the Izapan monuments in iconographic detail. Lowe believes that this stela was oriented to commemorate the first day of the agricultural or solar year.93 Itzamna as a double-headed earth serpent frames the tree, one head dominating each side of the monument. Beneath this head is a seated figure with a royal parasol held over his head by an attendant, indicating his status as a king, who rules in the name of the life god.94 In front of this figure is a book or table in the shape of an Ik profile, the cross-shaped life symbol of Itzamna.95 Preclassic Izapa was a well-developed chiefdom and regional center.96 As such, much of the ritual iconography of its art served as a basis not only for agricultural ceremonies but also as a renewal of kingship by the earthly representatives of the gods. A royal personage may be seen on Stela 4, wearing a headdress bearing the image of Itzamna on his belt.

The defeat and sacrifice of the underworld lord may be seen in Stela 12, in which a sacrificed jaguar is suspended from the heads of the two-headed serpent god. The sons of Jun Junajpu may be seen below the sacrifice tending a fire.

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88 Lowe, Lee, and Espinosa, Izapa, 273; Norman, Izapa Sculpture, 199.
89 Lowe, Lee, and Espinosa, Izapa, 30, 37; Norman, Izapa Sculpture, 111.
90 Norman, Izapa Sculpture, 140.
91 Norman, Izapa Sculpture, 93.
92 Ibid., 94; Lowe, Lee, and Espinosa, Izapa, 30, 37.
93 Lowe, Lee, and Espinosa, Izapa, 277, 292, 298, 305.
94 Norman, Izapa Sculpture, 99.
95 Ibid., 91.
96 Lowe, Lee, and Espinosa, Izapa, 313.
Book of Mormon Evidences of a November Festival

It has been shown that throughout the history of the Maya, the most important festival of the calendar year consistently took place in mid-November when the sacrifice and resurrection of their life god was ceremonially reenacted. This festival was apparently tied to the main harvest period as well as New Year's Day and its attendant renewal of kingship power. The question remains, would this season of the year have held any significance for Book of Mormon peoples? The Nephites (Alma 30:3) and many Lamanites (Alma 25:15) kept the law of Moses and were therefore familiar with its required festivals. It is significant in this regard that the Israelite harvest festival, or Feast of Ingathering, is among the most important festivals** of the Israelite calendar year. All Israel was enjoined to gather at Jerusalem for its celebration. Zechariah said that it would be during this festival that the Messiah would come and be declared king (Zechariah 14:16). This Israelite festival complex (which also included Rosh ha-Shanah and Yom Kippur) traditionally served as the time when sacrifices were made in similitude of the atoning sacrifice of God, when the New Year was celebrated, and when kings officially took office.

The period from 300-50 B.C., when the Izapan Art style reached its peak of influence, was an exceptionally important one among Book of Mormon cultures. It was precisely at this time, around 200 B.C., that a large group of Nephites under Mosiah became united with the Mulekites at Zarahemla, thus introducing Nephite religious concepts to a new area. It is reasonable that Lehi and his family would continue to observe the Festival of Ingathering and would time it with the period of the harvest.

The key elements of the Festival of Ingathering appear in the account of King Benjamin's address to the combined population of his realm gathered at Zarahemla about 124 B.C. (cf. fig. 7).97 The premise of Benjamin's call to the people to assemble was the transfer of kingship to his son, the second Mosiah. Anciently, the inauguration of a new king was the central focus of the New Year's rite, and this appears to have been true in this case. The timing of such an act was critically

important. Notice that Benjamin had his son assemble the people on a specific day (Mosiah 1:10, 18; 2:9, 28). As John Welch has pointed out, he was not on his deathbed—this
gathering having preceded his death by three years—and therefore he must have chosen that day for its ritual importance.98

Benjamin's address closely parallels the ancient Mesoamerican pattern of harvest festivals in which the life god, or his earthly representative, descends into the underworld and is overcome by evil powers of death and sacrifice. Benjamin begins by declaring to the people that he intends to unfold "the mysteries of God . . . to [their] view" (Mosiah 2:9). He announces his imminent death and "descent" into the grave (Mosiah 2:26-30). In his absence, he warns the people to beware of the "evil spirit," "the enemy of all righteousness," the "enemy to God" who brings destruction upon mankind (Mosiah 2:32-33, 37-38). It is precisely the descent of the king into the underworld in the Mesoamerican festival at the end of the calendar year which permits the forces of death and evil to reign upon the earth. Although this is usually only a temporary ritual death on the part of the king, the prospect of his actual death was cause for great concern.

Benjamin's announcement of his own impending death and the coming of the "evil spirit" must have had a similar effect on his people. It is at this point that Benjamin shifts the focus from himself as a mortal king to the God of Life, whom he calls their "heavenly king" (Mosiah 2:19). He prophesies that this God would soon "come down from heaven" to experience the trials of temptations, pain, hunger, thirst, fatigue and the shedding of blood for their sakes (Mosiah 3:5-7). At the culmination of these trials, the God of Life was then to die and be crucified (Mosiah 3:9).

The death of the god of life and his placement on a cross, or cross-shaped tree of life, were powerful motifs within Mesoamerican society. The association of the cross with the tree of life was explicit in the Book of Mormon. Both Lehi and Nephi, the founders of the Nephite royal dynasty, were shown a vision of the tree of life. When Nephi asked the meaning of this tree, he was told that it represented the love of God (1 Nephi 11:25). The attendant vision given to Nephi to explain the tree of life motif was a prophecy of the "condescension of God," whereby the sacrificial "Lamb of God" descended from heaven to be slain on a cross for the sins of the world (1 Nephi 11:26-
Immediately after his death, Nephi beheld the combined forces of evil brought together to fight against the people of God (1 Nephi 11:34-36).

As in Mesoamerican theology, the death of Jesus Christ as the god of life was associated elsewhere in Book of Mormon prophecy with the sun. Samuel the Lamanite foretold that the birth of Christ would be accompanied by three days of light, as if the sun had not set (Helaman 14:3-4; 3 Nephi 1:15, 19). Samuel then went on to confirm the prophecy of Zenos and Nephi that the crucifixion of Christ would be accompanied by the darkening of the sun (1 Nephi 19:10-11), which would “refuse to give his light” (Helaman 14:20). Great death and destruction occurred as a result (Helaman 14:20-27; 3 Nephi 8:3, 19-23).

Benjamin continued his prophecy by declaring that the death of Jesus Christ was only temporary and that he would rise again after three days (Mosiah 3:10) to bring salvation to his people. The evil spirit would thus be expelled. Benjamin stressed that during his life Jesus Christ would have great power to “cast out devils, or the evil spirits which dwell in the hearts of the children of men” (Mosiah 3:6) and that his atoning blood was the only means of salvation (Mosiah 3:27).

King Benjamin seems particularly to stress God’s power over life (Mosiah 2:20-23; 4:6, 22; 5:15). It is interesting that Benjamin should stress that it is Jesus Christ who gives them “breath” (Mosiah 2:20-21). It has been seen that the cross-shaped glyph, meaning breath or wind, was prominently associated with both the tree of life as well as its patron deity Itzamna.

The prophet Nephi, who seems to have set the pattern for many of the religious motifs in the Book of Mormon, identified Christ with the serpent raised upon a staff by Moses (2 Nephi 25:20). This is similar to the recurrent Mesoamerican symbol of the serpentine god Itzamna lifted up into the branches of a cross-shaped tree of life. The persistence of this symbol may be seen in a prophecy given 600 years later by Nephi, the son of Helaman. It was delivered from a tower to a large multitude of people at Zarahemla. In this prophecy, Jesus Christ is again compared to a serpent who will be “lifted up.” He further declares that “as many as should look upon that serpent should live,... even unto that life which is eternal” (Helaman 8:15). The recurrence of this theme before large congregations of people may imply a formal ritual or reference to such.
There is evidence that the Lamanites also recognized the importance of the New Year in the renewal of kingship. To the Lamanites, the Nephites in the land to the north would have been considered evil adversaries, ripe for destruction. Divinely sanctioned wars were a prominent part of Mayan theology and were often tied to astronomical events or appropriate dates on the ancient calendar.99

In this paper it has been shown that as part of their New Year’s rites, ancient Maya kings engaged in ritual combat with evil lords who resided in the north. Their legitimacy and the continued survival of their kingdoms depended on the successful defeat of these powerful adversaries. It is therefore no accident that the Lamanite king Amalickiah chose New Year’s to engage the Nephites in battle (Alma 51:32–52:1). The Nephite general Teancum took advantage of the situation by slaying Amalickiah on New Year’s Eve, precisely when the underworld lords would have been believed to be their strongest. When the Lamanites awoke the following morning, expecting a divinely sanctioned victory, they found instead their king and protector dead. It is no wonder, then, that they fled in terror.100

Ammoron, the brother of Amalickiah, was chosen to succeed as king of the Lamanites. Undoubtedly the new king was determined to assert his legitimacy and therefore again chose the end of the calendar year to confront the Nephites in the north. Teancum in response again successfully slew the Lamanite king in his sleep. The demoralized Lamanites were thus slaughtered the following day and driven from the land (Alma 62:36–39).

The rivalry between the underworld lords of death and sacrifice, and the god of life, has been traced continuously in time to at least the Late Preclassic period, well into Book of Mormon times. This comprises an important, if not the dominant, theme of contemporary Maya rituals, early Maya literature and codices, the Yucatec New Year’s rites, Classic Maya architectural and ceramic art, and Izapan monumental structures.99

stelae. The conflict was dramatized in New Year’s festivals, held in November, whose aim was to celebrate the sacrifice and resurrection of life deities, as well as to legitimize the earthly authority of Maya rulers.

At a recent seminar on warfare in the Book of Mormon, John Sorenson concluded that military campaigns between the Nephites and Lamanites in the first century B.C. were conducted on a consistent basis in the months immediately preceding and following their New Year’s day. He further concluded from an exhaustive review of the sources that these campaigns were fought soon after an important annual harvest when provisions would be most plentiful and the people would be less involved with agricultural labors. If the Nephites were subject to the same environment as the native people of Mesoamerica, the Book of Mormon New Year’s Day, like that of the Maya, must fall at or slightly after the primary maize harvest in November or December. I therefore propose that the harvest season corresponding to our month of November, so important throughout Mesoamerican history as a New Year marker, also served as such in the Book of Mormon.

According to most scholars, Book of Mormon history took place during the Preclassic period of southern Mesoamerica, a time of widespread cultural interaction throughout the area generally believed to have been the Nephite/Lamanite center of power. Numerous passages in the Book of Mormon point to concepts which would have been familiar to the inhabitants of contemporary Mesoamerica, such as the tree of life, the placement of the life god on a cross, or cross-shaped tree, the association of the death and resurrection of the life god with the movements of the sun, and the renewal of kingship as part of a harvest season New Year’s ceremony.

That Nephite and Mesoamerican rulers were familiar with shared religious symbols broadens our understanding of New World scriptural concepts of kingship and resurrection. Many of these motifs, indeed, may have originated in the teachings of Nephite and Lamanite prophets who centered their teachings on Christ as the only true God of life and resurrection. In this light it is appropriate that the ancient Maya of Santiago Atitlán readily adopted Christ as their life God, whose history had long been familiar to their ancient predecessors.

It seems basic to acknowledge at the outset of this review that any book which proposes to show where the events in the Book of Mormon story took place is on shaky ground by the very nature of its subject. In this area we obviously operate without a gold standard. No mortal really knows for certain where the book’s events actually happened, nor can we know without some future revelation on the subject. The only available criteria by which we may judge and evaluate any proposed setting for the Book of Mormon are the geographical clues contained in the text of the book itself, correlated with currently available scientific archaeological and geographic information. Beyond these, we have only our intuition—which is fallible at best. This is not to say that such books should not be written. A real contribution to our feeling for the Book of Mormon may be made by placing it in its geographic setting. In the Church we are committed to absolute authenticity of the book. It is a book about real people who lived and died in a finite setting. As we come to know more about that setting, our love for the book can only increase.

I am by trade a physician/cardiologist and in every sense an amateur student of Book of Mormon geography. I have traveled on only one occasion to Mesoamerica with Dr. Allen and Dr. John L. Sorenson (from whom, among others, Dr. Allen draws heavily at significant points). In all, Dr. Allen has made more than 130 trips to this area. How then might I presume to review his book critically? For what they may be worth, I will try to give an honest student’s reactions to an experienced author’s writings.

Dr. Allen’s general thesis is that the events recorded in the Book of Mormon occurred in the geographic area today called Mesoamerica. He bases this proposal on three major arguments: (1) Scholars have determined that the only place on the American continent where a written language was in use during the time period in which the Book of Mormon history occurred was in Mesoamerica. It is in this area that the calendar system and the written language of the Americas had their origins. (2)
Archaeologists have determined that the vast majority of discovered archaeological sites dating to the time period of the Book of Mormon are located in Mesoamerica. (3) The oral traditions, the cultural patterns, and the written history of Mesoamerica contain many interesting parallels with the writings in the Book of Mormon. I will take each of the book's chapters in turn, briefly review its content, and comment on my impressions.

Chapter 1, which is the book's introduction, contains a miscellany of introductory information. A few statements made here left me wanting to discuss them with the author. I was left hoping that a more thorough discussion of each would be provided later in the book. Some examples include: (1) "The spoken language of the Jaredites was probably spoken by both Mulekites and Nephites. When Lehi's colony, as well as Mulek's colony, arrived in the Promised Land, the Jaredites constituted a high majority. Both the Nephites and the Mulekites lived simultaneously with the Jaredites for approximately 200 years to 300 years, after which the Jaredite kingdom fell" (p. 8). Did not both the Mulekites and the Nephites bring to the Western Hemisphere their own language from Palestine, presumably Hebrew? When Mosiah and his Nephite followers discovered the Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla, their spoken language had evolved considerably along different lines, and the two peoples were unable to understand one another. Is it really possible to know the extent to which the Jaredite language influenced that of the Mulekites or later the Nephites? Also, isn't it likely that the culture of the remnants of the Jaredites which survived their great devastating battles would have some lingering influence on the Mulekites and Nephites? Would this influence be expected to cease suddenly at any point in time? (2) Under the heading "Summary of Moroni's life," Allen states that between the years A.D. 400 and 421 Moroni "wandered for 21 years from [his] homeland to New York" (p. 9). Aren't there other possible explanations for the plates' finding their way from Mesoamerica to New York? (3) "We must take the Book of Mormon at face value. To alter its directions, as some current literature suggests, or to demand unbelievable distances, as tradition outlines, is unacceptable" (p. 10). It is my understanding that the issue of directions in the Book of Mormon is not a simple one. Doesn't this issue demand a little consideration and open discussion rather than simply brushing other options aside with this rather dogmatic and simplistic statement? (4) "The
Lamanite culture corresponds with the Classic Maya (200 A.D.-900 A.D.)—suggesting that the largest portion of the Pre-Classic Maya (600 B.C.-200 A.D.) living south and east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec may have been Lamanites” (p. 6). Is it really an established conclusion that all of the people of that part of Mesoamerica during those years were involved, directly or indirectly, in the Book of Mormon story? How dominant and pervasive in the land were the people of the Book of Mormon? Could there not have been other significant groups of people in the area who do not figure into the Book of Mormon account?

Chapter 2, “Looking at Dates,” provides interesting information on chronological matters. Notable was the interesting defense offered, based on a combination of the Mayan calendar and the writings of the sixteenth-century Spanish writer Ixtlilxochitl, of the dates: 3114 B.C.—the Great Flood; 2700 B.C.—the arrival of the Jaredites in the New World; 1300-1200 B.C.—the events in chapter 5 of the book of Ether.

The assumption is made that the Jaredites were the first settlers in the New World. Is the matter really that simple? Is there, for example, good evidence that the land was pristine and uninhabited before 2700 B.C.? And are there compelling data to indicate that all of the Mesoamerican people in the centuries that followed 2700 B.C. were purely of a single lineage and culture?

Dr. Allen finds the date of Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem to be problematic. A review of 1 Nephi 1:4 and subsequent verses suggests that the departure was during or shortly after the “first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah.” Biblical scholars have dated Zedekiah’s appointment to the throne as occurring in 597 B.C. Why is this a problem? Because Dr. Allen’s review of the history of Jerusalem at the time indicates that by that date Babylon had already ransacked Judah and carried off much of her treasure and many of her most capable people. Hence, in 597 B.C. it would hardly have been necessary for Lehi to prophesy of the impending destruction of Jerusalem, as all in Jerusalem would already have experienced much devastation and would not have to be warned. His solution is to suggest that a more appropriate date for Lehi’s departure is 600 B.C. He explains 1 Nephi 1:4 by suggesting that “Zedekiah” is a title and not a specific name, and that Josiah’s son Jehoiakim, who was king of Judah in 600 B.C. was perhaps referred to by this title in 1 Nephi 1:4.

Dr. Allen then struggles to explain the “six-hundred year prophecies in the Book of Mormon. There are actually several
references in the Book of Mormon that prophesy that Jesus would be born six hundred years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem. See 1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8; 2 Nephi 25:19; and 3 Nephi 1:1, 13. Even starting at 600 B.C., rather than 597 B.C., it is difficult to make the numbers come out since Christ’s birth is most commonly held to have occurred prior to 4 B.C., the date of the death of Herod the Great. Is the time span “six hundred years” mentioned in the Book of Mormon intended in a literal and specific sense or in more general terms? Dr. Allen believes it is to be interpreted literally, while many might be comfortable with a more liberal interpretation. Thus, he concludes that either Christ was born in 1 B.C. or that the “six hundred years” were years according to the Mayan calendar which each contained 360 days rather than 365.

I had some trouble following the reasoning on pages 26-27 which led to the conclusion that the Jaredite people (Olmecs) were destroyed, presumably to the point of extinction, in about 350 B.C. First of all, it would seem that the great final battles of the Jaredites would not necessarily coincide with the extinction of the entire Jaredite culture. Their warriors were destroyed, but what of their women, children, and men of ages too old or too young to fight? It does not seem likely that a well-established nation with deep roots would simply disappear suddenly. I have always assumed that the early “Mulekites,” shortly after their arrival in the “land northward,” discovered Coriantumr, a wounded Jaredite leader who lived with them nine months before he died. Perhaps the Mulekites did encounter Coriantumr two and one half centuries after their arrival, but I find nothing in the reasons listed on pages 26 and 27 to compel me to think that they did.

On page 27, in the second paragraph, a correlation is attempted between the first Mosiah’s leading the group of people from the land of Nephi to the land of Zarahemla and the archaeological development of Monte Alban. This correlation would be difficult to make since Monte Alban is located well above the narrow neck of land in the “land northward” and, according to our view, Zarahemla is located below the narrow neck in the Chiapas depression. This paragraph assumes that Mosiah’s Nephites also colonized a land some three hundred miles to the north of Zarahemla shortly after settling in Zarahemla, which is of course possible.

Dr. Allen’s discussion of the possible date of Christ’s resurrection and his appearance to the Nephites on pages 27 and
28 is interesting, but hard to follow probably because of the introduction, without adequate background explanation, of the concepts of the “Codex Nuttall” and the calendar dates of “6 Rabbit” and “2 Earthquake.”

In paragraph 7 of page 28, Dr. Allen describes a very interesting correlation between the archaeological picture in Mesoamerica and the happenings in the Book of Mormon in the period of Nephite apostasy, A.D. 200 to 350. He suggests that the Gadianton robbers may have had control of the Teotihuacan (Mexico City) area, but he does so without any substantiation.

On pages 36 and 37 (chapter 3, “And Then It Came to Pass”), Dr. Allen asserts that the language spoken by the Nephites led by the first Mosiah and that of the Mulekites in the land of Zarahemla “both . . . had a Jaredite base.” The language considerations in the Book of Mormon are obviously complex. It seems reasonable to think that the Mulekites’ spoken language might well have been influenced by the language of the Jaredites, but it is not clear at all how the language of the Nephites at that point would have been similarly affected.

On page 40, during a discussion of the proper name “Hermounts,” Dr. Allen discusses the term’s possible meaning and hypothesizes as follows: “Since the term ‘Hermounts’ is mentioned in reference to both wilderness and wild and ravenous beasts, we can hypothesize that ‘mounts’ equates to wilderness and ‘her’ is equal to wild and ravenous beasts.” But if there is no real linguistic evidence to suggest the meaning of the term “Hermounts,” it is not useful to “hypothesize” in this manner.

Chapter 4, “Archaeology in Mesoamerica,” is a useful summary of the current archaeological sites and the ancient cultures which might possibly have played significant roles in the Book of Mormon story. Dr. Allen suggests a number of correlations between ancient cultures well known in scientific archaeological circles and Book of Mormon peoples: (1) The Olmec culture corresponds with the Jaredites. (2) The Pre-Classic or more agrarian Mayan correlates with the Lamanites and Nephites of 600 B.C. to A.D. 200. (3) The Classic Mayan culture is likely the post Book of Mormon Lamanite culture in which the priests controlled virtually every aspect of the people’s lives. (4) The Zapotecs might be the Mulekites, and those who settled and built up the area of Teotihuacan parallel the migration cultures that traveled to the land northward in 50 B.C. (5) The Izapa culture might fit with the Nephites who remained near the
Pacific coastal plain near the land of first inheritance or the point of disembarkation of Lehi and his traveling group.

Chapter 5, “The Olmek/Jaredite Culture,” contains Dr. Allen’s defense of the idea that the people known today to archaeologists as the Olmecs were the original inhabitants of the New World and were likely the Jaredites of the Book of Mormon. He provides an interesting outline of the evolution of scientific thought regarding the Olmecs and provides several compelling correlations between the Olmecs and the Jaredites. The heartland of the Olmecs was along the gulf coast of Mexico in the states of Veracruz and Tabasco.

It is particularly interesting to learn that a sixteenth-century historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl wrote of a group of people who came from the great tower. They were led to a good and fertile land that today is called Mexico. Based on the discovery of their bones, he refers to these people as giants, as apparently they were of unusually large bony structure.

In chapter 6, “The Maya/Lamanite Culture,” Dr. Allen’s premise is that the Pre-Classic and Early Classic Mayans (570 B.C. to A.D. 420) were, in reality, the same people as the Lamanites, Nephites, and Mulekites in the Book of Mormon. Numerous correlations are drawn between the Book of Mormon text and what archaeologists have taught us about the Mayans.

Located north and west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec (generally held to be the narrow neck of land) is the Oaxaca Valley, dominated anciently by a city where the archaeological site of Monte Alban is now located. The Zapotec Indian civilization had its beginnings here in about 500 B.C. Dr. Allen describes several reasons why it is reasonable to conclude that the Zapotecs were a part of the Mulekite culture (chapter 7, “The Zapotec/Mulekite Culture”). These reasons include: (1) There is a similarity of word comparisons between Hebrew and the Zapotec languages. (2) Monte Alban period I dated to the Mulekite time period. (3) Monte Alban is located in the same area where the early Mulekites possibly lived. (4) A number of elements in the Monte Alban culture appear to be Jewish in origin. (5) The Zapotecs of Monte Alban were influenced by the Olmecs of the Gulf Coast in much the same manner in which he believes the early Mulekites were influenced by the late Jaredites. (6) A small group of conquerors came from Guatemala and Chiapas and superimposed their power over the inhabitants of Monte Alban at the same time that Mosiah led a small group of
Nephites to the land of Zarahemla and became king over both Nephites and Mulekites who lived in the area.

The Book of Mormon text often speaks of a mysterious land. It may be referred to as the “land which was northward” (Alma 63:4) or simply the “land northward” (Alma 63:5-8, 10; Helaman 3:3-4, 7, 10-11). In another place it is referred to as the “northernmost part of the land” (3 Nephi 7:12). It is possible that this land is in the same location as the “great city of Jacobugath” (3 Nephi 9:9). Dr. Allen suggests that this mysterious land might be the ancient city of Teotihuacan, built in the valley of Mexico, near where Mexico City lies today (chapter 8, “The Teotihuacan Culture”). The ancient culture which inhabited this city had its beginnings about 150 B.C. and fell about A.D. 750. The circumstantial evidence that Teotihuacan may indeed have been the “land northward” includes the fact that between 55 B.C. and A.D. 29, the Book of Mormon mentions several migrations into this land where large bodies of water were found. This is the same period when Teotihuacan was experiencing a high growth rate. The valley of Mexico contained many lakes, and in fact Mexico City is built on a dry lake bed. The Book of Mormon speaks of the people in the land northward building houses out of cement because timber was scarce in the land (Helaman 3:7, 10-11). The archaeological site of Teotihuacan contains many buildings made of cement, and timber is indeed scarce in the valley of Mexico.

Obviously not all of the references in the Book of Mormon to the “land northward” necessarily referred to the same, or indeed, to any specific place, since all territory “north” of the narrow neck of land might legitimately be called by that name.

In speculating as to the destination of Hagoth’s ships which were launched into the “west sea, by the narrow neck of land” (Alma 63:50-56), Dr. Allen states: “Landing near Acapulco, the people would have then migrated inland to Mexico City and the surrounding areas” (page 105). It would seem that much is presumed here, and the author owes the reader more reasons for his assumptions.

In writing of the Jaredites, Moroni spoke of “secret combinations” that were responsible for the destruction of both the Jaredites and the Nephites (Ether 8:18, 21-22). Dr. Allen points out that in A.D. 350 the government of Teotihuacan was formed by a combination of merchants, priests, and military men. He then implies that this “combination” government may have been the “secret combinations” of the later Nephite period.
Intuitively, however, I believe we would rather see the Book of Mormon’s secret combinations as clandestine associations which sought to do evil rather than as a legitimate government resulting from the “combination” of different elements of society.

I found chapter 9, “The Izapa Culture,” to be one of the most interesting chapters in the book. Dr. Allen describes the ancient archaeological site of Izapa, near the current city of Tapachula, Mexico. Possible relevance of this site to the Book of Mormon is discussed. A helpful section describes the entire history of the archaeological exploration of this site from 1935 to the 1980s, including the role played by the Church-sponsored New World Archaeological Foundation. The chapter also contains a well-illustrated and thorough discussion of the stone monument discovered there called “Stela 5.”

Izapa is located in the western coastal plain or “Pacific corridor” of Mesoamerica. It is at the southernmost extremity of Mexico near the Guatemala border. Dr. Allen suggests that it may have been a Nephite city from the time of Lehi’s landing to about A.D. 350. There has been intense interest in the Church concerning the possibility that Stela 5, the so-called “tree of life stone,” might have been created to illustrate the vision of the tree of life experienced by both Lehi and Nephi (1 Nephi 8, 11, 12). A detailed defense of this proposition is provided. Whether or not the creators of this stone carving had in mind anything to do with Lehi’s vision will likely never be known for certain, but it is a fascinating topic for consideration.

One question that occurs in the mind of the reader of this chapter is: How did a city with the vulnerable location of this one maintain its “Nephite” character over the years of the Book of Mormon story? If it was, as Dr. Allen suggests, possibly the land of first inheritance, or the original settlement established by Lehi and his group, one might have expected it to lose its “Nephite” identity as soon as Nephi and his followers were forced to flee from the hostile threats of his “Lamanite” brothers. Later on in the Book of Mormon, it is likely that the Pacific corridor was used by hostile Lamanites as a route by which they traveled from the land of Nephi in the south to Zarahemla in the north to attack the Nephites, in Ammonihah for example (Alma 16:2-3). It would seem that the city must have had to be extraordinarily well defended to maintain its Nephite qualities during this period, given its exposed setting.

Chapter 10 introduces the section of the book called “Traditions,” which summarizes the written histories, cultural
patterns, and oral traditions of Mesoamerica, all of which show many interesting parallels with the Book of Mormon text. Chapter 10, "The Customs of the People," specifically summarizes the types of written materials available to us today from which we can learn of these ancient Mesoamerican histories, cultural patterns, and traditions. These include

1. The codices or books written by priests before the Spanish conquest. Most of these were destroyed by Catholic priests after the conquest. Only five major codices have survived, including the Dresden Codex, the Paris Codex, the Madrid Codex, the Grolier Codex, and the Nuttall Codex.

2. Native documents written by Mesoamerican natives after the conquest probably in their native tongues and using as sources either their memories or ancient documents. These include the *Popol Vuh*, written by the Quiche Mayans of Guatemala and containing their mythological description of the creation; the Annals of the Cakchiquels which contain the native description of the Spanish Conquest; the Title of the Lords of Totonicapan; and the Books of Chilam Balam.

3. The Spanish Chronicles or the writings of the post-conquest Catholic clergy of Spanish descent. These chroniclers include Fernando de Alva Ixtlixochitl, Fray Bernardino de Sahagun, Bishop Diego de Landa, Fray Juan de Torquemada, Father Diego Duran, San Bartolome de las Casas, and Bernal Diaz del Castillo.

The most prolific writer on early Mexican history was one of the Spanish chroniclers, Fernando de Alva Ixtlixochitl (A.D. 1568-1648). Chapter 11 contains Dr. Allen's English translation of a part of Ixtlixochitl's writings, which covers the period of time from the great tower to about A.D. 439. He points out a number of similarities between this chronicler's writings and the Book of Mormon text. These include: (1) They both speak of the first civilization coming from the great tower at the time of the confusion of tongues. (2) They both speak of a white god who was born of a virgin and who ascended to heaven after teaching his people. (3) They both record the date of a great destruction occurring in the first month of the 34th year, or at the death of Christ. (4) They both use the same terminology in describing the manner in which cities were named. Ixtlixochitl says, "it was their custom to name it [a large city or a small village] according to the first king or leader who possessed the land" (see the parallel wording in Alma 8:7). (5) They both speak of three distinct civilizations that predate the coming of
Christ. These include the Quinametzin, or the giants which came forth from the great tower and which Dr. Allen thinks might be the Jaredites, or the Mesoamerican Olmecs. Secondly there were the Tultecas, wise men who kept records and who worshipped a god they called Quetzalcoatl. These might be the Nephites. Finally there are the Chichimecatl which may be the same people whom the Book of Mormon calls Lamanites. (6) They both record the destruction of the first civilization, who lived in the northern lands, prior to the time of Christ. (7) They both speak of a nation whose principal area meant "land of abundance" or "bountiful."

Fray Bernardino de Sahagun was a sixteenth-century Spanish priest, and Dr. Allen (chapter 12) sees in his writings many applications to the Book of Mormon. In order for them to be applicable, however, some important assumptions must be made. First the "Tultecas" or "Toltecas" of Sahagun must be the same as the Nephites; "Quetzalcoatl" must be Christ; and "Tula" must be the land of Bountiful. Once these assumptions are made, and it may be a bit presumptuous to do so, we may read in Sahagun's writings such things as:

The Tolteca . . . are wise, learned, experienced. . . . They made what was their temple; its name was "house of beams." Today it stands; it exists, considering that it is indestructible, for it is of rock, or stone. . . . Their houses [are] beautiful, tiled in mosaics, smoothed, stuccoed, very marvelous. . . . The house of Quetzalcoatl, which was his place of worship, stood in the water; a large river passed by it; the river which passed by Tula. . . . They invented the art of medicine. . . . These Tolteca were very wise; they were thinkers, for they originated the year count [calendar]. . . . And they understood well the movements of the heavens; their orbits they learned from the stars [see Helaman 12:15]. . . . Their clothing was . . . the blue knotted cape; their sandals were painted blue, light blue, sky blue. . . . They were tall; they were larger. . . . They were devout. Only one was their God. . . . And they had very great faith in . . . Quetzalcoatl and were very obedient, very devout, and very reverent; for all obeyed, all had faith in Quetzalcoatl when he led them from Tula. He caused all to move, to depart, even
though they were settled there, even though very marvelous were the temples . . . situated at Tula.

Dr. Allen also feels that Sahagun may have written of the council in heaven wherein Jesus Christ was selected to be Savior of the world:

It is told that when yet all was in darkness, when yet no sun had shone and no dawn had broken—it is said—the gods gathered themselves together and took counsel among themselves: Come higher, O gods! Who will carry the burden? . . . And upon this, one of them who was there spoke: Tecusitztecatl presented himself. He said: “O gods, I shall be the one.” And again the gods spoke: “(and) who else?” . . . None dared; no one else came forward. Everyone was afraid; they all drew back. And now present was one man, Nanauatzin; he stood there listening among the others to that which was discussed. Then the gods called to this one. They said to him: “Thou shalt be the one, O Nanauatzin.”

Diego de Landa (in chapter 13) was the Catholic bishop of the Yucatan during the latter part of the sixteenth century. The Yucatan was part of the Mayan culture. Among Latter-day Saint investigators, the Mayans have generally been felt to be the apostate remnants of the Lamanite culture. De Landa’s historical writings of the Yucatan, therefore, might be expected to contain some tidbits of information on the cultural patterns of this remnant. A few such tidbits are provided.

Any amateur student who has tried to read about the Mesoamerican myth or legend of Quetzalcoatl (chapter 14, “The White God Quetzalcoatl”) has found it a frustrating and confusing exercise. Dr. Allen believes that the legend of Quetzalcoatl originated with the visit of Jesus Christ to Mesoamerica, but he also explains the difficulties in trying to correlate the legend of Quetzalcoatl with Jesus Christ. He points out that subsequent to Christ’s visit, scores of individuals, both mythological and real, were given the name or title of Quetzalcoatl. Notably a tenth-century leader and folk hero named Topiltzin took upon himself the name or title of Quetzalcoatl. Indeed most written material about Quetzalcoatl today refers to this tenth-century version. Furthermore, with the passage of time, many pagan attributes have become associated with Quetzalcoatl.
Dr. Allen does list and reference several characteristics of Quetzalcoatl found in early historical writings that seem to parallel the characteristics of Christ: (1) He was recognized as creator of all things. (2) He was born of a virgin. (3) He is described as being white and wearing a white robe. (4) He performed miracles. (5) He taught the ordinance of baptism. (6) He prophesied of future events. (7) He was a universal God in Mesoamerica as opposed to being recognized as merely a local god. (8) A great destruction was associated with him at one point in his life. (9) The cross was a symbol of Quetzalcoatl. (10) He sent out disciples to preach his word. (11) He promised he would come a second time. (12) A new star is associated with him. (13) The children of Quetzalcoatl will become lords and heirs of the earth. It seems, however, that this discussion of Quetzalcoatl might have been better organized to flow more logically from a pedagogical standpoint.

In chapter 15, “Cultural Patterns,” Dr. Allen looks at several current and historical cultural features or patterns in Mesoamerica and compares them with those in the Book of Mormon. He suggests as he begins the chapter that as a traveler visits some of the small villages in southern Mexico today, he “gets the feeling that things have not changed very much over the last 2,000 years.” The cultural features he treats make up a pertinent list including: astronomy, cement, climate, clothes, corn (grains), directions, food, horses, joy, liquor, metal, medicine, metal (iron), money, serpents, stone boxes, and weapons.

In chapter 16, “A Survey of Geography,” the evolution of thinking relative to Book of Mormon geography is summarized from its beginnings in the early days of the Church. The thinking has varied, and still does today, from a nihilistic approach, which believes any attempt to place the book’s events in a specific setting is anathema, to the “traditional” approach, suggested early on by Orson Pratt, in which the land northward is North America, the narrow neck of land is the Isthmus of Panama, and the land southward is South America. Another major paradigm includes what Allen calls the “internal geographic map,” which is a hypothetical map of topographic relationships and land masses without any attempt to place them on any existing specific map. Finally, he concludes that the majority of current writers and scholars favor a limited setting in Mesoamerica as the most likely location.
In one paragraph on page 194 he fails to distinguish between the concepts of "narrow neck" of land and "narrow pass." This leads to a confusing comparison between different authors' ideas of these concepts.

In chapter 17, "An Exercise in Geography," Dr. Allen takes the geographic information in two segments of the Book of Mormon text (Alma 22:27-33 and Alma 50:7-15) and makes specific suggestions as to the locations in Mesoamerica of the land of Bountiful, the land of Zarahemla, the land of Nephi, and the cities by the east sea (Moroni and Lehi). The major difference between Dr. Allen's formulation and that of Dr. John L. Sorenson is made clear here. Dr. Allen places the cities of Moroni and Lehi on the Caribbean coast of Belize. Thus the boundary between Zarahemla and Bountiful runs directly east to west, and Bountiful is a large land mass involving the southern part of the Yucatan Peninsula from Belize to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Dr. Sorenson, on the other hand, places the cities of Moroni and Lehi on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico just east of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The boundary between Zarahemla and Bountiful then runs almost north and south, and Bountiful is a narrow land just east of the Coatzacoalcos River in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Dr. Allen's concept of directions in the Book of Mormon is that north, south, east, and west are true compass directions, while Dr. Sorenson uses the concept of "Nephite north" in which east is toward the Gulf of Mexico, west is toward the Pacific coast, and north and south are appropriately modified to fit in between. Both seem to agree as to the location of the land of Desolation, just west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

I must admit to a preexisting bias in favor of Dr. Sorenson's formulation. If one studies Dr. Allen's maps 17-6 and 17-7 on pages 203 and 204 respectively, one might see why I am uncomfortable with the location of Bountiful, especially because of the intimate relationship which it should have with the land of Desolation and the narrow pass leading to the land northward (Alma 22:30; 52:9). Also, it is difficult to correlate Dr. Allen's Bountiful with Hagoth and his ship building and with the narrow neck of land as described in Alma 63:5. Admittedly, though, it would be unwise for any investigator to reject either model and close his mind to ongoing dialogue.

Dr. Allen's premise in chapter 18 is that the land northward in the Book of Mormon is the land area northward from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, including the Mexican states
now known as Oaxaca, Veracruz, Puebla, and part of Tabasco. He further proposes that the land northward extended to the valley of Mexico where Mexico City is located. He justifies his premise by itemizing several points of compatibility between the Book of Mormon text and archaeological findings pertinent to this area. He then provides an apparently comprehensive listing of Book of Mormon verses that include a mention of the land northward, the land of Desolation, the land north, north, land which was northward, northerly, and northward. This scriptural listing seems a bit exhaustive and exhausting. Though it does provide a good deal of information about the land northward, this information must gleaned from a large body of repetitious facts. Perhaps a more readable approach might have been to list pertinent points of information once and provide their scriptural references.

Chapter 19 is concerned with the land southward. Dr. Allen proposes that the land southward is the land located southward from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, including the Mexican states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo. He also includes the countries of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, and the northern tip of Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

We are introduced to the idea that Lehi’s group, on their arrival in the Western Hemisphere, probably encountered “scantily clothed, sun-baked, dark-skinned natives living along the coast. . . . Most likely Laman and Lemuel, in their traditional jealousy of Nephi assumed the leadership of these natives. Thus began the great Lamanite (Maya) culture.”

Among those investigators who have provided us their concepts of the layout of Book of Mormon cities there are, inevitably I think, some differences. One of the basic differences is the way in which the land southward is divided into the land of Nephi and the land of Zarahemla by the “narrow strip of wilderness.” Here we learn that Dr. Allen places that dividing line in highland Guatemala, running east to west, from the area of the southern Yucatan, just south of Belize, to the Pacific coast near the town of Tapachula, Mexico. Zarahemla then is the entire Yucatan peninsula, the Usumacinta River valley, and the Chiapas depression. The land of Nephi is highland Guatemala and parts of El Salvador. The alternate concept, that espoused by John L. Sorenson, would orient the narrow strip of wilderness in a more north-to-south direction, located in highland Guatemala just south of its border with
Mexico. This dividing line would then extend south from the Gulf of Mexico near the combined deltas of the Usumacinta and Grijalva rivers. This formulation excludes the general area of the Yucatan as a part of the land of Zarahemla. As stated previously, this reviewer is uncomfortable with the long distance separating the city of Bountiful and the narrow neck of land in Dr. Allen’s formulation. The scripture seems clear that the land of Bountiful with its capital city Bountiful is “northward,” bordering on the land called Desolation (Alma 22:30-32). Dr. Allen suggests that “Bountiful,” in addition to being a specific land and the name of that land’s capital city, is also synonymous with the entire land southward (including the lands of Bountiful, Zarahemla, and Nephi). This third meaning of the term “Bountiful” seems unnecessary if one assumes that the land Bountiful is a limited area situated transversely across the narrow neck of land immediately southward of the “line” (likely a river) separating the land southward from the land of Desolation.

Though Dr. Allen favors the Chiapas depression as the site of the land of Zarahemla (and thus the Grijalva River as the river Sidon), he has not excluded the idea that Zarahemla might have been located in the Usumacinta valley—implying that the Usumacinta River is still in the running for the river Sidon.

In chapter 20, “Landing Sites,” Dr. Allen speculates, marshalling textual evidence, as to the location of the disembarkation sites of the Jaredites, the Mulekites, and Lehi’s colony. Little information is available to help us specifically locate these sites, especially that of the Jaredites, though some evidence does exist.

Most investigators feel that the ancient Olmec civilization (chapter 21, “The Voyage of the Jaredites”), whose population centered along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, were the Jaredites of the Book of Mormon. This doesn’t necessarily mean that their landing site was on the Atlantic side, however, since they may have wandered many years before finally settling. Dr. Allen presents a helpful summary of the arguments for both an Atlantic crossing and those for a Pacific crossing. He favors the latter and summarizes the reasons for his conclusion.

Allen traces Lehi’s journey from Jerusalem to Mesoamerica in chapter 22, “The Voyage of Lehi’s Colony.” He proposes the area of Tapachula, Mexico (the ancient ruins of Izapa), as a possible site for the “land of first inheritance.”
Dr. Allen proposes in chapter 23 that the Mulekites disembarked near Panuco, which is near the present-day city of Tampico, Mexico. He presents a thorough and interesting discussion of all Book of Mormon references to the Mulekites, including the writings of sixteenth-century Mesoamerican historians which may refer to the Mulekites.

He suggests that the "king-men" of Alma 51:5 and 51:8 were Mulekites whose "attempts to establish kings may have been Mulekite (tribe of Judah) attempts to regain the glory of the olden days in Jerusalem." This conclusion seems unwarranted, especially since the people of Zarahemla, as they were discovered by Mosiah, were hardly people of "high birth" (Alma 51:8) likely to harbor an elitist mentality.

In chapter 24, "Things That Are Narrow," we learn that Dr. Allen regards the "narrow neck of land" as the Isthmus of Tehuantepec and believes that the "narrow pass" refers to the old King's Highway that runs north, paralleling the Coatzacoalcos River, from the Pacific coastal plain to the gulf coast and then north along the gulf coast. Others, such as John L. Sorenson, have suggested a more restricted definition of the "narrow pass." Actually Dr. Allen's and Dr. Sorenson's concepts of the narrow pass need not be regarded as altogether different. Allen suggests that the narrow pass is the full length of the King’s Highway as it winds its way from the Pacific coast some 125 miles to near the Gulf of Mexico before turning parallel to the gulf coast to traverse the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Sorenson feels that the narrow pass is a short portion of this highway route running east and west from a point just west of the Coatzacoalcos River for a few miles to Acuyacan, Mexico.

In chapter 25, "Wilderness Areas," Allen defines "wilderness" as uninhabited areas. He reviews all references in the Book of Mormon text to the word "wilderness" with emphasis on plausible distances between major Book of Mormon sites. He includes an interesting archaeological description and illustration of defensive earthworks found near Tikal which might have been similar to those which Moroni caused to be built surrounding cities near the eastern seashore (Alma 49:2, 4, 19, 22; 50:1-4; 53:4-5). He again addresses the question of the location of the land and city of Bountiful. He proposes a location in the north of the Yucatan Peninsula near the Caribbean coast. He again struggles with Alma 22:32 and Alma 63:5, which indicate a contiguous relationship of the land Bountiful with the land of Desolation, the west sea, the narrow
neck of land, and the land northward. To solve this problem and maintain the northern Yucatan as a plausible site for the city of Bountiful, he reiterates the proposal that the term “Bountiful” is used not only for naming a city and a land but also a vast area extending from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec to and including the Yucatan. He also suggests an alternate explanation, which is that there were two lands Bountiful—one on the Caribbean coast and one along the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Allen begins chapter 26, “Bodies of Water,” with a discussion of the east sea and the west sea. The lay student of Book of Mormon geography can’t help but be somewhat amused by the struggles that occur in this area. No one argues about the identification of the west sea. It is the Pacific Ocean even though the Pacific Ocean is located to the south of this area of Mesoamerica. The disagreements begin with the identity of the east sea. Dr. Allen and others believe that the east sea is the Caribbean, while John L. Sorenson thinks it is likely the Gulf of Mexico. Alma 22:32 as it is usually interpreted supports Dr. Sorenson’s contention, since all investigators agree that the border between Desolation and Bountiful runs north to south across the Isthmus of Tehuantepec parallel to the Coatzacoalcos River. Intuitively one tends to interpret the verse as meaning that a well-conditioned Nephite could run from the east sea to the west sea along this border in a day and a half. The east sea would then have to be the Gulf of Mexico. Dr. Allen has an alternate explanation of this verse, though his explanation is frankly a bit confusing to me. After musing over his explanation, I think I finally understand it. Let me explain. The phrase in Alma 22:32, “from the east to the west sea” does not refer to a distance between two seas. Rather it refers to the distance from some specific inland point to the shore of the west sea. If we follow the boundary line between the lands of Desolation and Bountiful south from the Gulf of Mexico, we expect to come to some notable point along that common border. The exact identity of this point is the confusing part of Dr. Allen’s explanation. He provides the explanation that this point is “Desolation’s east boundary” which is not a point at all, but rather a line. If Dr. Allen’s interpretation of this verse is correct, it would be fair to say that there is some ambiguity in this verse regarding the distance which the verse is trying to quantify. Also, assuming Dr. Allen’s explanation is accurate, there is a bit of irony in all this. The direction which the Nephite would be traveling on this line is still referred to in the Book of Mormon
as east to west, which is certainly not in keeping with the compass. In another place, Dr. Allen makes a concession to the Gulf of Mexico's being the "sea... on the east" (Alma 50:34).

Also in chapter 26, Dr. Allen takes ten major bodies of water mentioned in the Book of Mormon and discusses plausible specific Mesoamerican sites for them. These include the west sea (Pacific Ocean); the east sea (the Caribbean); the waters of Mormon (Lake Atitlan); the waters of Sebus (no specific body of water suggested); a land of pure water (the village of Almolonga in the Department of Quetzaltenango); the river Sidon (even though he suggests both the Grijalva and Usumacinta rivers as possibilities, he defends only the Grijalva), the land of many waters (the gulf coast area near Villahermosa and the Tuxtla Mountains, north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec around the probable sites for the hill Cumorah and the hill Shim); the place where the sea divides the land (the Coatzacoalcos River); the waters of Ripliancum (the Papaloapan water basin); and the large bodies of water in the land northward (the lakes in the Valley of Mexico where Mexico City is now located).

Most of the emphasis in chapter 27, "Hills and Valleys," is given to Dr. Allen's selection of the Hill Vigia or the Cerro del Vigia (in Spanish, the "hill of the view") as the ancient hills Ramah and Cumorah. His explanation is thorough and instills a desire to visit the site.

Most of chapter 28, "The Land of Nephi," concerns itself with Dr. Allen's defense of the idea (first significantly advanced by John L. Sorenson) that the ancient archaeological site of Kaminaljuyu, located near Guatemala City, is the city of Nephi. Similarly in chapter 29, "The Land of Zarahemla," he mainly defends the idea that the land of Zarahemla was located in the Chiapas depression and that the city of Zarahemla is likely the archaeological site called Santa Rosa located on the west of the Grijalva River. Some of his other hypotheses were interesting and new ideas, at least to this reviewer, although many of his points have been gathered and borrowed wholesale from other sources. For example, he proposes that the ancient site of Monte Alban, located north of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, was a Mulekite city between the years 500 and 200 B.C., a la Sorenson. Allen alone further proposes that Monte Alban became a Nephite city between 180 B.C. and A.D. 350. He suggests that one reason the Lamanites and Gadianton robbers wanted the Nephites destroyed is that the Nephites occupied a land area that lay between the land northward in the valley of
Mexico, controlled by the Gadianton band, and the land southward, controlled by the Lamanites. Thus the Nephites stood in the way of commercial and cultural exchange between these two larger nations.

There are remarkable correlations between the cultural characteristics of the Book of Mormon people during the period of apostasy beginning about A.D. 200 and the Mayans during their Early Classic period. These are outlined in chapter 30, "The Great Apostasy." Dr. Allen cites both Book of Mormon verses and archaeological records which provide evidence that both cultures showed the emergence of a ruling hereditary elite of vain and apostate priests who surrounded themselves with luxury and built buildings with impressive and massive exteriors but with little concern for the practical use of their interior spaces.

The final chapter, 31, concerns itself primarily with the growth of the Church in Mexico since the restoration of the gospel in 1830.

Dr. Allen has obviously made good use of a scriptural word search computer program. In analyzing various geographic topics he has sometimes used this program to review all pertinent Book of Mormon references to a word or to words pertinent to that topic. This is usually helpful though on occasion the lists of references seem overly long and redundant.

If the book has an overall weakness, I suggest that its pedagogy is sometimes inconsistent. It seems that some of the chapters are a bit more tedious reading than they need to be. One is occasionally cognizant of a good deal of repetition. Each chapter contains excellent and useful information, yet perhaps a bit more thought could have been given to the succinctness and logical flow with which the information is presented.

Some of the book's chapters are concluded with a section called "questions commonly asked." Questions are asked and then answered. Presumably these questions are the one's most frequently asked by those whom the author has conducted on tours. The questions were few and the answers brief. I did not often find these questions to be the ones I would like to ask.

I have one personal criterion by which I tend to judge a nonfiction book: How much of the author's "heart and soul" have been put into the book? In other words, how rigorous and dedicated an effort has gone into the production of the book. Using this criterion, I would have to give Dr. Allen's book high
marks. There is little question that this book reports his life’s work to date.

Reviewed by Richard Lloyd Anderson

This short paperback is the latest but not the final installment in the continuing fulfillment of the Moroni-Joseph Smith prophecy: "my name . . . should be both good and evil spoken of among all people" (JS-H 1:33). Rumor and ridicule had intensified for ten years before angry ex-Mormon Philastus Hurlbut collected the worst in signed statements from Joseph Smith's former townsmen. Negative studies of the Prophet rely heavily on these hostile declarations of 1833; but examinations of the religious integrity of Joseph Smith have minimized such statements, maintaining basically that this modern prophet is the ultimate expert on his own spiritual story.

Some forty testimonials of 1833 and later are printed in the last third of Rodger Anderson's short book, but they could not be studied in depth in his 116-page commentary. He mostly argues that Hugh Nibley and I have made a weak case against Hurlbut's work, concluding that these 1833 statements and certain later ones "must be granted permanent status as primary documents relating to Joseph Smith's early life and the origins of Mormonism" (p. 114). But not quite—the concluding chapter is laced with rules on when to trust a testimonial. For instance, "ghost-writing may have colored some of the testimony" (p. 113), and "they did not always distinguish hearsay from observation" (p. 114). In other words, the Nibley-Anderson analysis is attacked, but its main cautions are at least verbally accepted.

Rodger Anderson often falls into the above historical traps. First, his book regularly assumes that signed testimony contains only the views of the signer, ignoring the many ways an interviewer may superimpose his biases on the statement he is taking. And although Rodger Anderson admits his signed

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declarations mingle hearsay with observation, he has difficulty keeping the two apart. So the book shows a marked softness in insisting on firsthand evidence: “preference should be given to witnesses speaking from personal, direct knowledge, not hearsay or obvious neighborhood gossip” (p. 115). But why talk of “preference”? Without direct knowledge, responsible history disappears.

The following discussion will give examples of what it means to insist on direct evidence for Joseph Smith’s early life. Rebuttal rhetoric is not needed here as much as specific illustrations of the tension between primary and secondary evidence. So my dissent will not be noted for many Rodger Anderson judgments, but the issue between us is nearly always a difference on what is firsthand, reliable documentation. His approach is deficient in the following cases, mainly selected for their relevance in constructing an accurate picture of Joseph Smith’s New York character.

Case 1: Atypical Statements in Interviews

Rodger Anderson gives a short critique of Hugh Nibley’s historical methods in the Myth Makers.2 Much of this is beside the point, since Nibley chose to spoof the broad inconsistencies of Joseph Smith’s detractors. In Rodger Anderson’s view, Nibley too quickly ridicules claims that Joseph found the plates not through an angel, but by the folk art of the seer stone. Two sources are cited, one of which is supposedly Martin Harris:

Nibley . . . chooses to ignore Martin Harris’s statement of 1859: “Joseph . . . described the manner of finding his plates. He found them by looking in the stone found in the well of Mason Chase. The family had likewise told me the same thing.” (p. 20)

But this quotation comes from an interview with Martin Harris, and the label of “Martin Harris’s statement” is misleading. As long as someone else wrote this down, one can call it reported conversation, not a personal statement. The distinction is critical, for David Whitmer was interviewed by

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newspapers about a dozen times and normally issued a personal correction of the printed interview on a number of key points. Here we don’t know whether Harris ever read Tiffany’s report or commented on it. However, it is contradicted by regularly reported Harris comments that an angel first revealed to Joseph Smith where to find the plates.

The interviewer here was Joel Tiffany, an articulate spiritualist. Tiffany says that he purchased a copy of E. D. Howe’s *Mormonism Unvailed* (where Hurlbut’s affidavits were first printed) and relied on it for the “facts” of Mormonism’s beginnings. Tiffany strongly favored a theory in which lower spirits influenced Joseph through a seer stone rather than one in which an angel of God gave him divine truths. The context of the above statement is instructive, for Harris said of Joseph, “an angel had appeared to him, and told him it was God’s work.” Then Tiffany reported Harris was confused (“seemed to wander from the subject”), after which the above quotation is given about finding the plates through a seer stone. Tiffany’s interview leaves a good deal of ambiguity on this point, despite another segment of the conversation reported as a seer stone discovery.³

Tiffany’s unusual details should not fly in the face of what Martin Harris consistently said about the angel throughout his life. Two out of a dozen documented examples can be given here. In 1829 the *Rochester Gem* ran an article about Martin Harris contacting printers for the Book of Mormon:

> He gave something like the following account of it. In the autumn of 1827, a man named Joseph Smith of Manchester, in Ontario County, said that he had been visited by the spirit of the Almighty in a dream, and informed that in a certain hill in that town was deposited a Golden Bible.⁴

Over forty years later, Harris returned to the Church in Utah and on the way met with an Iowa editor. The newspaperman

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reported how Harris "loves to relate the incidents with which he was personally connected," and then referred to the "story" he had just heard from Martin: "In September, 1828, as the story goes, Joseph Smith, directed by an angel . . . dug up a very solid stone chest, within which were the tablets of gold."5

Rodger Anderson also mentions "Orsamus Turner's 1851 recollection that the Smith family 'said it was by looking at this stone in a hat, the light excluded, that Joseph discovered the plates' " (pp. 20-21). But this is not a "recollection" from Turner, a pioneer Palmyra editor of some experience with the Smiths. Turner first said he got reliable information on Martin Harris from "several respectable citizens of Palmyra to whom he made early disclosures." Then Turner said Harris's story was in substance as follows: "The Prophet Joseph was directed by the angel where to find, by excavation, at the place afterwards called Mormon Hill, the gold plates." In this setting, Turner claims an inconsistency in the story, not from his own knowledge, but claims the family "made a new version of it to one of their neighbors." My emphasized phrase indicates the source of the different story of finding the plates by the seer stone, which Rodger Anderson claimed to come from Turner. But Turner is only reporting a rumor from an unidentified neighbor.

So what is really firsthand in the case of finding the plates? Since Joseph Smith is the only one who was directed to them in the first place, his consistent testimony of being directed by the angel should settle the question. The above examples show that Martin Harris and the Smith family gave reports consistent with Joseph's.

Case 2: Substituting Rumor for Experience

Hurlbut's goal in gathering New York evidence was openly declared: to "completely divest Joseph Smith of all claims to the character of an honest man."6 His case is essentially: "Since Joseph habit-ually lied and cheated, don't believe he was truthful on his visions." I personally think this causation should

be reversed: Since the Palmyra-Manchester communities could not believe in Joseph Smith’s visions, they developed the corporate rationalization that the budding prophet lied and cheated. Clearly the affidavits are filled with labels when the documentary historian wants facts, not opinions.

An example of empty vilification is Pomeroy Tucker’s *Origin, Rise, and Progress of Mormonism*, an 1867 work chiefly valuable for the author’s memories of Martin Harris of and printing the Book of Mormon. Nibley’s eye for bluffing caught Tucker telling of Joseph Smith’s first money digging, based on “several of the individuals participating in this and subsequent diggings, and many others well remembering the stories of the time.” Rodger Anderson cries “foul” when Nibley points out hearsay in relying on memory of the “the stories of the time,” but Tucker did in part appeal to community rumor. Yet Tucker has a better illustration of hearsay overcoming firsthand recollection. He says there was a general suspicion in the neighborhood of the Smiths because they were idle and there were unidentified thefts in “sheepfolds” and “hencoops.” After thus beheading the Smiths morally, Tucker incidentally adds, “though it is but common fairness to accompany this fact by the statement, that it is not within the remembrance of the writer.”

This difference between gossip and personal knowledge brought a reaction from John Stafford, a neighbor of Joseph’s age who became a respected doctor and later commented about Joseph Smith to inquiring RLDS leaders: “He was a real clever, jovial boy. What Tucker said about them was false absolutely.”

**Case 3: Reporting Conflicting “Confessions”**

Rodger Anderson’s book is mainly organized as a refutation of my 1970 article, “Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reappraised,” a negative evaluation of Hurlbut’s collected statements. I see most of these 1833 statements as little more than local protests against founding a new religion in

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8. Ibid., 15.
10. See n. 1 above.
their midst, the psychological equivalent of the “how could he, of all people” slurs against Jesus (Matthew 13:53-54). These poison letters far more often express disgust at Joseph Smith than try to explain him. Three longer statements are exceptions, one of which comes from the articulate Willard Chase, a Methodist exhorter and artisan whom Joseph asked to make a chest for the plates. Chase reports what Joseph told about bringing the plates home, and his details remarkably correlate with Lucy Smith’s history here.11

But Chase’s version of first finding the plates at Cumorah four years before is filled with “exaggerated, ridiculing details.” Rodger Anderson objects to my phrase, as he claims that three Mormon sources besides Joseph Smith and four non-Mormon sources agree on these details. The issue is, which details? Chase and the non-Mormon sources add the stage props of magic and money digging to the first Cumorah visit, whereas Joseph Smith and the Mormon sources have only the personal appearances of the angel and of Satan trying to dissuade Joseph Smith.12 The two versions do not mix, since one claims divine direction and the other human appeasement of a spirit guarding a treasure. The Mormon sources reflect or quote Joseph Smith, while the non-Mormon sources here reflect a sarcastic version in a community that did not accept the reality of Joseph getting plates, whether by revelation or incantation. Rodger Anderson is sure that Joseph first told the magical version and then cleaned up his story. Joseph Smith gives no other report except the coming of an angel to reveal the plates. One can believe that he first told a magical variation only by letting others tell Joseph’s story for him. But it is all too easy to put words in another’s mouth.

Yet Rodger Anderson believes that Peter Ingersoll invented a Joseph Smith story. Peter lived near Joseph Smith and was employed to go with him to Pennsylvania to move Emma’s personal property to the Smith farm in the fall of 1827. Ingersoll claims that after this, Joseph told him he brought home white sand in his work frock and walked into the house to find “the family” (parents, Emma, brothers and sisters) eating.

11 The statements of Chase and other statements collected by Hurlbut first appeared in E. D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed (Painesville, OH: E. D. Howe, 1834), ch. 17. They are reprinted in Appendix A of the Rodger I. Anderson book.

When they asked what he carried, he "very gravely" told them (for the first time) that he had a "golden Bible" and had received a revelation that no one could see it and live. At that point (according to Ingersoll), Joseph offered to let the family see, but they fearfully refused, and Ingersoll says that Joseph added, "Now, I have got the damned fools fixed, and will carry out the fun."  

Rodger Anderson agrees with me that this is just a tall tale. Why? Family sources prove they looked forward to getting the plates long before this late 1827 occurrence, and Joseph had far more respect for his family than the anecdote allows. So Rodger Anderson thinks that Ingersoll at first believed Joseph and then retaliated: "it seems likely that Ingersoll created the story as a way of striking back at Smith for his own gullibility in swallowing a story he later became convinced was a hoax" (p. 56). That may be, and there are perhaps others making affidavits with similar motives. But the more provable point is that good stories die hard. Facts were obviously bent to make Joseph Smith the butt of many a joke. So anecdotes could be yarns good for a guffaw around a pot-bellied stove.

Ingersoll has another story in this class. Joseph planned to move Emma and the plates to Pennsylvania at the end of 1827. Then Ingersoll has Joseph playing a religious mind game with Martin Harris: "I... told him that I had a command to ask the first honest man I met with, for fifty dollars in money, and he would let me have it. I saw at once, said Jo, that it took his notion, for he promptly give me the fifty." Willard Chase tells a similar story, not identifying his source. But in this case both Joseph Smith and Martin Harris gave their recollections. Both say that Martin was converted to Joseph Smith's revelations first and then offered the money out of conviction, not because of sudden street-side flattery. The best historical evidence is not

13 Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, 235-36.
14 Joseph Smith's 1832 history reads: "And in December following we moved to Susquehanna by the assistance of a man by the name of Martin Harris, who became convinced of the visions and gave me fifty dollars to bear my expenses." Dean C. Jessee, Personal Writings of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 7. According to the 1859 Tiffany interview with Harris, Joseph first told Harris that the Lord had called him to finance the Book of Mormon. Then after prayer, God "showed me that it was his work." Then Martin took the initiative to pay Joseph's Palmyra debts "and furnished him money for his journey." Kirkham, New Witness for Christ in America, 2:382.
something told by another party, especially one with hostility to the person he is reporting.

Case 4: Prompting the Witness

What specific things could Joseph Smith’s townsmen tell about his character? Not much, according to Hurlbut’s two general affidavits. The Palmyra group signed a declaration that the Smiths “were particularly famous for visionary projects,” a report of public reputation, not personal observation. When “spent much of their time in digging for money” follows, it indeed carries the tone of “famous for,” not, “I watched them do it.” The bottom line was the evaluation of the Prophet and his father, who were “considered entirely destitute of moral character, and addicted to vicious habits.” With “considered” being the same thing as “famous for,” the statement is historically empty. We have only learned that 51 prominent men were embarrassed by the Smiths. Eleven more in the Manchester farm area signed a crisper evaluation of the Smith family, “a lazy, indolent set of men, but also intemperate; and their word was not to be depended upon.”

My 1970 article showed how these similar phrases were sprinkled throughout most New York affidavits. For instance, Parley Chase bunched standard condemnations and signed his own version of “I don’t like the Smiths.” My 1970 reasoning was that Hurlbut probably wrote the group affidavits (and Parley Chase’s cribbed copy), so striking parallels in the other affidavits indicated his influence: “Hurlbut either suggested this language, penned it for signing, or interpolated it afterwards.”

Rodger Anderson defends the affidavits by noting that these similarities “may only mean that Hurlbut submitted the same questions to some of the parties involved” (p. 28). In this view the interrogator asked the same questions to each party, such as, “Was digging for money the general employment of the Smith family” (p. 28)? Several affidavits using these phrases would then be reflecting Hurlbut’s question. Rodger Anderson adds another possible question to explain parallels: Was their reputation respectable, “or were they addicted to indolence, intemperance, or lying” (p. 29)? One of my 1970 possibilities

15 These two general affidavits are in Howe, Mormonism Unveiled, 261-62.
was that Hurlbut “suggested this language.” Lawyers call the
technique “leading the witness,” traditionally forbidden on
direct examination because legal theory requires that the witness
should speak his own mind, not have thoughts and words
prepackaged for him.

Rodger Anderson recoils at my suggestion that the
affidavits were “contaminated by Hurlbut,” but he has merely
argued harder for one road to this same result. Rodger
Anderson then contends that Hurlbut’s influence does not
matter, since many of the statements were signed under oath
before a magistrate. This is one of scores of irrelevancies. The
question is credibility, not form. As Jesus essentially said in the
Sermon on the Mount, the honest person is regularly believable,
not just under oath. Nor does the act of signing settle all, since
it is hardly human nature to read the fine print of a contract or all
details of prewritten petitions. Rodger Anderson finds
Ingersoll’s sand-for-plates story “the most dubious” (p. 56) and
thus admits that Ingersoll is “the possible exception” in
“knowingly swearing to a lie” (p. 114). But Ingersoll does not
tell taller stories than many others glinting in the hostile
statements reprinted by Rodger Anderson. Like the persecuting
orthodox from the Pharisees to the Puritans, the New York
community was performing an act of moral virtue to purge itself
of the stigma of an offending new religion. Hurlbut contributed
to the process of mutual contamination of similar stories and
catch-words.

Eight Hurlbut testimonials do not appear in Rodger
Anderson’s collection; he gathered them in Ohio and
Pennsylvania with the motive to prove that early minister
Solomon Spaulding wrote fiction of pre-Columbian America that
was plagiarized to become the Book of Mormon. Since
historians generally dismiss this “Spaulding theory,” Hurlbut’s
affidavits supporting it now appear as prompted propaganda. E.
D. Howe, the publisher of Hurlbut’s interviews, visited some of
those making the Spaulding recollections to verify their
signatures. The problem, however, is not the signatures but the
strange similarities and overdone content. Fawn M. Brodie, for
instance, is strangely divided in believing that Hurlbut’s New
York affidavits “throw considerable light on the writing of the
Book of Mormon,” but that his Pennsylvania-Ohio statements are factually distorted.

It can clearly be seen that the affidavits were written by Hurlbut, since the style is the same throughout. It may be noted also that although five out of the eight had heard Spaulding’s story only once, there was a surprising uniformity in the details they remembered after twenty-two years. Six recalled the names Nephi, Lamanite, etc.; six held that the manuscript described the Indians as descendants of the lost ten tribes; four mentioned that the great wars caused the erection of the Indian mounds; and four noted the ancient scriptural style. The very tightness with which Hurlbut here was implementing his theory rouses an immediate suspicion that he did a little judicious prompting.18

Oberlin College has the only known Spaulding manuscript, with its broad similarity of migrations to America but with details totally at variance with the neighbors’ recollections. Diehards can argue for another Spaulding manuscript, but style predicts what any number of manuscripts would show from the old minister’s untalented pen: “florid sentiment and grandiose rhetoric” with all of the “stereotyped patterns” of the melodramatic novels of the day.19 Since no such mind produced the Book of Mormon, affidavits are incorrect that allege similarities between an exaggerated romance and the sober religious exhortations of the Book of Mormon prophets.

My original article outlined an objective test. The standard phrases of the affidavits stressed indolence among the Smith’s cardinal sins, a tip-off on what Hurlbut wanted to prove. But as a serious Smith family historian, the “lazy” epithet strikes me as ridiculous. Lucy Smith’s detailed history of the family from New England through New York is a saga of industry against unforeseen setbacks. Her home productions combined with the farm income and coopering of her husband, supplemented with

18 Ibid., 446-47.
19 Ibid., 450.
scarce cash as her sons regularly hired out.20 With his strange mixture of admiration and skepticism on the Smiths, Lorenzo Saunders objectively described one of their farm operations: "The Smiths were great sugar makers. . . . They made seven thousand pounds one year and took the bounty in the county—of $50.00."21 The bottom line? A half dozen New York statements speak of indolence, which is demonstrably inaccurate. How can the neighbors' declarations be trusted on other main themes if their idleness claim is clearly false?

**Case 5: The Best Joseph Smith Source**

Rodger Anderson strangely disclaims responsibility for the consequences of his book. His object is merely to prove that New York testimonials were taken in good faith: "Whether or not it follows that the conclusions of the Smiths' neighbors about the events they witnessed are in fact justified is a task I leave to other researchers" (pp. 7-8). But the author really does not leave judgments on Joseph Smith to others. The Hurlbut affidavits have a single common denominator—the Smiths, and particularly the younger Joseph, deceived their neighbors through money digging and in other things regularly proved their unreliability and dishonesty.

Thus the issue for those who signed the New York affidavits was the trustworthiness of Joseph Smith. Since Rodger Anderson argues so intensely for respecting Hurlbut and his signers, evidently their supposed view of Joseph Smith is really his: "For them, he would always remain a superstitious adolescent dreamer and his success as a prophet a riddle for which there was no answer" (p. 116). But the New York townsmen had a stronger answer—fifty-one signers in Palmyra said the Prophet was "entirely destitute of moral character." The Prophet answered the core issue of his youth in the blunt Nauvoo comment: "I never told you I was perfect, but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught."22

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21 E. L. Kelley Interview of Lorenzo Saunders, Sept. 17, 1884, E. L. Kelley Papers, Box 1, Fold. 7, RLDS Archives.

If money digging is part of the young Joseph Smith’s imperfection, so be it. Rodger Anderson discusses how my mentality resists all possibility of treasure searching by Joseph Smith, a conclusion aided by quoting an article twenty-one years old instead of my recent articles on the same subject. Yet I would not change my 1970 sentence: “if the Smiths participated aggressively in treasure seeking, they participated in a passing cultural phenomenon, shared widely by people of known honesty.”

Folklore concerning the Smiths’ appropriating a neighbor’s sheep circulated in many versions in Palmyra, and probing its source tells something about Joseph Smith’s good faith. Rodger Anderson takes a combative stance in treating my study of the William Stafford statement containing the sheep story: “Anderson’s first charge is that Hurlbut probably wrote Stafford’s affidavit and ‘merely had him sign it’ ” (p. 48). In fact, I made no “charge,” but raised a series of possibilities—that because William Stafford became a sailor “beginning in early life,” he evidently had little formal education, which in turn would “heighten the possibility that Hurlbut composed Stafford’s affidavit and merely had him sign it.” Little turns on the point, though I have many doubts about the affidavit with its central story of the Smith family borrowing a sheep for sacrifice but then eating the meat when the treasure dig misfired.

The clever ending made this floating folklore in Palmyra, where the town historian later observed that “various stories have been told about the sacrificing of the sheep.” In the Hurlbut report of William Stafford, “old Joseph and one of the boys” asked for the sheep for sacrificing at the place where Joseph, Jr., had discovered buried valuables. Permission was granted “to gratify my curiosity,” but the dig failed and the affidavit adds: “This, I believe, is the only time they ever made money-digging a profitable business.” Rodger Anderson to the contrary, this wording was designed to implicate Joseph and family in dishonestly manipulating Stafford, reinforced by the following comment that the Smiths and digging friends really sought more “mutton than money.”

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Joseph’s character is the point of all this. In 1970 I was intrigued by a version of sacrificed sheep from two careful historians who talked with Wallace W. Miner in the 1930s. Miner lived near William Stafford, who died about 1863, when Miner was about twenty. Miner said he once asked Stafford if the Prophet stole his sheep, and the answer was that “Joseph came and admitted that he took it for sacrifice but he was willing to work for it. He made wooden sap buckets to fully pay for it.” But using Miner’s recollection of Stafford was my fatal step, according to Rodger Anderson: “perhaps the most egregious of [Richard] Anderson’s errors” (p. 50). Why? Because I admitted the “obvious limitations in recalling the details of what one had said almost seventy years earlier.” I emphasize “details” here, because Miner could certainly remember why he asked Stafford about the story, and the basic answer that Joseph Smith did not steal the sheep. Of course particulars could be blurred, since the story clearly evolved.

After complaining about my quoting a late memory, Rodger Anderson does the same, for he appeals to S. S. Harding hearing the sheep story in a visit to Palmyra in 1829. His footnote cites a Harding letter of 1882, which requires remembering main details for 53 years, which I consider quite possible. Incidentally, Wallace Miner visited Salt Lake City when he was 72 and told a reporter:

As a boy I heard all these stories about Joseph Smith. In our neighborhood he was considered an eccentric character because he did different things from other people. At the same time I never heard anything bad of his character, but much of interest.26

When all is said, Joseph Smith is the best witness on Joseph Smith, saying candidly in the Nauvoo pulpit: “I never stole the value of a pinhead or a picayune in my life.”27

Joseph Smith recorded only one direct comment on a Hurlbut affidavit, that of David Stafford, which gives his version of a fight with Joseph Smith. Despite my siding with Joseph Smith, my language does not justify Rodger Anderson’s

black and white interpretation: “he dismisses David Stafford’s account” (p. 35). My 1970 comment stated a truism—the differing versions show “that controversial events cannot be settled by hearing only one side.” In this example, by reading Stafford we simply learn that he claimed that Joseph was hotheaded with alcohol. But Joseph claimed he defended himself after a just dispute:

**David Stafford Version**

Previous to his going to Pennsylvania to get married, we worked together making a coal pit. While working at one time, a dispute arose between us (he having drunked a little too freely), and some hard words passed between us, and as usual with him at such times, was for fighting. He got the advantage of me in the scuffle, and a gentleman by the name of Ford interfered, when Joseph turned to fighting him. We both entered a complaint against him, and he was fined for the breach of the peace.28

**Joseph Smith Version**

While supper was preparing Joseph related an anecdote. While young, his father had a fine large watchdog which bit off an ear from David Stafford’s hog, which Stafford had turned into Smith’s cornfield. Stafford shot the dog and with six other fellows pitched upon him unawares. Joseph whipped the whole of them and escaped unhurt, which they swore to as recorded in Hurlbut’s or Howe’s Book.29

Rodger Anderson argues hard that the two accounts report different events. If so, Joseph’s recollection suggests a hostile attitude to him on the part of some neighbors. But some reasons for separating the accounts do not hold up. We are told that one occurred at the coal pit and the other “in a corn field,” but Joseph Smith says that the dog bit the hog in a corn field, not that the fight took place there. We are also told that Joseph imperfectly remembered Stafford’s version because he remarked “that the

28 Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, 249.
seven men who attacked him were the ones who signed the statement, whereas in fact Stafford was alone in making deposition” (p. 41). That may be, though Joseph’s remark could be more general in having Stafford signing as representative of the rest.

The chief reason for considering these as two versions of the same event is the “firsthand” question—Joseph was there and said David Stafford had only told part of the story. Rodger Anderson assumes for argument that the two accounts might refer to the same event. Then it is suggested that Stafford’s “sworn affidavit” stands on better ground than the Prophet’s informal recollection, which misses the point that the trustworthy tell the truth in informal as well as formal situations. Then we are told that Smith beating two men is possible, but winning over seven is “an improbability” (p. 36). I disagree with that conclusion after reading many journal accounts of Joseph’s wrestling prowess.

Before and after the publication of the Hurlbut materials, Joseph Smith reviewed his youth without mentioning money digging, except for the Pennsylvania episode of working for Stowell and meeting Emma Hale. After public accusations, one would expect Joseph’s total denial if there had been no treasure searching. Indeed, Joseph’s use of the seer stone to find lost objects and buried riches is suggested by the phraseology of his mother’s history, recollections in the Harris-Tiffany interview, and the surviving but highly selective 1826 trial notes. So if some, how much? The Hurlbut affidavits give an answer beyond belief—the large household of ten Smiths survived a dozen years without seriously working but spent days and nights in seeking treasures and finding none. This is why the Palmyra-Manchester accusations of total laziness are the objective key to the situation. Money digging had to be occasional because of the hard necessity of working long hours productively to stay alive.

And this is just what Joseph Smith said about his boyhood period. In pre-Hurlbut 1832, he sketched his early life: “[B]eing in indigent circumstances [the parents] were obliged to labor hard for the support of a large family, having nine children. . . . [I]t required the exertions of all that were able to render any assistance for the support of the family.”

30 See my “Mature Joseph Smith and Treasure Searching,” 491-95.
31 In Jessee, Personal Writings, 4.
later he gave a similar picture from 1823 to 1827, when he received the plates: "As my father's worldly circumstances were very limited, we were under the necessity of laboring with our hands, hiring by days works and otherwise as we could get opportunity. Sometimes we were at home and sometimes abroad, and by continued labor were enabled to get a comfortable maintenance."32

This last summary of Joseph's youth comes from his official history written to correct "the many reports which have been put in circulation by evil disposed and designing persons," phraseology clearly including the Hurlbut affidavits launched four years before.33 So what is Joseph's firsthand answer? That daily labor and religious seeking were the main activities of the family, and all else was peripheral and not worth mentioning. If someone demands to know how much treasure digging, the Prophet's answer is essentially, "not enough to matter." Economic survival and Bible-based searching were the main activities of the Smiths, as described in the writings of the Prophet, his mother, his brother William, and incidental reflections of the father and some children. Their attitude is consistent in neither denying nor affirming money digging, but bypassing it as irrelevant.

Case 6: Loaded Samples

The Saunders family lived nearby and later left many recollections of the Smiths in Palmyra. An interviewer asked Benjamin if he knew D. P. Hurlbut, and got this answer: "He came to me, but he could not get out of me what he wanted; so he went to others."34 This Hurlbut procedure is obvious without being documented, since he produced total negatives, and true history will have a credit and debit column for everyone's account. But Rodger Anderson disagrees with the concept: "that does not mean that an investigator less biased would have produced significantly different results" (p. 57). Such language is out of touch with reality—an unbiased investigator would uncover the full range of those opposed, those indifferent, those unacquainted, and those positive. Rodger Anderson tips his hand when he seriously quotes the

32 Ibid., 206-7.
33 Ibid., 196.
34 William H. Kelley report of interview with Benjamin Saunders, 1884, Miscellany, P 19, f. 44, RLDS Archives.
smug statement of Palmyra’s Episcopal minister, who contended (after Latter-day Saint converts moved away) that “there are no Mormons in Manchester, or Palmyra,” and it would be impossible “to convince any inhabitant of either of these towns, that Jo Smith’s pretensions are not the most gross and egregious falsehood” (p. 62).

Hurlbut and Clark painted the picture that everyone who knew the Smiths rejected their religion because the Smiths’ credibility was zero. But that should depend on who talked with whom. Consider the following Mormon journals of visiting the Smith neighborhood very near the time of Hurlbut’s exposé. The negative Carter journal represents some random contacts in the general area, whereas the positive Hale journal reflects systematic inquiry in the “neighborhood” of the Smith farm:

**John S. Carter, 1833**

The people greatly opposed to the work of God. Talked with many of them and found them unable to make out anything against Joseph Smith, although they talked hard against him.35

**Jonathan H. Hale, 1835**

We went about the neighborhood from house to house to inquire the character of Joseph Smith, Jr., previous to his receiving the Book of Mormon. The amount was that his character was as good as young men in general.36

In the 1880s, two sustained attempts were made to contact the dwindling number of former New York neighbors of the Smiths, one by the avowed anti-Mormon A. B. Deming, and the other by the RLDS general authority brothers, E. L. and W. H. Kelley. In my 1970 article, I touched on Deming’s work and

35 John S. Carter Journal, September 1833, LDS Archives, cited in Davis Bitton, *Guide to Mormon Diaries and Autobiographies* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1977), 62. The context is the migration of a large company of Mormons, who “encamped in Manchester, where the plates were found, also by the Sulphur Springs.” The sentence seems to refer to a single location in Manchester-Sulphur Springs, somewhat away from the Smith farm, with contact only with those near the encampment.

36 Jonathan H. Hale Journal, May 30, 1835, also cited in ibid., 134. The context of the quotation is a visit to the Hill Cumorah with apostles Marsh and Patten and an inquiry in that specific area where Joseph Smith had lived.
used the Kelley interviews in order to expand the narrow Hurlbut data base. I stressed that Deming’s interviews show how many associates condemned the Smiths for money digging but were themselves involved in it—a clear revelation of the limited line of investigation of Hurlbut. Rodger Anderson seems to miss this point and pours my two pages of comment on Deming into his strange attack-defense mode, noting “charges,” which are but incidental characterizations of Deming as tragic but resentful because of his family reverses from the time that his father was murdered when he defended the Mormons in the civil unrest in Hancock County after the martyrdom.

I profiled the wheat-chaff content of Deming’s affidavits in order to cautiously utilize, not obliterate them. Rodger Anderson quickly condemns my adjective “one-sided,” and then more calmly admits that “Deming’s methods would not be considered satisfactory today” (p. 65). His main complaint is strangely expressed: “Anderson’s final objection to Deming’s affidavits is that they ‘reveal no direct knowledge that the Smiths were involved’ in money digging” (p. 68). My 1970 sentence is in a paragraph about “Palmyra-Manchester” money digging, on which point I correctly said that Deming added nothing but hearsay.

If we discuss Rodger Anderson’s broader question of Pennsylvania, he favors two statements: Henry A. Sayer and W. R. Hine “claimed to have seen Smith hunting for ‘lost and hidden things’ while in Pennsylvania” (p. 67). The phrase is from Sayer, who “often” saw “Jo, Hyrum, and Bill Smith” doing these things. Does this ring true? Hyrum, the eldest after Alvin died in 1823, took the main responsibility with his father for the farm in Manchester and was married there in later 1826. Treasure jaunts to Pennsylvania are implausible for Hyrum in these years. As for William, he writes of being raised on the Manchester farm and mentions that Joseph went to Pennsylvania part of the time between the angel’s first visit and getting the plates in 1827: “During this four years, I spent my time working on the farm, and in the different amusements of the young men of my age in the vicinity.”37 Since Sayer is off base in claiming to see Hyrum and William Smith in Pennsylvania, his credibility is not high in what he claims for Joseph.

W. R. Hine is the other Deming observer of Pennsylvania treasure digging. He repeats the standard rumors of Joseph’s searches in the Susquehanna area, but speaks directly only in the case of digging for salt. Hine is ambiguous on how much lore about Joseph’s stone is firsthand. Hine says that Joseph’s father was in Pennsylvania and told Hine Joseph was 15. But Joseph did not go to the Harmony area until he was nearly 20. In this and other things Hine talks too much. With the record for the most words of any Deming informant (2400), half of his stories are suspicious anecdotes. Hine spreads legends on how Joseph carried the plates around personally, first sent them to Philadelphia for translation, then sat with Cowdery translating in a public tavern with an audience. Their cook was Martin Harris’s wife, who stole the 116 pages when they were at dinner, after which a local doctor retained the stolen manuscript in the Susquehanna area and read it to his friends, one of which was Deming’s informant Hine.38 This affidavit is touted as the top of the line. Of thirty-two statements reprinted from Hurlbut-Deming, Rodger Anderson names eight as “primary examples of witnesses having firsthand experience,” among them W. R. Hine (p. 115). However, only a small percentage of Hine’s episodes are firsthand, and few correlate with responsible historical accounts. And the quality of the other Deming testimonials is generally below this. This is enough of an insight on Rodger Anderson’s tedious conclusion to most of his chapters: “many of his neighbors” considered Joseph Smith a deceiver who avoided productive work, making empty promises of treasures through looking in his stone (p. 71).

In 1881 the two RLDS leaders, the Kelleys, interviewed a dozen in the Palmyra area that might know about the Smiths, who had moved away some fifty years beforehand. The interviewers were probing a Michigan news story that quoted “old acquaintances” claiming Joseph Smith’s “reputation” was that of a “lazy, drinking fellow.” One person had it both ways—he knew the Smiths well enough to expose them, but “did not associate with them, for they were too low to associate with.”39 My 1970 study showed that the Kelley interviews add

38 Hine’s statement is reprinted in Rodger I. Anderson, Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined, 155-60.
39 There is no known copy of the Cadillac, Michigan Weekly News of April 6, 1880, other than its quote by Clark Braden in the 1884 Public Discussion (Lamoni, IA: Herald House, 1913), 119. In its quoted form, there are only a few sentences, totally negative opinions of the Smiths.
dimension to Hurlbut's short, narrow statements. The Kelleys asked who knew the Smiths, and what they knew firsthand—the critical questions in judging between rumor and reality. Half of those contacted gave answers based on some personal observation of the Smiths. Rodger Anderson spends the longest chapter in his book arguing that the Kelleys can't be trusted, but quotes them to prove negative aspects of the Smith character.

Rodger Anderson mainly focuses on Kelley interviews that don't matter—from those who had little experience with Joseph Smith. The Kelleys found those quoted in the Michigan story, and obviously asked whether they really knew Joseph Smith, and whether they made the statements quoted in Michigan. Four parties were quoted as negative on both issues. But, angry with what the Kelleys printed, three made affidavits that they had been originally quoted correctly in Michigan. Yet none claimed real contact with Smith then or in the original statements. That is why my 1970 article described a "skirmish of affidavits"—the real issue of reporting anything significant about Joseph Smith is not here.

But the loudest explosion came from another party, John H. Gilbert, colorful compositor of the Book of Mormon, who obviously felt used by Book of Mormon believers and made his own affidavit that he was "grossly misrepresented in almost every particular."40 I originally observed that many of the "main points in the Kelley interviews can be substantiated as being said to others by Gilbert, and even written by Gilbert himself." Without claiming perfection for the Kelleys then or now, I am impressed with their scope and accuracy on the main things Gilbert characteristically said about his Mormon contacts in the printing process. But Rodger Anderson devotes seven pages to supposed bad reporting of Gilbert.

The Kelleys tackled a complex job in talking to Gilbert, for he had an excellent mind that remembered details. Since he gave far more facts than anyone else interviewed in Palmyra, others with less to say could be reported more simply. Afterward, he gave about eight corrections on about fifty items the Kelleys attributed to him, a score of about 85% in reporting him accurately.41 Not unexpectedly, Rodger Anderson complains

40 John H. Gilbert Affidavit, July 12, 1881, cited by Braden in Public Discussion, 119.
41 The reconstructed Kelley interviews appeared in the Saints' Herald, June 1, 1881, 162-68, with Gilbert's at 165-66. Gilbert's criticisms...
about the lack of perfection. Gilbert subtracted anything faith-promoting, like Hyrum saying Joseph translated by the power of God, or Gilbert criticizing Tucker’s exposé. Perhaps the Kelleys expressed some of Gilbert’s general responses in their own vocabulary of faith—and Gilbert objected to the words more than to the ideas. Small misunderstandings included questions of whether two distinct words were changed in typesetting, or the same word changed twice—and whether Gilbert typeset all the Book of Mormon or only 90% of it. Gilbert denied saying that Books of Mormon had sold for $500 or more—but the Kelleys asked how much he would take for his, and reported his answer as “$500 for it, and no less.” Earlier that year he had written a New York historian: “My copy I ask $500 for, and I expect to get that price someday.”

The only valuable section in Rodger Anderson’s book is the four-page segment at the end transcribing William H. Kelley’s raw notes as found in the RLDS archives. They are extremely concise and leave open the possibility of additional memo material from the brother, E. L. Kelley. But taking the simplest scenario, W. H. Kelley expanded about 80 words of jottings into a reconstructed Gilbert interview of about 1500 words. Rodger Anderson generates pages of speculation about what the Kelleys originally heard, what they first wrote down, how they possibly expanded the conversations, etc. Yet each set of raw notes is a true skeleton of the main points rounded out in the reconstructed interviews. Rodger Anderson extols the objectivity of A. B. Deming in recovering memories of a half-century before, and yet he doubts whether the Kelleys could reconstruct conversations from a month before. In fact, the Gilbert interview mostly passed that printer’s critical scrutiny; despite his rhetoric of being misrepresented in every “important particular,” his actual corrections were few.


42 John H. Gilbert to Diedrich Willers, Jr., January 5, 1881, Seneca Falls, N.Y. Historical Society, BYU Film 298, no. 116.

43 John H. Gilbert to Clark Braden, February 27, 1884, cited in Public Discussion, 382.
As suggested, the reconstructed Kelley interviews are mainly valuable in the case of some who personally knew Joseph Smith. Those in this category are Abel Chase and Orlando Saunders from neighboring farms, Ezra Pierce somewhat south of the Smith property, Hiram Jackway, somewhat north, and John Stafford, Rochester physician about Joseph Smith’s age, and his former neighbor. Actually, Saunders and Stafford were clearest in their memories because they had more contact with Joseph and were old enough then to remember. The Kelleys sought to test the labels pasted on the Smith family from Hurlbut on. They asked about money digging. Three had stories but no personal knowledge. Only Stafford “saw them digging one time for money [this was three or four years before the Book of Mormon was found], the Smiths and others. The old man and Hyrum were there, I think, but Joseph was not there.” This glimpse hardly amounts to a main activity for the family.

In Hurlbut’s general affidavits, the Smiths were “intemperate,” or “addicted to vicious habits,” intended to mean the same thing. Yet only a few of his testimonials said much on the subject. A. B. Deming’s late statements press the theme of the father drinking in the fields, and occasionally the younger Joseph. The Kelleys questioned the survivors candidly and reported honest answers. Here Rodger Anderson is preoccupied enough with the subject to add opinions of the journalist-interviewer Mather, who in 1880 made broad claims with minimal data. But the give and take of the Kelley questionings produced a context. From the five who knew Joseph Smith, there is only one observed incident of Joseph and his father drunk and wrestling—and John Stafford’s report of Joseph intoxicated and tearing his shirt may repeat a family story circulating since Hurlbut. The pioneer culture is prominent in all four who mention drinking. It was the pattern of the time—whatever the Smiths did was not out of the ordinary. Rodger Anderson is out of touch with this period when he exaggerates Father Smith’s drinking and sets up a contradiction to William’s forceful refutation: “I never knew my father Joseph Smith to be intoxicated or the worse for liquor nor was my brother Joseph Smith in the habit of drinking spiritous liquors.”44 Whatever the father’s problem, it was apparently in control as younger

William grew up—and “spiritous liquors” were obviously distinguished from the hard cider then common everywhere.

In 1833, Hurlbut narrowed his interviews to those willing to swear against the Smiths, and targeted limited areas of their lives. Later the Kelleys broadened the type of person consulted, and widened the scope of inquiry. Rodger Anderson proposes the astounding thesis that there really isn’t a conflict—that the individuals contacted just had different experiences: “Hurlbut’s witnesses did not accuse the Smiths of unqualified laziness”; the Smiths only gave “a disproportionate share of their time to . . . money digging” (p. 96). But such subtleties are foreign to the Hurlbut affidavits, where the cumulative case is made that “a lazy, indolent set of men” had to steal and use trickery to survive, and they so consistently lied that they were “entirely destitute of moral character.”45 This goes far beyond private money digging and drinking in the norms of their society. Those acts by themselves would not diminish the Smiths’ reliability. But Hurlbut’s statements assailed Joseph Smith’s integrity and character. The Prophet got the message, acknowledging that the New York testimony accused him “of being guilty of gross and outrageous violations of the peace and good order of the community.”46

Parley Chase was spokesman in stating without qualification that Joseph Smith was lazy and a habitual liar, an image to be “corroborated by all his former neighbors.” Any statements of neighbors to the contrary would rescue Joseph’s reputation and prove at the same time that Hurlbut selected a negative sample. The full community of friends and foes is re-created in Lucy Smith’s history, where a positive sample appears in the 1825 letter of recommendation to the land agent when the Smith purchase contract was endangered through misrepresentation. Their respected physician was contacted, and Dr. Gain Robinson “wrote the character of my family, our industry . . . with many commendations calculated to beget confidence in us as to business transactions.” In an hour this

45 The phrases are from the two general Palmyra and Manchester affidavits, which were intended to summarize the community case against the Smiths with dozens of signers. The underlining is in the first printing and apparently theirs.

testimonial had 60 signatures "in the village." Oliver Cowdery taught school in the Smith neighborhood and is generally favorably remembered in later statements of the families of his district. On publication of the Hurlbut affidavits, he said of Joseph, "I have been told by those for whom he has labored, that he was a young man of truth and industrious habits."

As noted, the Kelleys contacted five with possible personal knowledge, and none were negative on his personal character. Some remembered Joseph as poor and uneducated, but John Stafford said that Joseph "improved greatly" in being taught at home. As mentioned earlier, Stafford admired Joseph's personality, but also said of his ability to work: "would do a fair day's work if hired out to a man." Abel Chase's view of the Smith men is most interesting. In 1833 he signed the general Manchester statement that they were "a lazy, indolent set of men, but also intemperate; and their word was not to be depended upon." In 1881 he said nothing about intemperance and dishonesty, though he remembered that his brother Willard wanted to reclaim a seer stone given to the Smiths and could not get it back. In 1881 he clearly modified "lazy": "poorly educated—ignorant and selfish—superstitious—shiftless but do a good day's work." "Shiftless" is not "lazy" in this context—it carries an older meaning of "ineffective," essentially unsuccessful. Contending that Chase did not modify his 1833 group statement, Rodger Anderson said that Chase "told the Kelleys in 1881 that the Smith family was superstitious, shiftless, and untrustworthy" (p. 17). But the analyst is fudging on the last word, which is not used at all by Chase.

Orlando Saunders, another neighbor, was totally positive on the reliability of the Smiths, and particularly Joseph: "They were very good people; young Joe (as we called him then) has worked for me, and he was a good worker; they all were." Rodger Anderson makes the Pollyanna comment that "Saunders's report . . . does not conflict with statements collected by Hurlbut" (p. 95), despite nearly all his testimonials contending that no person in the area would respect or trust the Smiths because of lying and laziness. Kelley's raw summary on

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47 Lucy Smith, preliminary ms., LDS Archives, slightly rephrased in the published versions.
48 Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, Letter 8, Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate (October 1835): 200.
Saunders has 80 words, which were expanded to a reconstructed interview of a little above 400 words. Rodger Anderson mechanically trusts only "the notes Kelley took at the time of the original interview" (p. 96), but a normal memory certainly recalls much of the original experience by seeing notes or photographs. Kelley's original jottings pertained to the whole family, but the brothers asked for recollections of Joseph from all their contacts.

Orlando's brother Lorenzo had a grudging respect for the Smiths. But since Orlando was born in 1803, and Lorenzo in 1811, the older one had eight years more experience with the family. Lorenzo is highly opinionated, insisting that he saw Sidney Rigdon mysteriously visit early enough to be the real source for the Book of Mormon. Though also claiming to have seen Joseph Smith evading work on a digging project, Lorenzo nevertheless said: "Speaking of the Smith family, I give them credit for everything except Mormonism. . . . They was always ready to bestow anything." Younger brother Benjamin Saunders was also interviewed by William H. Kelley. Born in 1814, he remembered hunting with Joseph and included him with the Smith men in his recollections: "They were good workers by days work. . . . They were big hearty fellows. Their morals were good." What else did he know firsthand? Like Lorenzo, Benjamin had seen the Smiths in a single attempt to dig for treasure, in 1826 he said. With their neighbors, they might drink at log rollings, haying, or harvest: "The Smiths were no worse than others, and not as bad as some." He never suspected them of stealing, nor did they have the habit of profanity. "They were a good family in sickness," and the men were generally peacemakers: "Would put [up] with anything and everything rather than have a quarrel." 50

No one would suspect such positive insights on the family whose names were blackened in Hurlbut's affidavits. Oliver Cowdery summarized Hurlbut's impact on the Smith reputation: "It has been industriously circulated that they were dishonest, deceitful and vile." The former Manchester schoolteacher added that he had access to "the testimony of responsible persons" who could correct these slanders and accurately characterize Joseph and his family: "They are industrious, honest, virtuous and

50 William H. Kelley report of interview with Benjamin Saunders, 1883, Miscellany, P 19, f. 44, RLDS Archives.
liberal to all." That is precisely the picture of neighbors Orlando and Benjamin Saunders. Cowdery spoke from knowledge that many neighbors would uphold the integrity and honesty of Joseph and his family.

**Case 7: Half-quotes and Half-truths**

Lucy Smith dictated spontaneous memoirs in 1845, and her editors then organized her autobiography on the model of a church history, leaving out many personal materials. Her preliminary manuscript was not available for my 1970 article but contains her important reaction to Hurlbut's materials. Though an authorized publication of Lucy's full manuscript is in preparation, her comment on treasure accusations has been fully quoted by several historians and partially quoted in several anti-Mormon publications. Since the short-form makes possible a narrower conclusion than Lucy intended, Rodger Anderson's use is printed along with Lucy's full thought:

**Partial Use**

[Lucy denies] that she and her family "stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac, drawing magic circles or sooth saying, to the neglect of all kinds of business. We never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation." The implication is that the family did engage in a bit of "sooth saying"—just not to the extent claimed by their neighbors (p. 109).

**Full Quotation**

I shall change my theme for the present, but let not my reader suppose that because I shall pursue another topic for a season that we stopt our labor and went at trying to win the faculty of Abrac, drawing magic circles or soothsaying, to the neglect of all kinds of business. We never during our lives suffered one important interest to swallow up every other obligation. But whilst we worked with our hands, we endeavored to remember the service of and the welfare of our souls.52

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52 Lucy Smith, preliminary ms.
Here Lucy neither admits nor denies the money digging that was tied to the family by the Hurlbut affidavits. Lucy had just described moving to the Manchester wilderness and creating orchards and buildings by hard labor. And her intent to “change my theme” introduces her recollections of Joseph’s visions revealing the Book of Mormon. Beyond the taxing job of survival lay the main goal of the family, “the welfare of our souls.”

So Rodger Anderson’s use of Lucy Smith sells her short spiritually. And the same must be true for the bits and pieces of Joseph Smith’s conversations on the plates in the Pennsylvania statements sent from Emma’s relatives there. These are not from Hurlbut, though probably generated by his request. Some months after Hurlbut visited Palmyra, Isaac Hale published his smoldering version of how Joseph Smith came into his life and married his daughter, with other relatives and neighbors there adding the most damning extracts they could remember in conversing with the young Prophet. Except for the Stowell treasure dig that brought Joseph to Pennsylvania, these statements refer to the time of Book of Mormon translation there in 1828 and 1829.

What did Joseph intend by the half-quotes sprinkled through these Pennsylvania statements? Isaac Hale said that he lifted the box with the plates in it but was told he could not open it; he then inquired who could see the plates and was told “a young child,” evidently Joseph’s comment meaning that without faith they should not be seen. Isaac adds that he saw Joseph and Martin Harris examining the revelation promising that three would see the plates (D&C 5). All of this coincides with Joseph Smith’s statements about the plates in Mormon sources, but the Hale relatives and neighbors had a different slant. Isaac’s brother-in-law, Reverend Nathaniel Lewis, claimed the Prophet said “he was to exhibit the plates to the world,” a statement similar to one reported by Joshua McKune. And Emma’s brother Alva said that Joseph promised that Alva would see the plates personally. One can speculate on whether these statements misinterpret a general promise that the world would have evidence of the plates, whether Joseph said to some that if they would significantly help, they would see the plates (cf.

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53 For background on their local publication, see Richard L. Anderson, “The Reliability of the Early History of Lucy and Joseph Smith,” 25, and note there.
Ether 5:2-4), or whether Joseph thought he had authorization to show the plates to others but was forbidden. A partial quote does not give context or intent, and the full meaning of what Joseph said hangs on these things. Joseph spoke consistently on the subject of the plates to Isaac Hale, the Book of Mormon witnesses, and his family. The short statements attributed to him in the brief Pennsylvania statements are evidently half-quotes, leading to half-truths about who would see the plates. Nathaniel Lewis says in essence that Joseph was a false prophet because he did not show him the plates. But the full reality is that eleven men met the requirements and did see the plates, a fact already printed in the Book of Mormon when the Harmony group made their statements.

Rodger Anderson closes his survey with the appeal to accept “the Hurlbut-Deming affidavits” as significant “primary documents relating to Joseph Smith’s early life and the origins of Mormonism” (p. 114). Some tell of “early life,” but many only repeat tall tales or disclose the prejudice that Joseph Smith said faced him from the beginning. There are some authentic facts about the outward life of young Joseph, but his inner life makes him significant. It is this other half that the testimonials brashly claim to penetrate but cannot. To the extent that the Prophet’s spiritual experiences are the primary issue, the Hurlbut-Deming statements are not primary documents.

Here I have discussed some aspects of their objective shortcomings, but I do not intend to take much time answering countercharges. Those who think like Rodger Anderson will continue to reason that the Hurlbut-Deming materials contain serious history because “many based their descriptions on close association with the Joseph Smith, Sr., family” (p. 114). That is too sloppy for my taste. Downgrading a reputation is serious business, and I want a reasonable burden of proof to be met on each major contention. Knowing the family is not enough—knowing specific incidents is required.

The mathematics of true personal history is fairly simple: half-truths added to others still retain their category of half-truths; conclusions without personal knowledge have zero value; and any number multiplied by zero is still zero.

A final, highly personal reaction: I once discussed a negative biography with a friend, literature professor Neal Lambert. After pointing out shortcomings in method and evidence, I self-consciously added an intuitive judgment: “and I think there is a poor tone to the book.” Instantly picking up my apologetic manner, Neal answered vigorously, “But tone is everything.” In reality, attitude penetrates the judgments we make, whether in gathering the Hurlbut-Deming materials or in defending them. With few exceptions, the mind-set of these testimonials is skeptical, hypercritical, ridiculing. But history is a serious effort to understand, and tools with the above labels have limited value.

Reviewed by Shirley S. Ricks

This resource for family home evening fun consists of twenty Book of Mormon lessons which contain scriptures, stories, games, and activities, interspersed with ten relationship activities (designed to bring family members closer together and develop appreciation and unity) and ten family night activities combining fun and principles. According to the introduction, the lessons and activities meet four important criteria:

1. They are fast and easy to prepare. Most of the materials needed are contained in the book.
2. They use variety to teach the gospel in a fun and exciting way.
3. They bring the family closer together and help family members appreciate each other.
4. They appeal to a wide range of ages. Young children, teenagers, and adults all enjoy and learn as they willingly participate in the lessons, games, and activities. (p. vii)

At the end of the volume there are twenty-two pages of further resources, questions, and game ideas to enrich the lessons.

The Book of Mormon lessons cover favorite stories such as Nephi’s obtaining the plates, the tree of life vision, the prayer of Enos, King Benjamin’s speech, the conversion of Alma the Younger, Ammon’s missionary labors, the stripling warriors, and Samuel the Lamanite. Character cards are used throughout the lessons to introduce important figures, and one lesson deals with the books in the Book of Mormon.

Quality is evident in the production of this book. The typesetting is well done, the illustrations add rather than detract, and the paper is heavy enough to provide some durability. The major complaint I had with the volume was the difficulty in extracting the pages at the perforations without tearing into the pages. Perhaps this defect could be corrected in later editions.

As a user of the book, I would have appreciated some more extensive suggestions in the introduction for prolonging the life of the book and making the materials more usable over a period of time. Several of the lessons suggest preparation by
cutting out pieces and saving them in envelopes. I would recommend laminating the game pieces for future use. Prior to laminating the appropriate pages and cutting them with a paper cutter, I would also label envelopes (preferably on the back flap) in which to place and store the game pieces. I, for one, would rather tackle the laminating, cutting, and labeling all at one time to reduce preparation time later. In addition, I would recommend photocopying some pages in order to maintain the originals.

In my opinion, the following pages should be laminated before the pieces are used (some individuals may be more ambitious than I and choose to color those with pictures first):

- Treasure Hunt Clues, p. 7
- Happiness Game, p. 9
- Numbered Squares, pp. 11, 13
- Message Code, p. 17
- Eighteen Letters, pp. 25, 27
- Beat the Devil Cards, pp. 33, 35
- Character Cards, pp. 37, 39
- Objects from Lehi's Vision, p. 45
- Books of the Book of Mormon, pp. 49, 51
- Prayer Game Squares, pp. 67, 69
- Service Game, p. 77
- Tic Tac Toe Markers, pp. 91, 93
- Word Squares (stop, look, listen), p. 101
- Concentration Cards (for shoot-out), pp. 123, 125
- Statement Sheet 1, p. 147
- Statement Sheet 2, p. 149
- Family Bingo Cards, pp. 163, 165, 167, 169
- Concentration Game Squares (Jesus Visits America), pp. 197, 199

In order to preserve the masters, I would recommend copying the following pages in sufficient quantities to meet the needs of the group:

- Category List, p. 23
- Hidden Word Mazes, p. 55
- Secret Message Squares, p. 57
- Family Unity Score Sheet, p. 61
- Top Dog Certificate, p. 73
- Twenty Statements, p. 81
- Latter-day Prophets, p. 87 (or 89)
- Tic Tac Toe Game, p. 95
Statement and Scripture, p. 99
Hidden Word Game, p. 105
Baptism Contract, p. 107
Price Is Right Lesson, p. 111
Morse Code Activity, p. 113 (or 115)
Alma the Younger Story, p. 119
Secret Question Game Sheet, p. 131
Statements about Story of Ammon, p. 133
Scripture Blanks Game Sheet, p. 137
or alternate activity for younger children, p. 139
Activity Sheet (Lamoni and Ammon), p. 143
Secret Code Activity Sheets, p. 157
Family Bingo Statements, p. 161
Secret Message Squares, p. 179
Story Title Strips, p. 183
Hidden Message Square, p. 187 (or 189)
Answers to Concentration Game, p. 195
Prayer Sentences, p. 203
Word Search Squares (Brother of Jared), p. 207
Olympics Unscramble and Lists, p. 215
Olympics Matching, p. 217
Olympics Word Search, p. 219
Olympics Crossword, p. 221 (or 223)

Admittedly, the laminating and photocopying would increase the cost of using the volume, but it would be a worthwhile investment should the user desire to use the game pieces numerous times.

I found only a few minor errors in the book. Lesson 6 suggests cutting out blank cards provided at the end of the lesson as part of the advance preparation, but there are no blank cards. Item 3 in the advance preparation section for Lesson 35 mentions six strips that show answers, but there are only four. One of my pages for the Happiness Game was smudged in the printing, but other copies of the book seemed to be free of that defect.

My younger children, ages 5-9, thoroughly enjoyed looking through the book and were interested enough to play some of the games on their own. I agree with the authors that the lessons are adaptable for all ages, and I could also envision using them in other groups, such as in Church classes or sharing time in Primary. I congratulate the authors for preparing a useful, quality resource.

Reviewed by Donald W. Parry

*How to Hiss Forth with the Book of Mormon* consists of a principal volume, a supplemental activity workbook, and a ready reference booklet designed with adhesive to be placed in the back of the reader's personal copy of the Book of Mormon. The three softcover books receive their name from a verse of scripture in 2 Nephi where the Lord states, "And my words shall hiss forth unto the ends of the earth, for a standard unto my people, which are of the house of Israel" (2 Nephi 29:2; cf. Isaiah 5:26).

The main volume in this set contains four sections, entitled "Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior," "The Book of Mormon and the Bible," "Our Personal Responsibilities," and "The Latter-Days." Each section is divided into subsections. A typical subsection includes several lengthy quotations from the Book of Mormon, interpretive commentary by the authors, self-examinations, and learning activities. The self-tests (consisting of multiple choice, essay, and fill-in-the-blank questions) are designed to determine if the reader understood the concepts presented within the chapter. However, after the reader takes the examinations, there is no simple method for the person to check his score—the authors failed to provide answers. For instance, one of the multiple choice questions reads:

**Because of Adam**

A. We all die a physical death  
B. We all were born  
C. All mankind is in a lost and fallen state  
D. All of the above

The answer to the statement "Because of Adam" is far from simple. Evidently, "D" is the intended answer. In what manner the reader is able to determine the correct answer to the multiple choice questions and essay exercises is often unclear.
The learning activities consist of an assortment of rudimentary exercises, such as matching expressions from two columns, crossword puzzles, solve the maze, unscramble the words, find the hidden words, and the like.

The acknowledgment, preface, and introduction explain the indebtedness the authors have to Reid Bankhead and Glenn L. Pearson. “The concepts in the ‘Hiss’ book did not originate with the authors. The concepts in this book represent the authors’ attempt to expand two great volumes . . . written by Reid E. Bankhead and Glenn L. Pearson” (introduction). In what manner did the authors expand the writings of Bankhead and Pearson? Outside of the addition of the learning activities and exercises, the remainder of the work appears to be several lengthy paraphrases of ideas and concepts introduced in the volumes written by Bankhead and Pearson.

While the title of the set apparently sums up the chief concern of the work, the authors delineate, with a sweeping circumference, the goal of the work. According to the authors, the mission of this book . . . is to assist the reader in approaching the gospel concepts in the Book of Mormon in a logical and conclusion-based manner such that the missionary, the parent, the home teacher, the visiting teacher, and the Sunday School teacher can recall to memory and teach through the power of the Holy Ghost, gospel principles in such a way as to provide solutions to problems and answers to questions which the participant cannot solve or learn for themselves. (preface)

This sweeping stated goal of How to Hiss Forth with the Book of Mormon is both lofty and utopian. The question must be asked, “Will How to Hiss Forth with the Book of Mormon aid missionaries, parents, and teachers in teaching gospel principles as it claims it will?” The youth of the Church may benefit from the expository sections, and Primary age children may spend some fruitful moments working through the activities and exercises, but in my opinion all age groups of the Church would be better advised to spend their time within the pages of the Book of Mormon itself.

Reviewed by Patricia Gunter Karamesines

Many readers of the Book of Mormon have undoubtedly been impressed with the results of careful reading manifest in work such as the reprints and working papers from the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.). Much of such materials relies on scholarly methods and materials not generally available, but much of it is also the result of careful study and thoughtfulness. Though few can expect to have the time necessary to become scholars of ancient cultures and languages, most members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints can read carefully and can use the insights of their reading to understand the Book of Mormon and other scriptures better. But most members don’t really know how to do that. Some have had relevant training for reading in literature classes, but few of them see how that training might help them read scripture. Most have not even had that training. We often tell each other that we must read the scriptures, particularly the Book of Mormon, more. We seldom have available the tools for doing any more than rereading in the same old way. As a result, though perhaps few will admit it publicly, most members have difficulty reading the Book of Mormon regularly and in a truly meaningful way. What is needed is a book or books to show the Saints the kinds of things they can do to improve their scripture study.

To judge by the title, George Horton’s book, Keys to Successful Scripture Study, is designed to help interested readers gain the skill in scripture study that most of us recognize we need. In fact, the word “Successful” in the title, combined with the metaphor of sure access that the term “Keys” implies, nearly guarantees mastery of the text. A glance at the Table of Contents might confirm one’s impression that the book is concerned with aiding the reader in appreciating the spiritual dimensions of scripture, since listed there are chapter titles such as “Effective Scripture Study,” “Key Concepts Underlying Scriptural Understanding,” and so forth.

However, other than an introduction printed on the inside flap of the dust jacket, no preface or other statement sets forth explicitly the author’s intent, and only a short, confusing bit of
instruction at the book’s beginning suggests how to manage the rather eclectic substance of the book to one’s benefit. In that bit of information, titled “How to Use This Book—Pick and Choose,” Horton almost whimsically tells his readers, “This book is like a smorgasbord—do not read from beginning to end,” and “This collection is a smorgasbord of keys to scripture study. Read the sections that appeal to you. Also ‘nibble’ at others to see if they are helpful.” Such informality appears to be at odds with the book’s intent as stated on the dust jacket: “Subject always to the reader’s seeking the Spirit in his studies, Keys to Successful Scripture Study will provide information, explanation, and techniques that will help the reader uncover the riches of the scriptures.” If such is true and if one takes seriously Horton’s comparison of his book as having a “wide variety of succulent meats, casseroles, salads, . . . and delicious desserts,” one may well experience the peculiar anxiety the variety of a smorgasbord evokes in some people: how is one to avoid missing something important? Furthermore, what in the book qualifies as “meat,” and what as “dessert”? If a well-intentioned reader follows Horton’s advice, might he possibly fill up on scriptural desserts (if such things exist) and miss the important nutrients that “meats” and “salads” provide?

I do not query Horton’s analogy in this manner to belittle it, but to demonstrate that his book should provide at its beginning more useful direction. To assert that the Spirit will provide a preface for each reader, so to speak, is not enough, because identifying the influence of the Spirit may be part of a reader’s quest as he approaches scripture or books about scripture. The usefulness of Keys to Successful Scripture Study would be increased with a thoughtful preface or foreword where the author states clearly his purpose in providing such a book for the Latter-day Saint audience. A reader would thus be better equipped to evaluate Horton’s materials in view of his own purposes. It is not unusual for the author himself to benefit from the introspection the writing of a preface requires. He may improve the book’s composition by forming a stronger thesis for his work; some flaw of organization may present itself for improvement. As it stands, the confusing tidbit of direction for use of the book leaves the reader wondering what sort of animal (or dinner) lies ahead.

That immediate handicap aside, there is no doubt that, compared to similar books available for public consumption, Keys to Successful Scripture Study is a welcome work in its
interdisciplinary approach to scriptural analysis. Besides making frequent references to the traditional tools of Latter-day Saint scripture study—prayer, personal insight, and illumination by modern prophets—Horton introduces other aids less familiar to the Latter-day Saint audience at large. Among these are concordances, dictionaries, and commentaries. He also discusses poetic language in the scriptures and emphasizes the importance of studying the context in attempting to understand any particular passage of scripture. While such tools and topics are not new to scholars in various fields of study, the level of discipline required to use such tools is nearly unheard of among the nonscholars the book appears to target. Nearly unheard of, but absolutely necessary, since lack of such discipline among Sunday School, Priesthood, and Relief Society teachers has contributed to a general scriptural illiteracy among Latter-day Saints. By introducing tools for scripture study borrowed from many areas, Horton also makes available to his Latter-day Saint audience a relatively new and extremely effective way by which they may garner understanding from sacred text. For making accessible to the often textually confused Latter-day Saint populace the many avenues for pursuit of scriptural understanding and for proclaiming the necessity of having a working knowledge of their many intricacies, Horton is to be praised.

However, teaching others to orchestrate the use of various resources for scriptural analysis is a complicated task requiring considerable experience with each instrument separately and also with combinations of instruments, since one must be able to generate and choose from possible courses of action for wresting meaning from a particular word, phrase, or passage. Such experience does more than merely acknowledge the existence of a path for scriptural enlightenment; through frequent, orderly, and difficult exploration, it recommends certain paths only because it knows those paths to be legitimate ones for reaching a goal (in this case) of scriptural literacy. In introducing such topics as poetic language in the scriptures, Horton has undertaken a tremendous task, one that he occasionally staggers beneath. Furthermore, he is often less than convincing in his own commitment to some of the avenues for scripture study he opens to his readers. Thus, Keys to Successful Scripture Study unfortunately falls short of the promise of its title, first, because the author exhibits a lack of experience in using some of the tools he offers to his readers,
and second, because he undermines the legitimacy of some of these tools even as he offers them.

For instance, in the section of the book titled “Scriptural Language,” Horton introduces his understanding of the Bible’s “colorful language” in this manner: “In the Western world, we tend to think and speak like architects, with concrete clarity and precision. Eastern peoples speak more like artists, with attention to the overall impression and not as much to details” (p. 172). He gives no argument to justify the distinctions he makes between Western and Eastern attitudes towards language, so it is difficult to know exactly what he means by “attention to the overall impression and not as much to details,” or, indeed, what he means by “artists.” However, this theory sounds like one adopted by many who are naive in matters of language, i.e., artistic language cannot be concretely clear and precise because it is artistic. While Horton makes the quoted statement in a section about idioms, it overshadows the entire chapter on scriptural language and surfaces in different forms throughout the book. Here it is again in the section titled, “Interpreting Symbolic Language”:

Since objects and symbols tend to remain constant, symbolic language may be more easily translated and transmitted than straightforward doctrinal statements. The exact wording of a pâtable, allegory, or analogy is not as important as the general idea, but losing or changing a shade of meaning in a statement of doctrine by translation from one language or culture to another may cause serious error. (p. 183)

This statement has several implications, one being that symbolic language is not straightforward. But this belief would seem to be only the shadow of another concept about poetic language, one commonly subscribed to by many people, i.e., if one has difficulty understanding poetic language, it must be because poetic language veils its own “true meaning.”

While artists of all kinds have done more than their share to deserve the frustration directed towards them that often accompanies this belief, and while some artists may have subscribed to the belief themselves, many cultures (artists included) use symbols and other “artistic” vehicles for meaning because they communicate clearly and precisely. They depend upon the straightforwardness of such language to reveal—not hide—important knowledge to members of their communities or
to others who wish to become members of their communities. In fact, the corrupting or veiling of vital cultural or religious symbols or metaphors often signals apostasy and loss of cohesive belief. Among Native Americans, for instance, various ceremonial symbols and other vehicles of language are used to restore meaning and balance to men and women who have suffered some fall from harmony and wish to return to it. The distortion, personalization, or isolation of such language from its context of healing and belief will provoke accusations of witchcraft. Also, many Native Americans lament the fact that the language of salvation in their culture has become esoteric not because its purpose is to somehow cloak true meaning and retard belief, but because no one wants to hear it; that is, in biblical language, the "heart [of this people] is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed" (Matthew 13:15).

To some degree, Horton acknowledges the ability of figurative language to provide quick and precise meaning when he says that "writers clarify as well as veil their messages by using comparisons" (p. 198) and "figurative language is based on truth; the message is literal, even when figures are used to express it" (p. 217), and when he makes other brief statements. But dominating these discussions of scriptural language in his book is the belief that metaphors, similes, symbols, and so forth are kinds of clever, delightful tricks a writer plays upon his audience, and that only those who are already initiated into the mystery the language protects will be able to appreciate it or approach its meaning.

Given (and giving forth) such a belief, Horton must shoulder the burden of providing an explanation for the presence of figurative and symbolic language in the scriptures, since it would seem paradoxical that works meant to provide pathways for salvation cover those trails with all manner of distracting and concealing devices. He accomplishes this difficult task in two ways.

First, he asserts a clear distinction between doctrine and the information borne forth by poetic scriptural language. For instance, in his discussion of symbols, he says, "Doctrinal truths must be fundamentally learned before symbols can be understood in their proper light. Only then do the symbols help us deepen or expand our concepts" (p. 190). This follows a statement that "Prior acquaintance with principles precedes understanding of the scriptures" (p. 190). While his assumption
that language transporting doctrinal information differs from language conveying information by symbols or the like is quite clear, Horton does not seem to provide any examples or arguments that would support this assumption. Do symbols never convey doctrinal knowledge? If not, then what is the relationship to doctrine of the kind of knowledge they do convey? If they do convey doctrinal knowledge, then why could one not approach the understanding of doctrine by initially wrestling with a symbol’s nature? It seems that while Horton believes that “greater gospel understanding increases meaning conveyed by symbols” (p. 190), given his thinking about symbolic (metaphoric, allegorical, etc.) language, he would hesitate to suggest that symbols could increase one’s understanding of doctrine, or that doctrinal understanding increases understanding of symbols, which increases doctrinal understanding, and so on. But if not, why not? Horton offers very little in the way of explaining his beliefs in these important matters.

Second, Horton’s discussion of parables proceeds in a similar way, with an argument that the language of the parables is designed to conceal their meaning from the wicked. This assumption that certain kinds of common biblical language are veiling in nature and his belief that the opacity of their veils protects truth (as if truth needs protection) from the wicked and the wicked from truth, reveals an inexperience with such language that handicaps any instruction he gives on the subject. Horton’s lack of supporting argument for his belief about language, beliefs long ago rejected by those who discuss the nature and function of language, often raises questions that will be troublesome to novices seeking direction in the study of scriptural language. More experienced students of the Bible may question vagaries in reasoning by which Horton makes some of his points. As an example, in his section on symbolic language, Horton assumes the point of view that “symbols deeply affect our emotions and attitudes” (p. 184). This statement is difficult to argue, but he supports his assertion by citing an example, Nathan’s tale to David of the poor man with one sheep. Certainly, David’s emotions are stirred by the tale, but that is because David took the tale literally, not because he recognized it as a “symbolic” story. Horton then says, “They [symbols] allow the reader to step out of his own shoes and assess the problems more objectively” (p. 184). Given the example he has provided, it is difficult to tell what he means by “step out of his
own shoes and assess the problems more objectively,” since it seems that the reason Nathan told the story was to encourage David to step into his own shoes and take personal responsibility for what he had done. Labelling this or any other soul-wrenching insight acquired by allegorical, symbolical, or ironical experience as objective assessment of a problem is meaningless and, in the case of scriptural language, perhaps contrary to the purpose of such language.

Just as a reader will not fail to notice occasionally unschooled and incomplete thinking in the section on scriptural language, he or she will also sense the hesitant and sometimes contradictory manner in which Horton approaches other subjects, such as the value and use of scriptural commentaries. On the one hand is his opening statement that “commentaries have their place, but they are not to be the chief source of our learning. Study of the scriptures and of the teachings of the living prophets is paramount” (p. 51). On the other hand, the strength of the reservations he has concerning the use of non-Latter-day Saint commentaries, dictionaries, and the like will probably be enough to convince many readers to pass them by when looking for directional or clarifying materials. One would almost suspect he believes such commentaries have very little place at all in scriptural studies, especially since he closes the section with a typically impressive quote by Bruce McConkie:

Anything to be said under this heading [Bible dictionaries] is more of a warning than an endorsement. On historical and geographical matters, these uninspired writings rate as one or two; on doctrinal matters they drop off the scale to a minus ten, a minus one hundred, a minus one thousand, depending on the doctrine. The wise and the learned know so infinitesimally little about doctrine that it is almost a waste of time to read them. All their creeds are an abomination in the Lord’s sight. They teach for doctrines the commandments of men. They twist and pervert the scriptures to conform to their traditions; and if they get anything right, it is an accident (quoted on p. 65).

This is the note on which the section ends. Whatever its original context, the quote’s import and tone loudly outcries even the earlier brief and modest acknowledgment that “The best contributions of most Bible dictionaries are found in their
HORTON, KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL SCRIPTURE STUDY (KARAMESINES) 93

historical, archaeological, cultural, and linguistic information” (p. 59). By using this quote from McConkie in the way and place that he does, Horton would seem to take away a key he offered to us at the beginning of this section. Anyone sensitive to authoritarian language would henceforth shrink even from dreaming to ask what that particular key might open. And again, as in the section on scriptural language, Horton assumes a doctrine/nondoctrine dichotomy, though nowhere in the book is there a clear, convincing explanation of what the differences between the two kinds of knowledge are in the scriptures or any guidance on how readers might surely discern between the two for themselves. Obviously, this ability in itself is some sort of key and, thus, worthy of detailed discussion.

Another problem with this section is that Horton provides concrete examples showing how non-Latter-day Saint commentaries have gone wrong in attempting to illuminate scripture, but he does little to demonstrate how, when used in appropriate ways, non-Latter-day Saint commentaries can inspire a discriminating reader to go right. It seems that only Latter-day Saint commentaries and dictionaries do that, but even with this assumption, the reader will notice an unsatisfying lack of concrete examples. Horton lumps all non-Latter-day Saint sources of information together in an uncomplimentary way and describes them frequently as laboring without the “benefit of modern revelation” (p. 63). He also provides rather dishonorable and occasionally extreme (“Without revelation, scholars have guessed wrongly that the ‘sons of god’ were extraterrestrial or superhuman beings,” p. 63) examples of non-Latter-day Saint scholarship as being representative of the lot. Because of such deck-stacking and unsupported assertions, this part of the section taints a discussion that began well. Unfortunately, Horton undermines the usefulness of a key he himself has introduced by demonstrating his lack of confidence in what some people consider to be a useful kind of scriptural literature without offering a fair critique. But in doing so, especially so emphatically, he also demonstrates lack of confidence in his reader. A reader who has been taught to practice good scriptural study procedures ought to be able to determine what information enlightens and what does not. Or perhaps a reader is in the process of learning this discernment. In either case, one would expect that a certain confidence in the student is in order, or one should at least trust that the materials one provides students will teach them to take responsibility for their own lives. Perhaps
Latter-day Saint audiences deserve such distrust in their ability to interpret and apply scriptural wisdom, since the ways in which they commonly do so—quoting scriptures out of context, or sometimes quoting *The Reader’s Digest* in preference to scripture—leave much to be desired. Or perhaps they distrust themselves and require of their instructors such direct guidance. But in *Keys to Successful Scripture Study*, Horton not only removes the necessity for students of scripture to come to their own conclusions about external resources for scriptural study, but he frequently eliminates the struggle to develop good judgment by offering his assertions about the meaning of some scriptures or the worth of entire books of scripture. For instance, in the section called “Interpretation of Scripture,” Horton “rates” the usefulness of books in the Bible. The gospels

are worth their weight in gold. Acts is not far behind them. Paul’s epistles, Romans being the chief and Philemon the least, are treasure houses of doctrine and wise counsel. The writings of Peter and James, plus 1 John, rank as though written by angels; 2 and 3 John are of no special moment; Jude is worthwhile, at least, and for those with gospel understanding, Revelation is a foundation of divine wisdom that expands the mind and enlightens the soul.

In the Old Testament, Genesis is the book of books—a divine account whose worth cannot be measured. Exodus and Deuteronomy are also of surpassing worth. . . . Leviticus has no special application to us [except for background perspective] and, except for a few passages, need not give us permanent concern. Ruth and Esther are lovely stories that are part of our heritage. . . . Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Lamentations are interesting books; Job is for people who like the book of Job; and the Song of Solomon is biblical trash (pp. 77-78, citing McConkie).

Again, Horton offers no defense for his judgments, no argument for why we should adopt them ourselves. Apparently, we are to take them on some kind of implicit authority. At any rate, this kind of controlling instruction, unfortunately frequent in this book, ranges far outside the realm of helpful guidance. It tells
us what to think, often without giving us reasons why we should. It suggests lack of trust in the reader’s ability to think about these things for himself and to come to legitimate conclusions about scripture, commentaries on scripture, and so forth. In this way, Horton undermines the usefulness of certain keys he offers his readers, casting doubt upon their value and on the reader’s ability to use them even as he offers them. Such mixed signals will confuse rather than enlighten many sincere readers; others genuinely intent on learning to search the scriptures might dismiss his heavier-handed direction as dogmatic defensiveness.

*Keys to Successful Scripture Study* suffers from other lapses in presentation. Horton’s treatment of Genesis 38 (the story of Judah and Tamar) is less than satisfactory. His arguments, when they appear, are frequently circular, and thus, unconvincing. The arrangement of sections and chapters sometimes seems disheveled. The instructions at the beginning that counsel the reader not to read the book from beginning to end and to “nibble” at sections may be counter-productive. These problems combine with the ones already mentioned to create many unfortunate distractions.

Nevertheless, this *kind* of book, with its practical introduction of interdisciplinary scripture study techniques to the average Sunday School-teaching, talk-wielding Latter-day Saint, is a splash of brightness in the dark heavens of contemporary Latter-day Saint scripture study practices. While the book is hardly the last word on many of the categories of discipline it introduces, the insight Horton displays by matter-of-factly presenting those categories as legitimate and necessary tools for the task is valuable. Such works will help all Latter-day Saints to assume for themselves the responsibility for teaching and being taught sacred matter, rather than the teachings of men.

Reviewed by James H. Fleugel

Books that posit models for a Book of Mormon geography have increased in number substantially in the past twenty years or so. Although assuming a geography for the Nephite record is unnecessary when applying it as a tool of salvation, Latter-day Saints undoubtedly find it interesting to relate Book of Mormon place names with those of the modern world, not only as a bulwark against claims that the book cannot be literally true, but also as a guide to understanding the course of events in the narrative, just as Bible maps and gazetteers have been for generations. But, perhaps not surprisingly, Latter-day Saints who have written such books have come up with vastly different ideas as to where in the Americas the Nephites, Lamanites, and Jaredites actually lived. In general, these proposed geographies have evolved from the notion that Book of Mormon events took place in all three major regions of the hemisphere (North, Central, and South America) to the limiting of them to only one or two of these regions.\(^1\) Although space does not allow for a complete review of the history of these ideas, I believe informed readers of this *Review* would agree that the serious scholarship in Book of Mormon geography has, in recent years, turned solely towards Central (more accurately Meso-) America for the beginning, middle, and end of the Book of Mormon saga.

A recent contribution to studies of Book of Mormon geography advocating a South American model comes to us in a soft-cover edition from a small publishing firm in Fullerton, California. Arthur J. Kocherhans’s *Lehi’s Isle of Promise* is written in a self-assured, often forceful, manner, but it ultimately leaves its own arguments incomplete, since it takes insufficient account of the best scholarship in the field.

In his introduction, Kocherhans writes that his object is “to provide a resource to sustain the conviction for those who want to accept the Book of Mormon as literally true and accurate” (p.

KOCHERHANS, LEHI'S ISLE OF PROMISE (FLEUGEL)

ix). The use of the word "accurate" here is telling. If the Book of Mormon is true then its accuracy logically follows. But Kocherhans brings to his writing his own sense of how the Book of Mormon narrative should accurately portray such concepts as compass direction, climate, and natural resources, as well as the usage of certain words, primarily "isle." Sadly, I find that Kocherhans's opinions in these matters are formulated from a very limited range of source material (mentioned parenthetically, since there is no index) and a limited personal familiarity with the subject matter.

The first chapter deals with the covenant made by the Lord with Abraham, passed down through Jacob to his sons, and ultimately to Lehi. Kocherhans provides a very basic recounting of the story: the Egyptian captivity, the return to Canaan and its division into "lands of inheritance" for the individual tribes, and the Assyrian and Babylonian conquests. There is no depth here, but the author's purpose is only to describe the geographic aspect of the covenant. In fact, only the right-side pages contain text. Left-side pages are reserved for maps or illustrations and are often left blank where there are none to correspond with the text on the opposite page.

Kocherhans's thesis derives from the idea that, since the Bible so clearly details the division of lands of inheritance among the chosen tribes, we can infer from the Book of Mormon how the Lord divided the American hemisphere between Ephraim and Manasseh. His conclusion, first laid out in chapter 2, is that North America is the inheritance of Ephraimites while South America is the same for the descendants of Manasseh. The problem here is that neither Bible prophecy, nor the Book of Mormon story, present such a picture—certainly not in the way the tribal inheritances are detailed in the Old Testament. Instead, Kocherhans relies on his own reading of the scripture, which often comes down to the use of one word.

An example of this is in Kocherhans's examination of 1 Nephi 13 (where Nephi prophesies the coming of Gentiles to the Americas). In order to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon story did not take place in Mesoamerica, he assumes Columbus to be the individual mentioned in verse 12. The correctness of that assumption is not at issue here; Latter-day Saints have traditionally agreed with this interpretation. But since Columbus never set foot upon the west coast of South America, Kocherhans takes issue with the verb "were" in Nephi's
description: “and he went forth upon the many waters, even unto the seed of my brethren, who were in the promised land” (1 Nephi 13:12). To Kocherhans, this means that the Lamanites met by Columbus were not in the promised land in the 1490s; rather the Caribbean area is only adjacent to the one true promised land of the descendants of Lehi—the Andean chain. A reading of the whole chapter, however, will show that the entire prophecy is largely in the past tense. No special condition for the seed of Nephi’s brethren mentioned in verse 12 is implied.

Kocherhans also goes to great length to differentiate between the Gentiles described in the same chapter. He insists that those Europeans who established the United States came not to smite the seed of Nephi’s brethren, but solely to establish a republic for the inheritance of the descendants of Ephraim. This distinguishes the Gentiles described in verse 13 from those in verse 14 (the ones who smote and scattered the Lamanites). This may be all well and good, but it does raise the issue of how the Indians of North America fit into the Book of Mormon scheme. Does Kocherhans believe that these people were descended from Book of Mormon peoples? He never says. The early Latter-day Saints certainly did, and this is an issue for some in the Church today, since books proposing both the South and Mesoamerican models tend to ignore the special status given to North American Indians by the first generations of Mormons. Kocherhans doesn’t even mention North American Indians.

In chapter 3 Kocherhans tries to show how the Lehi party must have come to Chile based upon global wind direction, climate, and resources. He provides no source references for his information on climate and wind conditions, but his source for the Chilean area that provides the best confirmation of 1 Nephi 18:25 (“we did find all manner of ore, both of gold and of silver, and of copper”) is a map from the World Book Encyclopedia. Although Kocherhans’s title for the map is “Minerals of Chile” (p. 114), the encyclopedia itself clearly labeled the map as showing modern (Kocherhans uses the 1969 edition) industrial sites. That Kocherhans could not find corresponding information (supposedly from the World Book Encyclopedia as well) for Mesoamerica is proof enough for him that that region could not be the Lehite landfall. Needless to say, maps of modern industrial sites in a popular encyclopedia do not
confirm or deny the existence of Book of Mormon ores in Mesoamerica.²

In another part of this chapter Kocherhans describes the Liahona in this manner:

Nephi had Lehi’s compass in crossing the waters to the promised land. It continued to be a recognized instrument of navigation among the Nephites (Alma 37:38, 43) and an instrument called a compass has continued to be used even down to our day for directional purposes (p. 99).

Here is an example of how he insists that the language of the Joseph Smith translation forces Book of Mormon vocabulary to correspond with modern usage. Various references to the 1828 edition of Noah Webster’s Dictionary are supposed to form a scholarly link between the translation and conditions in the outside world. But in this case, at least, there is no implication in the text of the Book of Mormon itself that the Liahona was a magnetic compass. Rather, it is clearly described as a revelatory device dependent not upon magnetism but upon obedience to the Lord (1 Nephi 18:12). The Book of Mormon makes this explicit, but because the translation also uses “compass” and because Kocherhans interprets that only to be a magnetic compass, he has carefully thought himself into anachronism.

Chapter 4 reintroduces the South American inundation theory previously proposed in published form by Venice Priddis.³ For Kocherhans, as for Priddis, a large Andean island resolves the use of the word “isle” in 2 Nephi 10:20 (“for the Lord has made the sea our path, and we are upon an isle of the sea”). Kocherhans is quick to refer us to an 1828 dictionary definition, “a tract of land surrounded by water, or a detached portion of land embosomed in the ocean” (p. 135). However, in the verse quoted above, Jacob is referring primarily to the ocean voyage from the Near East. Since the Lord, according to Jacob, “made the sea our path,” Jacob calls the result of that voyage “an isle of the sea.” The exact dimensions of the land mass they occupied were probably never known to the Nephites, but the fact that they came there by ship led Jacob to refer to it as an isle.

Kocherhans admits that 2 Nephi 10:20 is the only use of "isle" in the whole Book of Mormon. But his references to the plural form, "isles," only point out the illogic of this strict usage. He cites, for example, 1 Nephi 19, where in several verses the house of Israel is said to be scattered among the "isles" of the sea. But the Lord will "remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people of the house of Israel, will I gather in" (1 Nephi 19:16). Does this mean that all the people of Israel were scattered to small islands?

Kocherhans insists that an island location for the Nephites and Jaredites is necessary to isolate them properly from outside contact. Rejecting John L. Sorenson's views on Nephite and Jaredite cohabitation with other peoples, Kocherhans writes that, were they not cut off, "surely someone in the outside world, in their [the Jaredites'] two thousand year record, would have reported on them" (p. 133). Reported to whom? Europeans did not have meaningful contact with American civilizations until Columbus, centuries after the rise and fall of the Olmec civilization. Later in the book, Kocherhans writes that the "isle" is "physically as isolated today, except by air travel, as it ever was" (p. 167). This admission renders the notion of having an Andean island unnecessary.

Finally, there is the insistence that the Amazon Valley and much of the rest of South America was under water until the crucifixion. Kocherhans writes, "The only thing I can see that needs to be worked out is the time element of the uplift of the land mass, and I'm voting for the Book of Mormon time" (p. 143). The illogic of this statement is symbolic of the author's whole mind-set. The Book of Mormon says nothing of South America being inundated until a point only 2000 years ago; Kocherhans does. Although he makes repeated statements to the effect that he wishes the scripture to speak for itself, it is his own preconceived notions of how the world should work that make for a book of no real scholarly value. Readers should take a warning from such books and realize that certain assumptions about the history of the earth should not be read back into the standard works, even when employed with the best of intention.

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4 Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, 83-84.

Reviewed by Bruce D. Porter

This thin volume presents the author's viewpoint that "Americans are the modern counterparts of the ancient Nephites" (p. 5). Anthony Larson argues that the history of America very closely parallels the history of the Nephite nation. He identifies and discusses twelve such parallels, arguing that the two histories follow a pattern so similar that it is possible to make specific predictions about our future simply by examining the course of events in the Book of Mormon. Toward the end of the book, the author makes several predictions based on this method.

*Parallel Histories* is a very readable book and contains some interesting information and ideas. Some of the parallels the author draws are quite appropriate, such as his comparison of contemporary America with the Nephite nation prior to the Lord's visitation. Unfortunately, Larson carries his thesis of parallel histories to an extreme. As far as he is concerned, our history is not merely similar to that of the Nephites; it is virtually identical. Our future is determined inexorably by their past, even down to specific political events. This approach turns the lessons of history into a form of historical determinism. As a result, many of the author's parallels are flawed and the predictions he makes at the end of the book are of questionable validity.

The author's basic thesis derives from his first parallel, namely, that "the progenitors of both the Nephites and the Americans originated in the same place in the world, at almost the same time" (p. 5). Larson argues that the lost ten tribes of Israel emigrated from Palestine to various regions of Europe (the Caucasus, the Black Sea region, England, Ireland, Iberia, Germany, and so forth) and that their descendants eventually settled in America. He bases this point of view (which is not uncommon in the Church) largely on linguistic evidence borrowed from a handful of Latter-day Saint scholars.

If the author had stopped here, his only error might have been the total confidence with which he asserts a position that ultimately is a matter of speculation, unprovable by existing archaeological or linguistic evidence. But the author's more
serious error lies in not differentiating between members of the Church and American society generally. According to Larson, it is not merely members of the Church who descended from Israel, but *America as a whole*. This becomes the basis for his argument that American history must precisely parallel Nephite history.

We know that members of the Church in general can be regarded as literal descendants of the tribes of Israel, but why America as a whole should be seen as an Israelite nation is unclear. Heedless of the questionable basis for this assumption, the author carries his notion of parallel histories to its logical conclusion. If we are Nephites, then our enemies (first Nazi Germany, then the USSR and Eastern Europe) must be Lamanites. The Lamanite conquest of half of the Nephite territory mentioned in Helaman 4:16 is equivalent to the division of Europe after World War II. The growing wickedness of the Nephites and increasing righteousness of the Lamanites described in Helaman 6:34-36 is parallel with the collapse of Communism in the East and moral degeneracy of the West. Gorbachev’s reforms represent a measure of “repentance” on the part of the people of the East bloc, who soon will be more righteous than those of the West. (The author switches back and forth between talking about the peoples of the East as a whole and about converts to the Gospel from these lands.)

Looking to the future, Larson predicts that there will be a broad and enduring rapprochement between East and West. He claims that the main threat to our security in the future will be from terrorists (the Gadianton robbers of our day). He emphatically asserts that the great destruction that will occur in the last days just prior to the Lord’s Second Coming will be caused by natural disasters and not by nuclear weapons or other man-made technologies, just as it was natural disasters that caused destruction in the New World at the time of the Savior’s crucifixion. He implies that Christ will not come in the year 2000, but at least thirty years later (just as he did not come in 1 B.C., when the sign prophesied by Samuel the Lamanite appeared, but only in A.D. 33). Larson even argues that when the Savior does come the second time, it will be exactly as he came in the Book of Mormon: descending slowly from heaven, dressed in white. The author decries as “mythic icons of antiquity” the notion that he will come dressed in a red robe, with the sound of a trumpet, or with a concourse of angels (p. 111).
These predictions are questionable at best and scripturally wrong on certain points. There are interesting parallels to be drawn between our situation today and that of the Nephites prior to the coming of Christ, but linking them to specific political events is a dubious approach. Such an approach may actually detract from the more important spiritual lessons of faith, righteous living, and patient waiting on the Lord, which are the core of the Book of Mormon message. For example, the author’s description of Soviet reforms as representing a kind of repentance reflects a certain naivety about what is really happening in the USSR: many of the reforms are shams, and Soviet society today continues to be plagued by what may be the world’s highest rates of alcohol abuse, abortion, divorce, petty crime, and sexual promiscuity. It is true that a religious revival is taking place among a minority of the Russian population, but it is exceedingly unlikely that the whole Russian nation will be converted en masse, like the mass Lamanite conversions of old to which Larson compares current events.

As to whether or not the destruction of the last days will involve nuclear weapons, the only answer is that we do not know. Since there were no nuclear weapons in Nephite days, the fact that they were not used then can hardly be used to predict that they will never be used in our era. But this Larson confidently asserts. His statement that we should study the Book of Mormon closely in order to understand what is happening in our own day is true enough, but the Book of Mormon is not a horoscope for predicting tomorrow’s political and diplomatic news (the main thing Larson focuses on) in any detail.

As to the Second Coming, Larson should be less dismissive of “mythic icons of antiquity.” When the Lord comes he emphatically will come in glory, with trumpets and concourses of angels (Matthew 24:30-31; D&C 49:23) and, yes, wearing red apparel (D&C 133:46-48; Isaiah 63:1-2). This will not be a visitation to an isolated branch of the house of Israel. It will be the beginning of the millennial reign of Christ on the earth.

Other criticisms of Larson’s parallels could be made, but there is no point in making a comprehensive critique here. The author’s inquiry is certainly sincere, and his emphasis on drawing lessons from the Book of Mormon for our contemporary world is admirable. When it comes to the future, however, we are best served by studying the revelations we already have, rather than trying to develop new predictions of our own about the precise course events will take.

Reviewed by Todd G. Andersen

Randall K. Mehew attempts to motivate his readers to read the Book of Mormon in his *A Most Convincing Witness*. He does cover the key scriptures and basic arguments adequately. In his first chapter he uses the “other sheep” scripture (John 10:16) and its answer in the Book of Mormon from the resurrected Christ to the Nephites: “Ye are they of whom I said, ‘Other sheep I have . . . ’” (3 Nephi 15:21). Next, in his second chapter, he establishes the need for dual witnesses from the Ezekiel scripture about the sticks of Judah and Joseph—the Bible and the Book of Mormon—from both of these books (Ezekiel 37:19; 2 Nephi 29; and 1 Nephi 13).

His third chapter quotes as its basis Revelation 14:6-7 about “another angel” flying with the message of the everlasting gospel, and discusses the role of the angel Moroni in restoring that gospel. His fourth chapter establishes that the Book of Mormon contains the “fulness of the everlasting gospel” (JS-H 2:34) and that Joseph Smith, who translated the book by the power of God, was to do this work as foreseen by Joseph the ancient patriarch and by Lehi, the first Book of Mormon prophet (2 Nephi 3).

His fifth chapter, perhaps the lightest and most interesting one, summarizes some statistics from Hugh B. Brown’s address, “Profile of a Prophet.” For example: “He had only a third grade education, yet he translated . . . 71 chapters on doctrine and exhortations that agree exactly with the Holy Bible” (p. 26). The sixth chapter cites a few key archaeological facts and gives an interpretation of their significance, such as the mention of ancient paintings from Mexico and Peru of light- and dark-skinned peoples together being a representation of Nephites and Lamanites.

The seventh chapter states, without example, that the Book of Mormon’s authenticity has never been disproved. His eighth chapter briefly names some of the prophets of the Book of Mormon. Finally, the ninth chapter mentions the testimonies of the three and the eight witnesses and lists several leaders of the Church whose lives were touched by the Book of Mormon.
This book—or, better, pamphlet—of 41 small pages, while arguing for a most worthwhile objective, leaves a number of things to be desired. The writing is not cohesive and the chapters are not tied together except for the common theme of the Book of Mormon. This lack of continuity inhibits the interest level. Also, the author frequently raises unnecessary questions and yet provides no answers. For example, he states, "Moroni made possibly as many as fifteen trips (twelve being recorded) to the Prophet Joseph Smith" (p. 17). Several statements are quoted without a source being cited, i.e., a quotation from Revelation 19:10 (p. 15).

In his ninth chapter, he makes a humorous error: "Brigham Young and Henry D. Taylor, protestant church leaders, . . . later became presidents of the Church." He meant to say John Taylor for the second leader. On the same page, he cites a testimony of Sidney Rigdon about the Book of Mormon, to the effect that flesh and blood had not revealed the truth of it to him. Then the author states that this assertion of Brother Rigdon’s "was similar to what Peter had said" in Matthew 16:19. In reality, Christ made the statement to Peter.

And who are Randall K. Mehew and his publishing company, Keepsake Paperbooks? Nothing is said in the publication about the credentials or goals of either.

Even though Brother Mehew meant well, the Book of Mormon itself is a far more convincing witness of its own authenticity than is this treatise. And the least expensive edition of the Book of Mormon costs less, too.
Reviewed by Scott Woolley

This book comes as an exceedingly pleasant surprise. The latest in a series of volumes of collected papers from the annual Book of Mormon Symposia sponsored by the Religious Studies Center at Brigham Young University (here, the fourth such symposium, held in 1988), this book continues the focus of the yearly compilations on discrete portions of the Book of Mormon. One might be forgiven for harboring lesser expectations for this installment, coming as it does after the one concentrating on Second Nephi and limited to an examination of the books of Jacob, Enos, Jarom, Omni, and the Words of Mormon. But the authors here reveal these smaller books to hold more treasure than a casual reader might suspect.

As with any compilation of this sort, these papers vary widely in terms of the authors’ approaches, and of course the value of any individual piece will be in the eye of the beholder, but for me the overall standard is almost uniformly surprisingly high. Ten of the seventeen contributors are current or emeritus members of Brigham Young University’s religion faculty, and one wishes for a broader perspective. The editors are apparently soliciting contributions from a somewhat larger group than in previous volumes in this series, and that is a welcome development. Still, unless the annual Book of Mormon Symposium is intended as an in-house event for the religion faculty, why not take better advantage of the wealth of available resources? This very collection argues for such an approach: as a group, the papers by professors from other Brigham Young University departments are perhaps the strongest in the book.

The opening essay, entitled “The Law and the Light,” is Elder Boyd K. Packer’s carefully reasoned testimony about the origin of man. I have chosen my words with care here—Elder Packer has thought long and hard about the theory of organic evolution and reasons cogently, but in the end it is a testimony and not a scientific or philosophical work (though it does have a strong philosophical component). That is because it reasons from the standpoint of a believer and assumes a common starting
place with its intended audience. It does not attempt to refute or rationalize the considerable scientific evidence tending to support the theory of evolution; instead, its author begins with what God has revealed about man’s origin.

Elder Packer starts by defining “law” as “an invariably consistent rule, independent and irrevocable in its existence” (p. 2), and he posits the existence of spiritual (or moral) law as well as physical law, each demonstrable by dramatically different methods but each equally valid. Conscience is one manifestation of spiritual law, or one means by which its existence may be demonstrated, and “if conscience is the only thing that sets us apart from the animals, it sets us a very long way apart indeed” (p. 5). Conscience makes moral law possible, and moral law “sets man apart from, and above, the animal kingdom. If moral law is not an issue, then organic evolution is no problem. If moral law is an issue, then organic evolution as the explanation for the origin of man is the problem” (p. 6, first emphasis added).

There follows a scriptural exploration of the creation, the fall, and the atonement, concluding that if man simply evolved from animals, there could have been no fall and thus no need for an atonement. Elder Packer finishes with a “Declaration of Conviction” to the effect that the theory of evolution, to the extent that it asserts that man is the product of an evolutionary process, the offspring of animals, is false. He also rejects the notion of “theistic evolution,” the view that God used an evolutionary process to prepare a physical body for man’s spirit, which he sees as a well-intentioned (but unsuccessful) attempt to resolve the conflict between the theory of evolution and the gospel. He gives six reasons for his conviction: the Lord’s revelations; an understanding of the sealing authority and its ramifications; two First Presidency declarations—from 1909 (Joseph F. Smith) and 1925 (Heber J. Grant)—regarding the Church’s position on organic evolution (both are appended to his article, pp. 28-31); the existence of moral law, reason, and conscience; the existence of beauty and harmony in the physical universe; and, finally, personal revelation.

It is difficult to argue with that sort of authority, and I at least am not inclined to try. Elder Packer is careful at the outset to identify his thoughts as his own, not presented in any official Church capacity. I have shown only a glimpse of his reasoning, but given his fundamental assumptions, which I share, his conclusions seem to me to be inevitable. Where we have no
definitive answers, either scientific or spiritual, we must be more than usually careful about where we place our trust.

Elder Packer's article has no apparent thematic connection to the Book of Mormon books around which this collection is organized, or indeed to the Book of Mormon at all. The other papers relate more specifically to the subject matter at hand, though not all confine themselves to topics contained solely within the books under consideration. The editors have attempted no categorization, but at least two broad groups emerge into which most of the various pieces fall.

Not unexpectedly, several authors focus on individual characters featured in this portion of the Book of Mormon. Robert J. Matthews leads with a thoughtful reconstruction of the life, ministry, and teaching of Jacob, Nephi's younger brother and successor as spiritual leader of the Nephites. He is aided in this by the comparative wealth of information that we have in the books of 1 and 2 Nephi as well as in the book of Jacob about this pivotal figure. The author writes: "There have been few people in history who have possessed the combination of spirituality, intellectual capacity, judgment, literary ability, parentage, faith, and seership that Jacob did" (p. 33). Dr. Matthews's admiration for his subject is fully justified, as he demonstrates. In addition to putting together a coherent biographical sketch of Jacob, he gives a brief overview of the several important doctrines expounded upon by Jacob, emphasizing Jacob's role as a witness of Christ.

Jacob is also the principal subject of my personal favorite of all the papers in the collection, John S. Tanner's "Literary Reflections on Jacob and His Descendants." An admirer of what he calls the "literary diversity" of the small plates of Nephi, Dr. Tanner takes as his thesis that "we do not, as a church, sufficiently appreciate the literary qualities of Jacob and his descendants" (p. 252). While recognizing the limitations of a literary approach to the Book of Mormon, he contributes to our understanding of the scriptures in ways that a religion professor, with his (natural and proper) emphasis on scripture as doctrine, could not. His focus is on individual voices:

As a literary critic, I am naturally drawn to first-person documents like the small plates. I savor truths bred in the bone, supposing that nuances of style

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1 Compared, at least, to the textual references to Enos, Sherem, and Amaleki, all of whom are the subjects of separate essays.
reveal the man, and I listen for echoes of a human voice in every sort of discourse, however ostensibly impersonal—even in prophetic speeches. I do not believe that God’s co-authorship normally eradicates an individual’s voice, since the Lord speaks through his servants “in their weakness, after the manner of their language.” . . . Close attention to a prophet’s words can be—and I mean it to be—an expression of love for those through whom the Lord speaks (pp. 253-54, citations omitted).

There is nothing scientific in this approach, no computer wordprints. “I come, rather, with conjectures about the timely, human contexts of timeless, divine utterances, and with confidence that more attention to the human context of the Book of Mormon can greatly enrich our appreciation of its content” (p. 254). This analysis, as a supplement to rather than a substitute for a more straightforward doctrinal approach, is tremendously enlightening. Having devoted most of his attention to Jacob, Dr. Tanner concludes: “Jacob is a poet-prophet whose voice we should learn to recognize, and to love” (p. 268). I’m convinced.

Jacob’s antagonist, Sherem the anti-Christ, is the focal point of Robert L. Millet’s definitive essay. President Benson has said that the Book of Mormon brings men to Christ in at least two ways: by telling plainly of Christ and his gospel, and by exposing the enemies of Christ. Dr. Millet examines Sherem as an archetypal anti-Christ, the sort of enemy of Christ which the Book of Mormon aims to expose. It becomes very clear why Jacob thought it important to add the account of the episode of Sherem to the Nephite record after apparently having concluded his writings in the previous chapter.

The two pieces centered around Jacob’s son Enos provide excellent examples of how much can be gleaned from thoughtful consideration of a short scriptural passage. The emphasis of “Enos: His Mission and His Legacy,” by Dennis L. Largey, is on Enos’s “brief but vital” doctrinal contribution to the Book of Mormon, especially regarding the nature and process of repentance and the fruits of conversion. Enos’s story is also the model for David R. Seely’s exploration of the concept of the “words . . . concerning eternal life” (Enos 1:3) and their role in the conversion process, in which the author mines a wealth of

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2 As far as I am aware—it is difficult to imagine a more thorough treatment.
insight from the concise scriptural description of Enos’s experience.

Even Amaleki, the last of five writers of the short book of Omni and the last on the small plates of Nephi, turns out to be worthy of an entire essay. Amaleki’s time, of course, was a key juncture in the history of the Book of Mormon peoples; Gary R. Whiting offers a treatment of Amaleki’s account of the three groups of people who come together here, aided by what we know of the subsequent history from the book of Mosiah. Amaleki himself turns out to be a substantially more important figure than I had ever considered, and his testimony of Christ, as set forth by Mr. Whiting, only adds to his stature.

Beyond its intrinsic value, this paper is interesting because of the author’s background. Even without the identification of Mr. Whiting as “an elder in the RLDS Church,” attentive readers might find slightly jarring one or two unfamiliar locutions and a faint echo of evangelical Christianity in the description of Amaleki’s testimony of Christ. How much of that (if any) is attributable to Mr. Whiting’s RLDS orientation, I cannot say. But the discussion is doctrinally sound as far as it goes, save for the attempt to make the joining of the Nephites to the Mulekites into a fulfillment of the Ezekiel 37 prophecy about the joining of the sticks of Joseph and Judah.

The other broad category into which a number of essays may be grouped is doctrinal. Several of these pieces are outstanding, beginning with Lauri Hlavaty’s detailed, readable explication of the “religion of Moses.” The religion of Moses (a term not found in the scriptures) is defined as “the gospel as it was taught by Moses to his rebellious followers” (p. 104), encompassing the law of Moses but also including “all doctrines, beliefs, covenants, sacrifices, and rituals” (p. 104) associated with Moses’ teaching. Another way to look at it is as “the gospel without the Melchizedek Priesthood” (p. 104) but including some extra carnal commandments that we usually associate with the law of Moses. Ms. Hlavaty, a graduate student in Ancient Studies at the University of Chicago, aims to reconstruct the spiritual environment of Bible (Old and New Testament) times as well as the Book of Mormon, in order that we may read the scriptures “as though we stood in place of those who wrote them” (p. 103), as Brigham Young enjoined. Particularly enlightening is her discussion of how the Book of Mormon (especially through the words of Nephi, Jacob, and
Abinadi) illuminates the religion of Moses, which is shown to be much more Christ-centered than we might suspect.

Also excellent is Rodney Turner’s “Marriage and Morality in the Book of Mormon,” an essay in which Jacob 2 is used as a springboard. The doctrinal discussion is for the most part familiar; what is striking is the urgency with which the message is delivered. Dr. Turner writes in his introduction: “Certainly no generation since the Flood [!] has had a greater need for one particular message in [the Book of Mormon]: the vital importance of personal morality both before and during marriage. President Benson has said, ‘The plaguing sin of this generation is sexual immorality’ ” (p. 271). Dr. Turner examines sexual sin in the context of what Alma characterized as the three most abominable sins (Alma 39:5), all of which share a common element described by the author as violating “the principle of life” (p. 278). There is a brief, cogent discussion of the first two, sin against the Holy Ghost and murder, but the focus is on unchastity, especially adultery and its effect on marriage:

Unchastity, in any of its expressions, is the third greatest sin because of the spiritual devastation it produces: alienation from the Spirit, the clouding of one’s own spiritual identity and sense of worth, the crippling contamination of those human relationships—marriage and parenthood—which the Lord designed to fulfill and perfect the soul (p. 278).

The piece concludes with an examination of the doctrine of plural marriage. Dr. Turner recounts what we know of polygny as practiced (with and without divine sanction) in Old Testament and Jaredite times and turns to its practice among the Nephites. He quotes and discusses Jacob’s denunciation of the practice (Jacob 2:23-28) and continues with a wider treatment of the doctrine itself and a resolution of the apparent conflict between Jacob’s position and the defense of the doctrine by Joseph Smith and the revelations recorded in D&C 132.

Chauncey C. Riddle’s contribution is a thorough exploration of “Pride and Riches,” largely a sort of annotated explication, phrase by phrase, of what he aptly describes as “one

3 “Know ye not, my son, that these things [sexual sins] are an abomination in the sight of the Lord; yea, most abominable above all other sins save it be the shedding of innocent blood or denying the Holy Ghost?”
of the most memorable and striking passages" in the Book of Mormon, Jacob 2:12-21. Dr. Riddle also offers his reflections about what this passage means, or ought to mean, for us. I was hoping for some practical guidance here; having lived for the last decade in New York and Chicago, I have seen on an almost daily basis the most dramatic extremes of poverty and wealth, and I have never quite come to grips with what my personal response should be to the problems I see in the streets. Despite an attempt to provide a few concrete applications for the principles under review, Dr. Riddle is on the whole not concerned with practical matters. But his discussion of these crucial gospel concepts on a doctrinal level is deeply insightful, and the reader is amply rewarded for grappling with the author's slightly dry style.

One of the really original pieces in this collection (along with, notably, Ms. Hlavaty's and Dr. Tanner's) is Wilford M. Hess's "Botanical Comparisons in the Allegory of the Olive Tree." "From a botanical point of view," writes Dr. Hess, a botanist, "Jacob 5 in the Book of Mormon is one of the most interesting chapters in all scripture" (p. 87). Well, yes. How many other scriptural chapters are there which would even fit into this category? This is an important chapter, however, and if a nonspecialist comes away knowing more about olive trees and their cultivation than he might care to know, Dr. Hess's observations are nevertheless valuable for the clarification they offer of Zenos's allegory. The events described in the allegory are botanically accurate, it turns out, with one notable exception—wild branches will always remain genetically wild, and though the quality of their fruit may improve after being grafted to a tame tree, they will never produce tame fruit. "The allegory violates a botanical principle," writes Dr. Hess, "to teach a spiritual truth" (p. 96), one that would have been striking to anyone familiar with the cultivation of olives. The author unfortunately only hints at the possibility that Zenos may have

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4 My dilemma is neatly summarized in my observation of two people regularly to be seen outside my downtown New York office building—one an immigrant woman who sold hot dogs from a cart seven days a week, rain or shine, and the other an apparently able-bodied young man who often stood just a few yards away asking for change. My inclination, of course, was to give whatever I thought I could spare (that is an entirely different question ...) to the woman (who would probably have taken offense), but I was never entirely comfortable with the sort of judgment that that required me to make of the panhandler.
intentionally violated that botanical principle in order to drive home the point to his audience. The paper concludes with a point-by-point interpretation of the allegory, for which the author credits Monte S. Nyman. Though this section is not original with Dr. Hess, it provides an instructive review in light of our new botanical knowledge of olive trees. This is precisely the kind of perspective we do not get from full-time teachers of religion, whose approach is different, and the inclusion of papers like this one is to be commended here and encouraged for future symposia.

As much historical as doctrinal, Richard O. Cowan’s “We Did Magnify Our Office unto the Lord” is a clear and comprehensive examination of church organization in the Book of Mormon, from the patriarchal family organization of Lehi’s time (paralleling that in the Old World from Adam through Moses) to the organization of a Quorum of Twelve Apostles in Third Nephi. It includes a description of the chapters in Moroni wherein the ecclesiastical procedures which had been taught by the Savior are set forth as a sort of “short handbook of instructions” and finishes with a look at the example of Jacob and Joseph as individual priesthood holders, the essay’s main connection to the subject matter of the collection.

Joseph Fielding McConkie contributes an excellent doctrinal exposition of the wonderful fourth chapter of Jacob, of which the author says that if Joseph Smith had been permitted to translate only that small portion of the plates, “that chapter alone would be sufficient to justify the mission and ministry of Joseph Smith” (p. 157). “The Testimony of Christ through the Ages” surveys the scriptural support for and theological implications of the doctrinal pronouncements Jacob made in this significant chapter.

Two papers focus on the structure of the Book of Mormon as it is clarified by the Words of Mormon. Eldin Ricks offers a clear explanation of Mormon’s work of abridgment and the records he was working with. Cheryl Brown’s aim is much wider in her insightful “I Speak Somewhat Concerning That Which I Have Written.” Beginning with Mormon’s explanation (in the Words of Mormon) of what he is including in the record and why, Dr. Brown pursues a wide-ranging examination of why the Book of Mormon contains what it contains and omits

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5 But quite basic—this piece will be of most value to beginning students of the Book of Mormon.
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what it omits. Reasons for exclusion range from the practical (lack of space, difficulty of engraving, language problems, and economy—that is, some things were to be written elsewhere, and there was no need to repeat them)\(^6\) to the spiritual (preventing sorrow for the righteous and temptation for the wicked, trying the faith of readers—by, for example, including only "a lesser part of the things which he [Christ] taught the people," 3 Nephi 26:8). Reasons for inclusion are equally various: certain writings were especially intended for particular future readers; obedience (Jacob wrote in obedience to Nephi's command, Nephi in obedience to the Lord's); to restore plain and precious parts of the gospel; to testify of Christ. Dr. Brown's emphasis throughout is on the Lord's controlling hand shaping the Book of Mormon.

"Prophetic Decree and Ancient Histories Tell the Story of America," by Clark V. Johnson, is a fascinating (if awkwardly titled) examination, from the perspective of history and prophecy, of the *Popol Vuh*, the "Sacred" or "National Book" of the Quiché Indians of southern Guatemala and the most important of the few works of Mayan literature which survived the Spanish conquest of Central America. The *Popol Vuh* is a compilation of Quiché religious and historical traditions, written by a member of the tribe shortly after the 1524 takeover of Guatemala by the Spaniards. It was translated into Spanish in the early eighteenth century, after which the original manuscript was lost. The translation was first published in 1857 in Vienna, and no English translation from the Spanish appeared until 1950 (so it is unlikely Joseph Smith could have known of the *Popol Vuh*).

The author does not set out to demonstrate every parallel between the *Popol Vuh* and the Book of Mormon, but he pays close attention to striking similarities between the two works in three specific areas: the origin of the ancient Americans (both works describe three groups of ancient migrants who came by boat from the east; Dr. Johnson is careful to note that the Book

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\(^6\) An illustrative example comes from 1 Nephi 13-15, the account of Nephi's vision. Nephi was told not to write some of what he had seen, "for the Lord has ordained the apostle of the lamb of God that he should write [them]" (1 Nephi 14:15). The apostle John was shown the same vision and recorded it in greater detail in the Revelation of John. The Lord knew we would have the Bible and had Nephi record only that which would clarify John's Revelation—a valid example of the fulfillment of Ezekiel 37:17.
of Mormon does not purport to explain the origin of all early Americans); the gods worshipped by those early inhabitants; and their belief in the Creation, the Fall, and the Flood. The essay notes differences as well as similarities—for example, the *Popol Vuh* was written late, largely the product of centuries-old oral traditions, whereas the Book of Mormon was written by the ancients themselves. This is a well-researched and well-written piece, demonstrating again the value of the perspective of secular scholarship in expanding our appreciation of the scriptures, though its connection to the Book of Mormon chapters on which this collection focuses is tenuous.

Less compelling, ultimately, is the contribution of Monte S. Nyman, one of the editors of this series, entitled "To Learn with Joy: Sacred Preaching, Great Revelation, Prophesying." From its position (chapter 11 of 17), it does not seem to be meant as an introduction to the collection, although perhaps it might have been, for it begins promisingly enough with a hint about why the editors gave this volume the subtitle "To Learn with Joy." The reference is Jacob 4:3, where Jacob expresses his hope that his posterity would "receive [the records of their fathers] with thankful hearts, and look upon them that they might learn with joy and not with sorrow, neither with contempt, concerning their first parents." Jacob's concern that his descendants learn from his writings is reflected in Joseph Smith's rhetorical question, quoted by Dr. Nyman, to the Twelve in his day: "Why will not men learn wisdom by precept at this late age of the world, when we have such a cloud of witnesses and examples before us, and not be obliged to learn by sad experience everything we know?" 7 "As believers in the Book of Mormon," the author writes, "we should learn with joy from Jacob's admonitions and not from the sorrow of our own experiences" (p. 194). A nice point—one that could serve as a worthwhile theme for the entire volume.

Those observations are by way of introduction; the emphasis of the essay is on Nephi's instruction to Jacob that he write only the "most precious" things upon the small plates and that he "should not touch, save it were lightly, concerning the history of this people" (Jacob 1:2) in his writings. Instead, Jacob and his successors were to concentrate on sacred preaching, great revelations, and prophesying (Jacob 1:4).

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Unfortunately, rather than discussing any of the items in those categories that were recorded on the small plates, or even presenting the main ideas in outline form, Dr. Nyman is content simply to give a schematic overview of the books from the small plates in light of the three categories. An example: "The book of 2 Nephi is even more spiritually oriented than 1 Nephi. Only one of its 64 pages and 29 of its 749 verses are historical. There are five incidents of preaching, eight great revelations, and five sections of prophesying" (p. 199). And so it goes for each book, so that at the end all we have is a mathematical demonstration that Nephi was more concerned in the small plates with spiritual matters and that Jacob and the other writers followed Nephi's instruction to touch only lightly on history, along with the author's lists of which sections of each book fit under the respective headings of sacred preaching, great revelation, and prophesying.

More troubling still is the conclusion. Despite protestations that the "light touch of history is not to be interpreted as a declaration that history is unimportant" (p. 193) and that the author still appreciates discussions about literary styles and external evidences, Dr. Nyman seems to suggest that we should approach not only the books from the small plates but the Book of Mormon as a whole from the same point of view. He makes the dubious assertion that the remainder of the Book of Mormon follows the pattern of the small plates, de-emphasizing nonspiritual matters, and asks,

Since this was the pattern set for writing on the Nephite record, should it not also be our pattern for studying, teaching, and applying its precepts to our lives, and to the lives of those whom we teach? Should we not learn and teach what the Book of Mormon itself teaches concerning the sacred preaching, the great revelations, and prophecies rather than what others have said about its contents, literary styles, or external evidences? (p. 207)

If anyone had suggested that other approaches should be followed to the exclusion of careful study of the scriptural text itself, Dr. Nyman would have a point. If we have to choose one approach only, of course we would be foolish to ignore the Book of Mormon itself in favor of external matters. Luckily, we do not have to make such a choice; and we are fortunate that Dr.
Nyman’s suggestion was not the controlling editorial policy for this fine and varied collection of essays.
Paradigms and Pitfalls of Approach to Warfare in the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by David B. Honey

Early in 1990 Stephen Ricks announced the arrival of the latest production of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.), Warfare in the Book of Mormon, as one that would adopt the approach of "contextualization"—"understanding the text better through understanding better the milieu from which it came."1 With this characterization Ricks accurately underscored the strength of this volume in its collective concern to examine—exegetically, not apologetically—the ideology and practice of warfare as narrated in the Book of Mormon from a variety of paradigms, ancient and modern, practical and theoretical. The light this book casts on Book of Mormon teachings on the morality and immorality of warfare, apart from the cold technicalities of the conduct of war and the tragedies of its aftermath, is both timely and insightful. Indeed, in my judgment this work is one of the best productions of F.A.R.M.S., which seems to be progressively developing into the modern Mormon equivalent of the Renaissance publishing house of Stephanus. The editors are to be congratulated for bringing together such a wide-ranging collection of essays and studies, most of which were originally presented at the Symposium on Warfare in the Book of Mormon, March 24-25, 1989, at Brigham Young University under the auspices of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies.

It would probably surprise most moderns to realize just to what extent warfare was the normal condition of everyday life in the ancient world, how casually its casualties were accepted, and how closely tied to religion it was. The latter was especially true for ancient Israel. For instance, even the name Israel was itself a martial image: "Israel means El fights, and Yahweh was the

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fighting El after whom the people named itself. The war camp was the cradle of the nation, it was also the oldest sanctuary.\(^2\)

Given that millennia of time and mind-sets of vastly different orientations separate ancient and modern outlooks, it is imperative in studying ancient warfare that we attempt to transcend our modern world view with its built-in assumptions and assumed biases—not to mention the emotional implications of unprecedented innovations of warfare like the Geneva Conventions, the surgical strike, or the friendly casualty—in approaching the concept of warfare from the perspective of the past. Warfare in the Book of Mormon is no exception to this methodological rule.

This is what the first three chapters attempt to do. They set the historiographic stage of the Book of Mormon for further discussion by first placing its warfare accounts in the context of the purpose of the sacred scripture. These introductory annexes by John Welch, R. Douglas Phillips, and R. Dilworth Rust stress the idea that since so much of the Book of Mormon concerns military matters and since the prophet-historians who wrote the book often as not participated actively in warfare, an understanding of the military chapters is basic, and indeed crucial, to an understanding of the whole work. Welch’s “Why Study Warfare in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 3-24) is particularly comprehensive in clarifying the importance of military matters for understanding, appreciating, and applying the lessons of the Book of Mormon. Characteristic of his careful scholarship, Welch provides an extensive table of suggested names for the major wars or campaigns included in the Nephite portion of the record (pp. 6-15). For each war, brief entries under the rubrics of Sources, Dates, Location, Causes, Tactics, and Results present convenient epitomes of the fifteen major wars or campaigns so included. This clear-cut categorization of wars will, it is to be hoped, allow for more informed, in-depth research as the use of standardized

terminology facilitates later scholarly treatment. Welch has already made use of this tabularized data by drawing some intriguing, if tentative, conclusions from the patterns evident in the data.

The most important contribution of these introductory essays is the persuasive plea to let the message of Book of Mormon warfare speak for itself directly to us without sifting it through the distorting filters of our own modern cultural assumptions, as mentioned above. As examples of moral lessons to be drawn from the military chapters, R. Dilworth Rust, in “Purpose of the War Chapters in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 29-32), reminds us that the book, “while it does not tell us much about matters such as kinds of warriors and battle lines, ... does give us, in considerable detail, accounts of the exercise of faith. . . . It shows inspired stratagems, the Lord’s protection, and the great warrior-prophet’s direction” (p. 30). John Welch tries to forestall one fatal weakness of much modern scholarship on warfare in the Old and New Testaments by concluding the following:

For many readers, encountering so much war in so sublime and sacred a volume is something of a culture shock. But this is our problem, not the book’s. On this issue, if we put aside our cultural predilections and attempt to understand the Book of Mormon as a Nephite or a Lamanite might have understood it, then these events play much different, more religious roles in the book, and they become spiritually more meaningful to us. . . . We need to listen to what the Book of Mormon is saying—not to project onto it what we want it to say. The Ammonites’ version of pacifism was surely not the same as those of modern-day conscientious objectors. Moroni’s version of a just war was not the same as that of today’s Kremlin or Pentagon.4 (pp. 20-21)

3 Unfortunately, in John Sorenson’s tabulation of Nephite wars in the Appendix to his contribution “Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica” (pp. 462-74), he adopts a different categorizational system; it would have been helpful, and a good methodological example, had at least parts of Welch’s system been integrated into Sorenson’s more detailed system.

4 The problem of reading modern cultural values back into the study of warfare in the Old and New Testaments is addressed in the
R. Douglas Phillips, in “Why Is So Much of the Book of Mormon Given Over to Military Accounts” (pp. 25-28), tries as well to place the Book of Mormon in an ancient, not modern, context by stressing that editor Mormon had “a peculiarly theological or religious concept of history according to which war was not a purely secular phenomenon but an instrument of divine purpose” (p. 25). Phillips adduces the example of Thucydides as a prominent historian who had first functioned as a general and whose career thus paralleled that of Mormon. Because this article originally appeared in the January 1978 issue of the Ensign in the column “I Have a Question,” its original format did not allow even a minimum of citation of authorities; nor has it been updated in this regard when reprinted here. The absence of supporting citations to confirm Phillips’s central thesis is rather unfortunate because it tends to make the Book of Mormon appear unique. This is far from the case. Just to cite one authority, “In much ancient historiography battle descriptions form the high point of the author’s effort to characterize the forces of history.”5 Therefore, if an ancient author attributed the moving force of history to divine will or intervention, battle narratives, “originally the essence of history,”6 inherently touched on religious thought and practice. But if the religious underpinnings of military motivation are overlooked, it makes for unrealistic, even inaccurate, history.7


5 Henry R. Immerwahr, Form and Thought in Herodotus, American Philological Association, Monograph 23 (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1966), 16.


7 W. Kendrick Pritchett, The Greek State at War, 5 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971-90), 3:1-2, reviews the early debate in the journals between the defenders of the famous classicist Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff and Hans Delbrück, the military historian.
The importance of Phillips' essay, then, lies in reminding readers (albeit ex cathedra) that the military narratives in the Book of Mormon perform an honorable yet common historiographical function that has widespread antecedents and parallels in the ancient world, and that these military chapters have a direct application to religious thought and practice.

Part 1, "Legal and Sacred Aspects of War," contains four entries ranging from short, representational essays to lengthy, comprehensive surveys. John Welch's "Law and War in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 46-103), is an imposing survey that sits Isaiah-like in the forefront of the book, challenging easy reading. But also Isaiah-like, it repays the persistent reader with intriguing insights and possibilities into many aspects of Nephite and Lamanite civilization that transcend the confines of legal or military spheres. We learn of the manifold legal aspects of warfare, divided and subdivided into various categories such as "Law and the Conduct of War" or "The Use of Military Force in Law Enforcement," and other categories that would not occur to the non-lawyer but which are equally interesting and relevant.

Welch's study is an excellent example of the benefits to be derived from approaching the Book of Mormon from the paradigm of ancient Near Eastern, especially Jewish, law. At least once, however, Jewish legal theory seems to have misled Welch as to the unpleasantness of historical fact. On p. 74 he describes the humanitarian aspects of Jewish warfare, citing valid scriptural and rabbinical sources. But in actual practice, or at least in the majority of historical cases, ancient Israelite warfare was particularly brutal. One supporting authority for this view is Hobbs, A Time for War, who writes: "Contrary to the practice of some oriental armies which were advised to let the enemy leave the field with honour, biblical battles were a game of killing. . . . The Old Testament . . . records with a distinct

The debate was occasioned by Delbrück's criticisms of Wilamowitz's approach to military history: one that was careful to credit the religious element in Greek warfare. Delbrück opted instead for an "objective" treatment that ignored religion altogether. Delbrück's monumental study, History of the Art of War, 4 vols., recently republished in an English translation, should itself be used with caution in light of Pritchett's own strictures against the weakness of a methodology that ignores the religious motivation behind military acts. For another caveat against certain features of Delbrück's approach, see Victor Hanson, The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece (New York: Knopf, 1989), 22-23.
lack of passion the slaughter of thousands of nameless and unsung soldiers on both sides of the conflict.”

The picture drawn by Welch of the restraint exercised by invading Lamanite armies is therefore probably an overgeneralization about a people characterized elsewhere in the Book of Mormon as being “blood-thirsty” and “without compassion.”

When this legal approach is combined with another, perhaps the paradigm of philology, the results are surprisingly creative. For instance, a close reading of the Book of Mormon usage of the term “young men” suggests Nephite parallels with the Hebrew terms bāhûr and nā'ûr. Then, by attacking this philological foothold in the text with weaponry from the comparative approach, an important insight is gained on Nephite society: the term “young man,” it is reasonable to conclude, refers to “a man who had attained the age of twenty and who was responsible to render military service” (p. 66). Seen in the context of what is known of Jewish society and expectations of military service, the Book of Mormon references, as brief as they are, hence take on important significance.

Another application of the philological approach is Terrence L. Szink, “An Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 35-45). This paper annotates the oath of allegiance and the motif of the rent coat incorporated in Alma 46 by adducing Hittite, Mesopotamian, and Hebrew parallels. Stephen Ricks, in his “‘Holy War’: The Sacral Ideology of War in the Book of Mormon and in the Ancient Near East” (pp. 103-117), himself uses a philological tool in also addressing the meaning of the Book of Mormon term “young men,” and extends the definition, as does John Welch, to include Helaman’s famous “stripling warriors.” There is some overlapping with Welch’s work, but the addition of new details is worth it.

But the main burden of Ricks’ study and his fundamental approach is not philological but contextual: to place Book of Mormon warfare within the context of the “sacral ideology” of the Near East and Israel. The comparisons are apt and drawn

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8 Hobbs, A Time for War, 98-99.
9 The development over the last several centuries of laws to govern the conduct of a “humane” (not necessarily a “just”) war—a strictly modern concern—is traced by Geoffrey Best, Humanity in Warfare (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980).
10 By focusing on the sacred ideology that underpinned the practice of warfare in ancient Israel and the Near East, Ricks neatly sidesteps the
from a broad range of cultures and eras. Indeed, one major contribution of this study is to adduce ancient Near Eastern parallels with the Bible, something that has rarely been attempted.\textsuperscript{11} It is hence an important contribution to the separate field of biblical studies, and is a religious counterbalance to the view that divine intervention in biblical warfare was often magical and hence only mechanical.\textsuperscript{12} Ricks further contrasts, under individual rubrics, wars of annihilation and wars of destruction, again by adducing further examples from ancient literature. One very minor observation is that, while the grisly piles of corpses and bones in Alma 16 certainly have similarities with later practices of the medieval Mongols or from World War II, rightly compared with Book of Mormon practice, I wonder if the ancient habit of erecting a battle trophy, the \textit{tropaion}, may not elucidate at least part of the rationale for heaping up the dead in the Book of Mormon.\textsuperscript{13} At any rate, thanks to Ricks,
scholars now have available selected examples from the Book of Mormon that, in the immediacy and clarity they present on the concept of divinely directed warfare, would complement any future study in biblical or Near Eastern fields.

A reverse tack to the tenor of the other contributions in Part 1 is taken by John A. Tvedtnes, "The Sons of Mosiah: Emissaries of Peace" (pp. 118-23). His representational notes on the mission of the sons of Mosiah to the Lamanites stress not the religious motivations of warfare but instead the military significance of this overtly religious act.

Part 2, "Military Policies and Leaders," consists of seven contributions, again ranging in length and depth of coverage. If the main focus of the contextualization approach of Part 1 is Near Eastern parallels, the main focus of Part 2 is Mesoamerican precedents and survivals. But first, two essays by Hugh Nibley and Daniel Peterson attempt to place warfare in the Book of Mormon within the context of military theory.

Nibley's "Warfare and the Book of Mormon" (pp. 127-45) takes many of the martial maxims from *Vom Kriege*, by the great nineteenth-century strategist Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), and illustrates them—with characteristic literary grace and ironic wit—with events from the Book of Mormon. The Nephites and Lamanites, by virtue of Nibley's insights, seem to have committed most of the general military do's and don'ts as isolated by Clausewitz; the military narratives of the Book of Mormon hence ring true in the context of military historiography. Of course, one may quibble with the validity of some of Clausewitz's maxims in light of the development of military thought, but not with the appropriateness of Nibley's selections.

Nibley's choice of Clausewitz for comparison with Book of Mormon warfare, because of his overall influence on modern military historiography, is certainly justifiable. But a closer connection could have been made between military theory that was current when Joseph translated the Book of Mormon and

the practice of warfare in the book, for Clausewitz had no influence on early U.S. military thinking. The first English translation of his great work appeared in England in 1873; only during World War II was an American edition published. Therefore, in light of the fact that early U.S. military doctrine was taken almost exclusively from French, not Prussian, theorists, a better candidate for comparison with Book of Mormon warfare is probably Clausewitz’s contemporary Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869). His military maxims and historical analyses, as embodied in such works as Traité des grandes opérations militaires, 5 vol. (1805), and Principes de la stratégie, 3 vols. (1818), lay behind both General Winfield Scott’s Infantry Tactics of 1835 and West Point Professor Dennis Har Mahan’s A Complete Treatise on Field Fortifications of 1836. The tie-in between between Nephite tactics and the theories prevalent in Joseph Smith’s time, taught before the publication of the Book of Mormon or of the American manuals themselves, would have been intriguing to investigate. Without this connection, Nibley may as well have chosen any competent manual of military tactics, or even an oriental classic such as the Sun-tzu ping-fa or the Honchō bugei shōden.

Daniel Peterson, “The Gadianton Robbers as Guerrilla Warriors” (pp. 146-73), addresses the nature of the threat of the Gadianton band. Seen in the light of the writings of three modern theoreticians on guerrilla warfare with much practical experience, Mao Tsetung, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara, the activities of the Gadianton robbers manifest a consistent and believable pattern of guerrilla warfare. A second essay of Peterson, “Notes on ‘Gadianton Masonry’” (pp. 174-224), makes an important point but is oddly out of place because its emphasis is on sociological, not military, aspects of the Gadiantons. And the “contextualization” approach used to treat them centers on the intellectual world of Joseph Smith, not the military milieu of Mormon. The piece was not presented in the warfare symposium but was included by the editors in this volume because of the important conclusion that it draws,

14 Jomini’s most famous opus, Précis de l’art de la guerre, appeared in 1838 after the publication of the Book of Mormon, but is a summary and expansion of ideas already contained in his earlier works.

15 The fact that early American military theory exclusively preached offensive warfare, a doctrine diametrically opposed to Nephite military practice, underscores the nature of the Book of Mormon as an ancient source, not dependent on contemporary thought for ideas or inspiration.
written with flair and insight: the Gadianton robbers have no relationship, either in history or in Joseph Smith’s mind, with the contemporary anti-Masonic sentiments of early nineteenth-century America.

The next entry, as well as the remaining ones of Part 2 (with one notable exception), uses the context of ancient Mesoamerica to discuss various aspects of Book of Mormon warfare. In “Secret Combinations, Warfare, and Captive Sacrifice in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 225-36), author Bruce W. Warren treats an institution thematically related to the Gadianton robbers in seeking to set the secret combinations and the practice of imprisoning captured kings, documented in the book of Ether, within the little-understood context of ancient Mesoamerican secret societies. His conclusion is that “some of the items the Mayan materials discuss may be manifestations in later forms of historical, religious, and ritual events described in the Book of Mormon” (pp. 226-27). Given the paucity of evidence, I would only concur with this conclusion if the wording were changed to read “Some of the items . . . may be manifestations in later forms of the types of historical, religious, and ritual events described in the Book of Mormon.”

Matthew M. F. Hilton and Neil J. Flinders, “The Impact of Shifting Cultural Assumptions on the Military Policies Directing Armed Conflict Reported in the Book of Alma” (pp. 237-65), is a curious example of the admirably rigorous application of an unfortunately unclear framework. The overly adequate documentation in note 1, a mere “sampling” of possible sources that prove a problem exists, does not counterbalance the undernourished documentation of note 3 (one source), the proffered solution. Yet this slender support is the foundation of the framework used throughout the article to analyze the military events in Alma, a framework of “the vertical versus the horizontal tradition” in ancient Judaism (p. 238). Since these terms are used frequently throughout the piece to characterize and categorize the moral tendencies of Nephite and Lamanite societies, one would expect that they be explained and the confines of the framework clarified and documented. Yet this is not done. The unfortunate result is to make these terms read as mere buzzwords that are used to excuse the lack of serious analysis. And since the majority of the few scholars cited to support this framework and related ones (the mantic versus the sophic, the supernatural versus the natural) are Latter-day Saint,
we are left to wonder if the framework really existed anciently with widespread examples in the literature or is merely a modern perspective generated from the Latter-day Saint world view. Since none of the events in the Book of Mormon or their underlying assumptions is set in any ancient context by the authors—Mesoamerican, Judaic, Greek, or the like—the validity and applicability of the framework remains unclear.

What does emerge from this essay is a representational survey of scriptural citations that are arranged under rubrics largely drawn from the behavioral sciences. Since the few technical and professional terms interspersed throughout the work are likewise undefined (and undocumented), we find little guidance on how to approach the mass of data so assiduously collected and arranged. A little effort at definition and documentation would let the reader get a handle on the data and let him know both the validity of the approach and the limits of its application.

The late A. Brent Merrill’s study, “Nephite Captains and Armies” (pp. 266-95), approaches warfare from the perspective of the development of Nephite and Lamanite armies and the evolution of the office of captain. He also surveys the successive occupants of the office of chief captain.

Major Merrill sets his conclusions within the framework of Mesoamerican, and to a lesser degree Near Eastern, cultures; but he was often led to his conclusions based on his experience with military practice and history. For instance, on p. 273 he concludes that because, “in the ancient Near East, only privileged leaders owned and used protective armor,” only leaders similarly outfitted could stand against each other. “This fact helps explain why a leader was frequently required to defy another leader in battle.” This observation leads to the further possibility that some sort of ritual combat was implied when leaders squared off, a practice that is often obscured by the close following of guards that commonly accompany either king or general in battle. John Welch already hinted at another

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16 For instance, Merrill sees behind Mormon’s statement at Mormon 1:2 a Toltec-Aztec parallel of early military training in telpochcalli, or military schools, which were, curiously enough, attached to temples (p. 286).

possible rationale on pp. 60-61: "Commonly, ancient wars were based on ‘animosities and arguments of leaders’ of nations, and hence premarital correspondences were typical and appropriate ‘to justify declarations of war and call down divine support.’ " His legal approach to these official declarations of war has a parallel from the realm of ritualized rhetoric. This is the practice of “flyting,” the verbal duel in which heroes make boastful claims that they endeavor to realize on the battlefield—Achilles versus Hector, Beowulf versus Unferth, Charlemagne versus Baligant, et al.\(^\text{18}\) Welch specifically mentions the hand-to-hand combat between Alma and Amlici in his own section on “The Position of the Chief Captain in the Nephite Government,” which should be read in conjunction with Merrill’s study.

Another of Major Merrill’s insights on military practice based on economic and strategic considerations is the conclusion that the Nephites were prudent to maintain a grand strategy of defensive warfare: “Fortifications, which needed relatively few men to man, became force ‘multipliers,’ by means of which the Nephites could extend a combat front, and served as a base of maneuver for mobile field forces. This was an effective use of one principle of war, the economy of forces” (pp. 276-77). He does go on to conclude that when this principle was violated, the Nephites usually suffered defeat, referring the reader to Mormon 4:4. This contribution in the style of a Delbrück, ascribing to economic or strategic exigencies the implementation or effect of a policy, is an important aspect of warfare, and it is to Merrill’s credit that his study reveals the contours of many such policies and military institutions. But, with Pritchett, we must hasten to add that the religious reasons for implementing or maintaining a policy are too crucial to ignore.\(^\text{19}\) Since other entries in this

\(^{18}\) See the just published study of Ward Parks, *Verbal Dueling in Heroic Narrative: The Homeric and Old English Traditions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), who examines the literary evidence and brings in insights from psychological and sociological perspectives such as playground antics or mob hysterics.

\(^{19}\) An instructive parallel with the Nephite practice of defensive warfare is the ancient Chinese Mohists, who preached the necessity of defensive warfare for small states and who developed the art of siege warfare to a high degree. Nevertheless, we misunderstand the Mohists as much as the Nephites if we do not consider their humanitarian philosophy as a major motivation alongside of the practical necessities for stressing defensive warfare: they utterly abhorred offensive warfare on moral grounds. On this point, see Robin R. E. Yates, “The Mohists on Warfare: Technology,
volume treat the religious implications of warfare, Major Merrill was justified in concentrating on his strengths in illuminating the strategic, economic, and purely military background. With this orientation in mind, his entire study is a valuable window on an important dimension of Book of Mormon warfare hitherto little understood.

In “Book of Mormon Tribal Affiliation and Military Castes” (pp. 298-326), author John A. Tvedtnes posits some interesting, often intriguing possibilities, which are unfortunately asserted with too much certainty in light of the paucity of evidence. His main theses—that “military and political leadership among the Nephites and related people was often a responsibility inherited from one’s father” (p. 296) and that tribal affiliations were maintained until the destruction of the Nephites—seem to be supported in the main by the evidence, admittedly sketchy, from the Book of Mormon. This multidimensional view of Book of Mormon society as made up of competing tribes, as opposed to a monolithic dichotomy between good Nephites and evil Lamanites, is a salutary corrective and calls for interpretation that is more sensitive to social forces and familial loyalties. But when the author defines the tribe in


20 It should be pointed out that men from the same localities have long tended to fight together; in terms of morale and esprit d’corps this made military sense as men were more willing to fight alongside of those who had as much stake in the conflict as themselves and were more willing to follow a leader whom they knew personally. It also made economic sense as communities often helped outfit their members. So caution should be exercised before drawing firm conclusions on the familial, kinship implications of a military organization.

21 One line of investigation for the study of tribes and tribal loyalty in the Book of Mormon is suggested by Rudolf Smend, Yahweh War and Tribal Confederation, tr. Max Rogers (Nashville: Abingdon, 1970). He cautions that, in studying ancient Israel, a distinction should be maintained between political tribal confederacies and sacred amphictyonic confederacies centered on a common cult. Although the notion of an Israelite amphictyony analogous to the Greek model is no longer fashionable, the notion of a sacred confederacy is still valid. In the Book of Mormon, therefore, loyalty to the common cause engendered by religious commitment should always form the backdrop against which to examine social affiliations and familial loyalties.
terms of the modern Arab, and claims that their "social structure is akin to that of the ancient Israelites," we must assume that the author knows what he is talking about, for nowhere does he substantiate this claim, nor document his description of the Arab tribe.22 The result of this unease is to make us view his findings as plausible in their outlines, but not sufficiently delineated nor supported to contribute to the sociological literature on tribal structures in biblical or Book of Mormon fields.

Unpersuasive, however, is the section on "The Nephite Military Caste," where too much hinges on tenuous genealogical ties and arbitrary dating. Bold statements of the etymologies of Book of Mormon names, let alone sweeping conclusions based upon their supposed significance, result from incautious scholarship. Ellis H. Minns once warned that "founding any argument on personal names is singularly unsatisfactory. All history tells us that easily as nations change their language, they change their names more easily."23 One historian who has fought against this approach in the field of Central Asian history is Otto Maenchen-Helfen. With regard to the question of the supposed identity of the nomadic Hun with the Chinese nemesis, the Hsiung-nu, he stated that even if the names were linguistically related, names do travel:

The simple fact that the identity of the names, provided they are identical, does not prove the identity of language, economy, social institutions, religion, or art is all too often overlooked. Huns and Hsiung-nu may have borne the same name, and have been as different as the Walloons from the Welsh or the Venetians from the Wends.24

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22 A recent survey of the literature on the tribal society of Israel reviewed works that support this thesis and works which would rather compare the Israelite institution with the Roman *tribus*, as well as works which posit new definitions. All of this literature surveyed, but not the survey itself, was available before the symposium on Warfare. See J. D. Martin, "Israel as a Tribal Society," in *The World of Ancient Israel*, 95-117. As with the paper of Hilton and Flinders, the trustworthiness of a model and its exact parameters must be set before the discussion begins if confusion is to be avoided.


24 "The Ethnic Name Hun," in Søren Egerod and Else Glahn, eds., *Studia Serica Bernhard Karlsgren Dedicata* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1959),
And I may point out that the title of the Mongolian Chinggis Khan is Turkish, while that of the Tibetan Dalai Lama is Mongolian. Neither adoption of a foreign name implies anything but the durability and popularity of particular titles. Therefore, to adopt this approach and claim that Moroni’s father Mormon was a descendant of the famous earlier Nephite general of the same name or that the chief captain contemporary with Alma named Zoram “may have descended from Zoram, the servant of Laban” (p. 320), all on the basis of identity of names, is really claiming nothing. But more depressingly, our confidence in the validity of Tvedtnes’s important conclusions is constantly undermined by outrageous claims made for unimportant, peripheral matters. An instance of this is the supposition that the sword used by Ammon against Lamanite raiders was quite possibly the sword of Laban, since his father was the king and in possession of the state treasures, among them the sword of Laban. This aside adds nothing to the discussion, and only serves to distract the sensibly cautious reader. It and similar suppositions are better left confined to the decent obscurity of the endnotes, a practice followed by other


25 I am not denigrating the utility of linguistics itself. Tvedtnes himself is an accomplished linguist, with several interesting and important contributions to the field such as “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon—a Preliminary Survey,” BYU Studies 11 (1970): 50-60, and “A Phonemic Analysis of Nephite and Jaredite Proper Names,” Newspaper and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A. 141 (December 1977): 1-8. His qualifications as a linguist are therefore unimpeachable. I am merely questioning the advisability of using a linguistic approach to answer broad social questions, especially in the face of an insufficient data base.
contributes to this volume. With a firmer editorial hand, the narrative could have flowed unimpeded, with the more assertive claims softened by humble disclaimers of infallibility, and the more egregious flights of fancy—they themselves already qualified by token "perhaps," "possibly be" or "plausible to assume"—expunged entirely. As it is, much imaginative, often insightful narrative remains, like the apocrypha, useful for the informed reader who, being grounded in the realities of the limitations of scholarship, prefers the safety net of proof or at least the safety line of plausibility before ascending the precarious trapeze of interpretation.

Part 3, "War and Its Preparations: Weapons, Armor, and Fortifications," essentially concludes the book. The focus of this section is on the realia of war—its physical implements and tools, and their use in ancient Near Eastern and Mesoamerican cultures. William Hamblin emerges as the chief contributor to this section as a series of articles, either alone or in collaboration with Brent Merrill, treats the major weapons used in warfare recorded in the Book of Mormon, all illustrated with hand-drawn figures of weapons and warriors and approached in the main through the discipline of archaeology.

"Swords in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 329-52) is one of these collaborative efforts. It prefaces an analysis of all words and scriptural contexts in the Book of Mormon that mention the word sword by putting both the development and use of swords in the context of military theory and practice. The conclusion of this investigation is that the common sword in the Book of Mormon, apart from the sword of Laban and others modelled after it, was an edged weapon used for cutting, and that the Mesoamerican macuahuitl or macana, a war-club double edged with obsidian, is the most likely candidate for this sword.

26 For instance, Hamblin, "Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon," 399 n. 61, contains a very plausible interpretation that could have been incorporated into the main body of the text; nevertheless, probably because the endnote also indicates the weakness or other qualifying factors of the interpretation, it was felt to be too digressive to remain in the text.

27 A work which appeared too recent to be of service to this study but which cannot be neglected now is Peter Connolly et al., Swords and Hilt Weapons (New York: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1989). Its profuse illustrations are matched by scholarly analyses by various learned contributors.
In keeping with the introductory role of this essay at the head of this section, it is prefaced by theoretical musings on the impact of warfare and weapons on the development of society as specialization of weapons manufacture led to the need for specialists in society: "Societies thus tended to become increasingly militarized, specialized, and complex" (p. 330). This question is a very complex one in its own right, and deserved documentation for further reading even if it could not and should not be addressed further within the confines of a paper on swords. The fact that the same question is addressed by Hamblin in his concluding essay, this time in more depth, should have been indicated.

A related essay by the same collaborators is "Notes on the Cimeter (Scimitar) in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 360-64). They adopt the same archaeological approach with philological excursions and conclude that the most likely Mesoamerican candidate for the Book of Mormon scimitar is both "a curved ax-like weapon held by many of the figures in the Temple of the Warriors at Chichen Itza" (p. 363) and the Jaguar claw mace.

On the same weapon Paul Y. Hoskisson, "Scimitars, Cimeters! We Have Scimitars! Do We Need Another Cimeter?" (pp. 352-59), challenges the view that the use of the word cimeter (commonly scimitar) in the Book of Mormon is anachronistic. Citing Near Eastern precedents and by closely reading 1 Samuel 17:45, Hoskisson concludes that Helaman 1:14 parallels the biblical passage and that the word should be considered no more anachronistic in the Book of Mormon than it is in the Bible.

Hamblin strikes out on his own with the next two studies. "The Bow and Arrow in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 365-99) is a well-ordered, amply documented treatment of various aspects of this weapon in its ancient Near Eastern and Mesoamerican contexts. His study is a model of both caution and comprehensiveness in examining three types of evidence—literary and epigraphical, artistic, and archaeological—to counter the claims of critics of the Book of Mormon that the bow and arrow were not used in ancient America.28 An interesting

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28 One claim of Hamblin seems misstated. On p. 382 he writes "Despite the clear use of the bow by the Israelites, there are no extant artistic representations of an Israelite using a bow." Unless he wanted to clearly distinguish Israelites from Judeans, Hamblin probably meant "There are no extant, indigenous representations by Israelites of an Israelite using a bow," for Judean archers are represented as defending the city of Lachish
appendix is a brief excursus, from the perspective of the aerodynamics of arrow flight, entitled "Why Did Nephi Make a New Arrow?" (pp. 392-93).

Hamblin’s "Armor in the Book of Mormon" (pp. 400-424) is in character with its same methodical, thorough presentation of data, mainly from archaeology, including non-Mesoamerican civilizations. Of special interest are the six figures that illustrate medieval Western, early Sumerian, and ancient Mayan armor. Appended is a critical index to references in the Book of Mormon on armor. On p. 408 Hamblin observes that the Lamanites copied Nephite technology soon after their defeat by Moroni’s better armored troops in 74 B.C. and that "Thereafter all sides in warfare seem to have had essentially the same defensive equipment." This is an effective illustration from ancient Mesoamerica of the principle of a symmetrical response to military innovation, and is one more example of the value the Book of Mormon can offer to general military historiography.

Two important studies by John L. Sorenson close out this section. It is fitting that he should be represented so prominently in this volume, since many of the tantalizing possibilities, intriguing insights, and bold conclusions of this collective volume found first utterance in his pioneering An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon. That his leads are not always acknowledged as such merely underscores their very

from Assyrian attackers in the famous relief of Lachish (Hobbs, A Time for War, 121-23); according to Hobbs the latest edition of the relief is in D. Ussishkin, The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1982).


See O'Connell, Of Arms and Men, 6-9, on the principles of symmetrical versus counter responses.

importance: they have already entered into the unconscious set of assumptions most Mormon scholars use to address Book of Mormon issues.32

The first study, “Fortifications in the Book of Mormon Account Compared with Mesoamerican Fortifications” (pp. 425-44), overthrows the “prevailing expert view” that “Mesoamerica was largely free from military conflict” (p. 425). The author’s mastery of the archaeological literature is evident in both text and table as he synthesizes the results of a growing body of technical reports. An inclusive appendix, “Book of Mormon Statements about Fortifications” (pp. 438-43), complements this study that is also indebted to the author’s unpublished research.

More anthropological in nature is the second of Sorenson’s studies, “Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica” (pp. 445-77). It traces temporal patterns of warfare evident in the Book of Mormon accounts to show that warfare then was conducted according to the seasonal round. Several natural factors emerge from this analysis: warfare had to take into account the availability of food supplies, and weather—the rainy versus the dry season, the heat—was an important element to plan around in any campaign. Sorenson next considers the timing of battles recorded in the accounts in relationship to the Nephite calendar. An important side result of this study is to show that after the birth of Christ the Nephites changed their new year’s day from around the winter solstice to near the beginning of April. He concludes that warfare was planned to account for natural factors, and major actions occurred between the end of the tenth and the beginning of the fourth month, or end of harvest. He shows how the Nephite pattern fits quite closely the Mesoamerican pattern. An exhaustive appendix called “Annals of the Nephite Wars” (pp. 462-77) concludes this study, categorizing 85 major wars under the rubrics of Action, Text, Dates, and Events.

Sorenson’s study is important for showing how closely tied to nature are the actions of men. The Nephites and Lamanites under consideration are revealed as men who occupy real time and who are subject to the vagaries of the natural

32 Occasionally, these assumptions are aired for the sake of the reader. For instance, William Hamblin states more than once sentiments such as “This study assumes that Mesoamerica [modern southern Mexico and Guatemala] is the land of the Book of Mormon, following John L. Sorenson’s An Ancient American Setting . . .” (47 n. 3; cf. 394 n. 9).
environment. Agriculture was not only a logistical problem, its destruction was often the goal of war. Even though we are not yet at the point of being able consistently to isolate precise logistical or topographical factors upon which success in Book of Mormon battles turned, such as can be isolated for many campaigns of the ancient and modern eras, Sorenson’s work makes a very promising start in this direction.

The work of summarizing the contributions to this volume and attempting a synthesis of its results falls to coeditor William Hamblin. In “The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies” (pp. 481-99), Hamblin’s mastery of the history, theory, and practice of warfare is evident in his expert marshalling of evidence, selection of historical examples, explanation of military theory, and comprehensive

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33 An overview of the importance of considering the factors of time and space and the length and duration of campaigns in the study of warfare is included in Israel Eph'al, “On Warfare and Military Control in Ancient Near Eastern Empires: Research Outline,” in History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literatures, 88-106.

34 For the relationship between agriculture and warfare in ancient Greece, see Victor D. Hanson, Warfare and Agriculture in Classical Greece (Pisa: Giardini, 1983), and Hanson, “The Hoplite and His Phalanx: War in an Agricultural Society,” in The Western Way of War, 27-39.

35 Hamblin cites John Masson Smith, Jr., in this regard. His “Ayn Jalut: Mamluk Success or Mongol Failure?” Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 44 (1984): 307-45, shows that the Mongols withdrew from the campaign against the Mamluks, “the turning point in the tide of Mongol conquest,” not because they were defeated but because of the following mundane considerations:

The Mongols in Syria carefully took into account both the resources of the country and... the military capabilities of their enemies. But despite their care, the Mongols could not—as long as they relied on the horses and methods of nomadism—reconcile the conflicting demands of logistic dispersal and movement with strategic concentration and tactical positioning. Any forces that were small enough to be concentrated amid adequate pasture and water were not large enough to take on the Mamluks. (p. 344)

This conclusion was only reached after a careful consideration of the topographical features of Syria and by calculating the daily nutritional requirements of the hardy but still mortal Mongolian pony.
documentation. He skillfully splices various strands of history, culture, and thought scattered throughout the volume with his own original insights and interpretations and weaves them into a tightly-argued text that stands on its own as an important statement of the relevance and importance of warfare in Book of Mormon studies. This allows the volume to conclude on a high rhetorical point and to serve as a motivating springboard for further research.

Just as important as his work of summary and synthesis are his suggested avenues for further research. For instance, he stresses the importance of logistics, citing the work of Engels on Alexander the Great and John Smith on the Mongols. He also nominates demography and patterns of recruitment as topics worthy of further study. A nod to the social and economic costs of warfare leads us to consider the personal cost in terms of the psychological effects of the terror of battle and its physical strain à la Hanson, *The Western Way of War*, who focuses not on strategy, tactics, weapons, logistics, or casualties but on the total emotional and physical impact all these factors had on the misery of the infantryman in his phalanx at the moment of battle.


Along this line, the Book of Mormon is in a unique position to offer comparative perspective on the spiritual cost of battle. The influence Lamanite cultural and social values had on the conduct of their war—apart from moral or religious values—should be investigated in light of specific findings on the impact the Celtic heritage of the Southerner had on his actions in the Civil War. The rhetorical function of war in the structure of narrative is another possible line of research that should be mentioned. All of these are possibilities for further investigation indicated by Hamblin, hinted at by his summary, or inspired by the volume itself. Other aspects of warfare drawn from the paradigms of other cultures and concepts of military theory are, of course, relevant for further research; the book does not claim to have exhausted its coverage. And one particular need is a separate study gathering the different ways the Book of Mormon contributes to understanding the history, theory, practice, and

38 Grady McWhitney and Perry D. Jamieson, *Attack and Die: Civil War Military Tactics and the Southern Heritage* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1982), conclude that the influence of the Celtic heroic ethos as transmitted by the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, and Cornish strains of the South, different from the staid English stock of the North, was manifested in a Southern military strategy of offensive warfare characterized by the “courageous dash and reckless abandon” of officers and men: “Casualty lists reveal that the Confederates destroyed themselves by making bold and repeated attacks. They took the tactical offensive in 91 percent of the battles in which they suffered their greatest percentage losses. . . . Reckless charges accounted for most Confederate casualties” (9-11). This same heritage blinded them from learning from their defeats until too late. 39 One important Near Eastern precedent that thus far has escaped notice is the transformation wrought in military organization and practice by a change in governmental structure. The change among the Nephites from kingship to judgeship mentioned by Merrill (p. 278) and Welch (p. 53) finds a striking reverse process among the ancient Israelites that changed both the practice and, unfortunately, the morality of warfare. The model adopted by Hobbs in his treatment of this theme is the “centralized bureaucratic empire”—“this new system represents a decisive shift in the manipulation of power in Israel. Power is now centralized” (*A Time for War: A Study of Warfare in the Old Testament*, 54). The king in the ancient Near East was more a warrior than a paternal figure. This understanding of the structure of power is directly relevant to the Nephite condition, for under the reign of the judges, unless the people were righteous and rallied around this authority and made it as strong as the kings had been, competing factions weakened this power and of course made military defense a difficult task.
especially the morality of warfare, hinted at throughout the volume.40

But the most important result we can reach by reading this work is not a specific area for more research, avoiding some of the pitfalls indicated in this review, or the learning of new facets of Book of Mormon life uncovered by the creative application of new paradigms, also indicated herein. Rather, it is that people in the Book of Mormon were frequently faced with warfare in life-and-death situations. But the hard choices of defense from aggression and physical survival had a spiritual dimension that governed the morality of implementing specific strategies and tactics. Book of Mormon warfare, although sometimes avoidable and always abhorrent, had a direct connection to both religious institutions and principles and was often righteously conducted under the direction of prophets and inspired leaders. The fact that the opposite was also true, that conspiring men involved their people in unrighteous wars of dominion, should lead us to face unflinchingly our own hard choices of physical survival and spiritual growth in a world grown weary of battle and unsure of its morality. The fact that "the rate of weapons development accelerated remarkably since approximately 1830" should tell us something of the importance of the message of the book that appeared in that same year.41 To discern the morality of our own conflicts and then to act according to religious principles in knowing when to fight with faith or when to have courage in avoiding combat, both exemplified in the Book of Mormon, then, is one of its most important lessons on warfare for our age.

40 For instance, on p. 72 Welch stresses the biblical teaching of ritual and sexual purity for success in battle. This concept, strengthened by the very clear examples from the Book of Mormon, is in striking contrast to the norm of military behavior on campaign or on leave in foreign lands.

41 O'Connell, Of Arms and Men, 9. Of less significance but of equal interest is the consideration that the first full-fledged codification of U.S. military tactics also appeared in 1830: U.S. War Department, Abstracts of Infantry Tactics; Including Exercises and Manoeuvres of Light Infantry and Riflemen; for the Use of the Militia of the United States (Boston, 1830). The board of officers who produced this manual was headed by the famous tactician General Winfield Scott, whose more famous manual appeared in 1835.

Reviewed by Kurt Weiland

Years ago, I knew a grizzled Army Sergeant-Major. He'd spent decades as a combat soldier, leading troops in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. When I knew him, he was stationed in Germany, and his hobby was travelling with his wife to archaeological sites across Europe. One afternoon, they went looking for an ancient Roman army camp. When they arrived at the spot where the guidebook indicated the camp would be, nothing was there. Nothing. No remains, no ruins, no evidence. Frustrated with the inaccurate guidebook, he and his wife walked the woods and fields for an hour, looking for the lost site.

Finally, exasperated, he paused and realized he was approaching the problem from the wrong direction. He looked at the terrain around him and asked, "If I were an infantry commander, where would I establish my camp?" He pointed to a nearby hilltop and told his wife, "There. That's where I'd set up. The camp's there. It's got to be there." When they climbed the hilltop, they found the camp.

Two thousand years of history telescoped on that hilltop. The same principles that prompted the twentieth-century soldier to select the hilltop position had prompted the Roman centurion to do the same.

The point of this story is that the principles don't change. In the libraries of military science, the only new texts are on the means of warfare, not the principles. So, if a modern student of warfare were to look at the Book of Mormon, that student would be able to recognize the principles, the tactics, and the strategies that the Nephites used.

And this is why *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* is such a worthwhile book. It examines the principles, the tactics, and the strategies that the Nephites used. The book is a collection of papers presented at the Symposium on Warfare in the Book of Mormon, held in March of 1989 at Brigham Young University.

Some of the papers are brilliant, some are interesting, and a few, unfortunately, are disappointing. But the book is well
worth the read. The brilliant and interesting parts clearly outweigh the disappointing parts.

I learned much here. The authors—the ones who have done it well—have made the connections. As I read the book, there were crystal-clear moments when the little light bulb would go on over my head, the little voice at the back of my brain would shout “A-HA!,” and I would pull out my yellow marker to highlight a sentence or paragraph.

For example, I’d never realized that there were one hundred separate instances of armed conflict in the Book of Mormon, nor did I understand that the conflicts fell into recognizable groups or campaigns. Yet John Welch, by the sixth page of the book, organizes them with such names as “The War of the Kings,” “The War of Ammonite Secession,” “The War of Nephitite Retreat,” and others.

I had never realized the connection between apparently simple events and their historical context. William Hamblin and Brent Merrill explain, almost in passing, how “Nephi’s method of beheading Laban by grasping his hair to pull up the head and expose the neck is a common technique. Grasping the hair of the victim also insures that the head remains a stable target for the swordsman” (p. 335). And, if there were any doubt, Hamblin and Merrill include copies of ancient Egyptian reliefs that show Rameses III grasping the hair of his enemies to behead them. While this may seem to be a small or distant connection, it places one of the familiar episodes of the Book of Mormon—Nephi slaying Laban—in a historical and cultural context. Much of the book works that way.

I had never realized the effect that Mormon’s role as warrior had on his role as abridger and compiler. Douglas Phillips points out the kinship that Mormon felt with Captain Moroni:

Inevitably, Mormon should have been attracted to Moroni—the brilliant, energetic, selfless, patriotic, and God-fearing hero who had been instrumental in preserving the Nephite nation. So great was Mormon’s admiration for him that he named his son after him. (p. 27)

Phillips argues that Mormon’s respect for Moroni led him to spend a large portion of the abridgment on the Nephite captain. I had always been aware that Captain Moroni shared his name
with Mormon's son, but I'd never realized the reason why. All of a sudden, the connections become apparent.

I stand in awe of the authors' research. The authors—again, the ones who have done it well—have done their homework. On page after page, I would find myself wondering, "How did they find all this stuff? Where did they get this information?"

Daniel Peterson, for example, cites an incredible array of references—from Che Guevara, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Karl von Clausewitz to Baroness Orczy (the author of The Scarlet Pimpernel), Truman Madsen, and Minucius Felix (who wrote Octavius 9: Occultis se notis et insignibus noscunt—but you probably already knew that, right?).

The "Index of Passages" at the end of the book cites not only all four Latter-day Saint standard works, but also—among other references—the Code of Hammurabi (not once but seven times), the Mishnah, Josephus, the Qur'an, and Julius Caesar. An incredible array.

I began this review with a short account of my friend, the Sergeant-Major. I explained how he and the Roman centurion followed the same principles when they selected a site for a base camp. Warfare in the Book of Mormon looks at some of the elements of war, both ancient and modern, and says, "This makes sense. This is why it was this way."

William Hamblin, for example, writes an intriguing essay on "Armor in the Book of Mormon." He points out that the book's description of armor is consistent with itself, with tactics, with technology, and with evidence from ancient America. I enjoyed the comparison with tactics.

First, some background. The armor of a specific time changes according to the tactics of the specific time. For example, the flat, "fried-egg" helmet of World War I changed to the more protective steel pot of World War II because the new war wasn't going to be fought in trenches. The soldiers of 1941 needed protection from the sides as well as from above. Using this principle of adaptation, Hamblin points out that Nephite armor was perfectly suited to Nephite warfare.

The battles in the Book of Mormon were battles of movement. Consider this battle of the Zoramite War:

And it came to pass that the Lamanites became frightened, because of the great destruction among
them, even until they began to flee towards the river Sidon.

And they were pursued by Lehi and his men; and they were driven by Lehi into the waters of Sidon, and they crossed the waters of Sidon. And Lehi retained his armies upon the bank of the river Sidon that they should not cross.

And it came to pass that Moroni and his army met the Lamanites in the valley, on the other side of the river Sidon, and began to fall upon them and to slay them.

And the Lamanites did flee again before them, towards the land of Manti; and they were met again by the armies of Moroni. (Alma 49:39-42)

Consider the movement involved here:

—from the land into the river Sidon,
—from the river to the far bank,
—from the far bank to the valley, and
—from the valley to the land of Manti.

The ancient combatants had no use for armor that might restrict their mobility. They had to move to survive. Hamblin points out that the Nephites wore little or no leg armor. The Book of Mormon describes head-plates and breastplates, arm shields and bucklers, but no leg armor. In fact, in one battle, the Nephite soldiers were wounded almost solely on their—exposed—legs (Alma 49:24). The Nephite battles were battles of movement, and leg armor would restrict movement. Nephite armor was perfectly suited to Nephite warfare.

Despite all the good passages, there are disappointing elements. Some of the papers must have been written for a far more sophisticated audience. I never finished Matthew Hilton and Neil Flinders’ essay on “The Impact of Shifting Cultural Assumptions on the Military Policies Directing Armed Conflict Reported in the Book of Alma.” I couldn’t understand what they were saying:

Many contemporary scholars are writing books analyzing historical and present cultural manifestations of the fundamental conflict between Korihor’s argument and its antithesis. The underlying issue that makes the debate possible is the axial tension between
what the Greeks perceived as the *mantic* versus the *sophic* view, what has been identified in ancient Judaism as the *vertical* versus the *horizontal* tradition. (p. 238)

I’ve understood that an author should write for the audience, and I have a hard time believing that the same audience that appreciates the discussions on tactics, warfare, and weaponry will immediately understand the discussion on *mantic* and *sophic* views.

I also had a problem with a specific writer imposing his own agenda. Hugh Nibley is entitled to his own views on soldiers and soldiering, but in “Warfare and the Book of Mormon,” he lets his biases interfere with his discussion:

Amalickiah has to get the Lamanites to hate so they can go to war, so he has his people preach from towers—gets the propaganda machine going. Such hatred is artificial. It has to be stirred up, but once the killing starts, there follows the idea of vengeance—*the Green Beret syndrome*. (p. 143, italics mine)


Earlier, he nails Maxwell Taylor (in an article about Clausewitz and the Book of Mormon?):

I remember very well the day General Taylor, just glowing, discovered brush-fire wars; he explained how we could have little wars going on, so the military could get their promotions and always have opportunity for practice—send the officers out to get practice. (p. 134)

No references, no documentation. Just a cheap shot at a well-known (and generally well-regarded) soldier.

My last concern deals with leaps of faith. In many of the articles, we’re asked to *assume* a lot. John Tvedtnes does a lot of leaping:

The other warrior caste comprised men such as the earlier Moroni and Moronihah and probably Mormon and his father Mormon, as well as his son
Moroni and another Moronihah. *It may not be out of line to suggest that this caste descended from the ancient kings.* (p. 321, emphasis added)

But he gives no support for this suggested lineage. Moments later, Tvedtnes argues that “it is not impossible” the sword Ammon used to defend Lamoni’s flocks was the sword of Laban—the one Nephi used to behead Laban and kept as a model for other swords (p. 321). While it’s not impossible, the proof and the connections aren’t there.

William Hamblin makes a similar leap in discussing Limhi’s expedition into Jaredite country:

Limhi’s expedition chose to return with only three items: the twenty-four gold plates of Ether, brass and copper breastplates, and some rusted pieces of swords, *implying that they were scavenging for metal and that metal was therefore something unusual and rare*—even a piece of rusting metal was worth recovering. (p. 406, emphasis added)

I don’t see the implication that metal was unusual and rare, especially for a people who kept their records on metal plates.

But my complaints are small compared with what I’ve gained from the book. When I learned that the Gadianton robbers practiced the same guerrilla warfare as the Viet Cong, I marvelled at the similarities. When I learned that no Lamanite leader was ever executed (just as the ancient Hebrews generally did not kill prisoners of war), I appreciated the connections. And when I learned that the annihilation of the city of Ammonihah, a city “consecrated to destruction” (p. 110), reflected similar patterns of the Israelites, the pre-Islamic Arabs, and the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Germans (p. 111), my understanding of the Book of Mormon grew.

On my bookshelf, *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* stands next to John Sorenson’s *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. They complement one another.
Reviewed by Victor L. Ludlow

*Isaiah and the Book of Mormon*, by Philip J. Schlesinger, is a passage-by-passage commentary of the Isaiah chapters in the Book of Mormon. The book's subtitle, "A Study Guide for Understanding the Writings of Isaiah in the Book of Mormon," raises expectations which this short book of 100 pages does not fulfill. Instead of "study guide," a more appropriate subtitle for the book would be "some study notes." The primary value of this letter-page sized paperback for students of the Book of Mormon is that it quickly shows where the whole chapters of Isaiah are found in the Book of Mormon. It also gives a few selected quotes from various Latter-day Saint authors about some of the passages. Unfortunately, this book has a number of problems and weaknesses that render it inferior to the other commentaries on Isaiah currently available to Latter-day Saint readers.

There are a number of grammatical errors, misspelled words, and other minor mistakes throughout the book. The writing style is choppy, and it lacks a standard and consistent footnote format.

It becomes quickly obvious that the author lacks familiarity with the world of the Old Testament, as indicated by mistakes and other problems in the lists of definitions given at the beginning of each chapter. These lists are convenient and helpful, but too often they lack clarity and accuracy.

Multiple examples of errors in just one list of definitions are found on page 70, where the terms for Isaiah 11 (2 Nephi 21) are explained. First of all, the list itself is incomplete and inconsistent. Three key terms found in Isaiah 11 are explained in the Doctrine and Covenants: Stem of Jesse, Rod, and Root of Jesse. The *Stem of Jesse* is included in Schlesinger's definition list along with its meaning and the D&C reference. The *Rod* (of the Stem of Jesse) is not even mentioned in the list although it is referred to in the following page of commentary. The *Root of Jesse* is listed with the D&C description, but no reference is included to where this material is found in the D&C.
In the same list, Ephraim is defined as (1) the son of Joseph and (2) a New Testament city. The second definition is irrelevant for this context, and two other important definitions should have been included, (1) the tribe of Ephraim's descendants, and (2) the central district of the Samarian hill country. In addition, the term Shinar is misspelled as "Shinor" and Orontes as "Drontes" (also on p. 65).

As a last example, the definition of Philistines (also repeated verbatim on pages 24 and 61) describes them as a "tribe" from Crete or Egypt that "occupied before the days of Abraham the rich lowland on the Mediterranean coast." Here the author has passed on inaccurate information from the Latter-day Saint Bible Dictionary. The Philistines are more properly a people, not a tribe, because "tribe" implies kinship associations and a common ancestry—things that cannot be proven for the Philistines. The idea that the Philistines were already in Palestine before the time of Abraham is erroneously derived from Genesis 21:32 and other passages in Genesis and Exodus, where the "land of the Philistines" is mentioned. But modern archaeology has proven that the Philistines, as one of the "sea peoples" that invaded the Near East at the end of the Bronze Age, did not enter Palestine until the twelfth century B.C.—long after the days of Abraham. The statement in Genesis 21:32 is thus anachronistic. It identifies the place where the Philistines dwelled to a Hebrew audience hundreds of years after the events of that verse occurred, using a designation that they would understand. It is the same as saying, "Columbus discovered America," even though America got its name after Columbus's voyage.

The definition goes on to say that "in the New Testament times [sic], they were considered a non-semitic people [sic] occupying Southwest Palestine." ("Non-semitic" should read "non-Semitic.") This statement is misleading because the Philistines cannot be considered a Semitic people in any time period. Also, by New Testament times the Philistines as a distinct people and culture had ceased to exist.

In the commentary on the Isaiah passages, the author relies almost exclusively upon previous Latter-day Saint commentaries on Isaiah and the Book of Mormon. The bulk of the citations are from the following works, in order of frequency: W. Cleon Skousen, Isaiah Speaks to Modern Times, Monte S. Nyman, "Great Are the Words of Isaiah," Sidney Sperry, Book of Mormon Compendium, and Victor Ludlow, Isaiah: Prophet,
Seer and Poet. Very little of an original nature is contributed, although the author does the reader a service in some instances by listing the various opinions of Latter-day Saint scholars and writers on the meaning of a particular passage. In this way the reader may see various possibilities for interpreting a particular passage. These selections would be more helpful if they were longer and if more selections dealing with the same Isaiah passage could be compared and contrasted to each other. Then the reader could identify the different styles and approaches of the Latter-day Saint writers.

The author uses the phrase "possible interpretation" and other uncertain language quite frequently, even in situations where more certainty is possible. This creates the impression that very little sure information is available and runs the risk of creating more confusion than offering aid.

The commentary does contain an admirable number of scriptural cross-references which help the reader find other references to specific words or ideas. However, these cross-references are almost entirely from the footnotes or Topical Guide listings readily available in the Latter-day Saint edition of the King James Version of the Bible.

Isaiah and the Book of Mormon is inferior to the sources from which it derives the bulk of its information. The reader would be better informed by studying the works of Ludlow, Nyman, Skousen, or Sperry listed above, or others, which are more professional, authoritative, and accurate. The contents of this book do not fulfill the reader's expectation that it will be another doctrinal commentary on Isaiah since it is not really a study guide, but more a collection of self-study notes. However, if this book can stimulate others to study Isaiah's writings and introduce them to better sources, then perhaps there is a place for it.

Reviewed by Joel C. Janetski

This work is aptly named. If you are interested in what has transpired in the study of Book of Mormon geography from the 1830s to the present day, this well-researched, encyclopedic study guide will serve you well.

The format of the book is both chronological and thematic. It consists of eight parts as follows:

**Part 1. A History of Ideas: The Geography of Book of Mormon Events in Latter-Day Saint Thought**

I found this section of the book particularly fascinating. Sorenson rather clearly traces the evolution of thinking about two kinds of geographical models in Book of Mormon studies: external and internal. The former is concerned with where in the real world, e.g., North America, South America, Central America, etc., the events in the Book of Mormon might have occurred. The latter is the attempt to construct a model or map of Book of Mormon events based on internal evidence without reconciling those events with real places.

Sorenson's insightful narrative comments on how personalities and even politics have entered into this sensitive issue over the past 170 years. Interesting trends noted include the gradual abandonment of the "hemispheric" model wherein the land northward is equated with North American and the land southward with South America and the adoption of a more limited scheme focused on Mesoamerica as the logical place for all Book of Mormon events to have happened. Despite these trends, Sorenson points out that no consensus has emerged.

**Part 2. Summaries of Models**

This section of the book is introduced by two geographical model indices, one arranged alphabetically by last name of the originator and one arranged chronologically. Following these is a lengthy section wherein all (there are 68 total) of the models are considered in detail. The section is arranged alphabetically
by originator's last name for ease of reference, I presume. The
detail on each model includes Area Focus (Mesoamerica,
hemispheric, etc.), Features (for example, where is the narrow
neck, etc.), various annotations by Sorenson, and the primary
reference wherein the model can be studied further, among other
things. If maps were generated by the originator, Sorenson has
copied them here.

This section forms the heart of the source material for the
historical aspect of the book.

**Part 3. The Resulting Problem and How to Proceed**

Here Sorenson sets up what he sees as a reasonable
approach to a study of Book of Mormon geography, with the
end result or solution to the problem being the attainment of a
"fit" between an internal model of the geography in the Book of
Mormon and some place in the external real world. To
accomplish this, Sorenson suggests that students first study the
text to produce a map based on geographical data from within
the text. Once this internal model is generated the second goal
can be pursued.

**Part 4. The Text Verse by Verse: Geographical
Relationships, Extents and Characteristics, with
Commentary**

This section represents a major contribution to any
student's work by providing a complete listing of all sources of
textual information on geography within the Book of Mormon.
Clearly, this section is offered as a logical follow-up to the
suggestion made in Part 3: construct an internal geographical
model based on the textual evidence. After stating several
assumptions about the information to follow, Sorenson moves
systematically through the Book of Mormon, noting all useful
scriptural references to geography, and analyzes the utility of
those references.

**Part 5. Index to the Analysis, by Feature**

This section provides a quick reference to the highly
Part 6. Summary of the Criteria for an Acceptable Model from the Text, by Feature

Sorenson here offers assistance to prospective students of Book of Mormon geography by making it clear what criteria must be met relative to various Book of Mormon places as new models are generated.


Again, a means of evaluating extant or new models is offered by the author. This section reminds me of a workbook approach wherein students can bore in to the problem and consider with some objectivity the utility of various models.

Part 8. A Trial Map Incorporating the Criteria from the Text

This is Sorenson's answer to his own admonition to generate an internal model or map of Book of Mormon places in Part 3.

Appendices

Three appendices are included with the book. The first could be construed as a complement to Part 1 as the various quotes on geography tend to help flesh out an historic perspective. The other two consider some difficult issues in the study of Book of Mormon geography: the difficulty with calculating distances and establishing or interpreting directions. The appendices are entitled:

A. Statements, by Date, Relevant to the Geography of Book of Mormon Events, by LDS Leaders or Others Reflecting Views Current in the Church
B. The Problem of Establishing Distances
C. The Problem of Directions

Comments

This most recent work by John Sorenson is a solid and highly useful contribution to the study of Book of Mormon geography. It is very much in the Sorenson style in that it is carefully researched and quite readable. However, the readability of the text could be improved by resolving a couple
of mechanical problems. I would suggest using one of the standard in-text citation styles (e.g., Smith 1945) rather than the cumbersome citation of authors and work titles within the text. A more streamlined approach would have required the inclusion of a formal Reference section, the exclusion of which I consider a deficiency. A final suggestion would be the inclusion of captions on the many maps accompanying the section on models. I also wonder a bit how well all of these second-generation maps will copy.

Regardless, with production of this synthesis along with his already published research, Sorenson has set himself apart as the primary scholar on the topic of Book of Mormon geography.

Reviewed by William Hamblin

Although *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans* will probably not be purchased by the average student of the Book of Mormon, it represents a major step forward in Book of Mormon studies. All serious students of the cultural implications of the transoceanic migrations of Book of Mormon peoples will find this work an invaluable resource. The bibliography provides a foundation for addressing the question, "'To what degree were the pre-Columbian American peoples and their cultures dependent on or independent of those in the Old World?" (p. v). The bibliography focuses not so much on internal issues of pre-Columbian American studies, but on the material remains, customs, myths, traditions, and historical accounts of both the Old and New worlds that can help answer this fundamental question. They include references to possible pre-Columbian contacts with Europe, Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and East Asia, in other words, with every geographical region of the Old World. Although there are some references to Latter-day Saint studies on the Book of Mormon, there is nothing overtly Mormon in Sorenson's and Raish's bibliography. Indeed, they make no mention of Mormonism in their introduction at all. Although most of the studies cited in these volumes do not directly address the Book of Mormon, they deal indirectly with the fundamental issues of the interpretation of possible archaeological and ethnohistorical remains of Book of Mormon peoples.

The bibliography consists of 5,613 individual citations (p. xii), each given a code number for reference. Although the compilers claim that the work is not "complete" (p. iii), the breadth and inclusiveness of the bibliography are very impressive. Certainly all major studies on pre-Columbian transoceanic contacts are included, and this work clearly represents the fundamental starting point for all future research on the subject.
The excellent annotations to the references are especially impressive and useful. Most entries are accompanied by at least a brief note on the contents. Many references include paragraph-length descriptions, while annotations on major entries are sometimes over a page. These annotations are useful on a number of levels. First, they provide clues to the major arguments of works which are often unclear from titles alone. Second, they assist in sifting the wheat from the chaff. In rapidly changing fields such as pre-Columbian history, a great deal of older work is dated by recent advances in understanding. Furthermore, like Egyptology with its "Pyramidiots," there is a substantial body of writing on pre-Columbian America derived from the lunatic fringe. Sorenson's and Raish's annotations can alert us to these tendencies in some works. Third, the annotations frequently serve as a type of intellectual cross-reference system, with Sorenson and Raish providing explanations of how certain books or articles are rebuttals or extensions to arguments raised by previous scholars. This allows the researcher to construct an intellectual history of scholarly arguments quickly and to view all sides of controversial issues.

The extensive index at the end of the second volume consists of 1250 terms (p. xii), with entries for each term ranging from one to the hundreds. It may surprise the average reader of the Book of Mormon to discover that there are over twice as many references to possible Chinese contacts with pre-Columbian America (257) as there are to possible Jewish contacts (Hebrew, 46; Israel, 44; Jew, 30; total, 120). Thus one of the values of this bibliography for Latter-day Saints is to help place the migrations of Book of Mormon peoples in the broader context of other possible pre-Columbian migrations and contacts with other peoples in the Old World. This helps us recognize that not every possible cultural parallel between the Old and New worlds should necessarily be seen as directly relevant "evidence" for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

As an example of the possible use of the annotations and index, we can take the term "chariot." The index references twelve citations. Examining just the annotations to these references, I learned that cultic and mythic chariots and wheeled vehicles (as opposed to war-chariots) were widespread throughout the Old World (C-248, F-139, L-80, S-365) and could be drawn by a wide variety of real or mythic animals, including lions, deer, dogs, and even birds (G-152, S-365,
A type of "bird-chariot" (L-80, S-178) is known in China, with possible parallels in Mesoamerica (N-16). Small wheeled vehicles, often described as "toys," may actually have been "magical" funerary models for use in the afterlife (F-139, S-365). The so-called wheeled "toys" in Mesoamerica are best understood in such a cultic and funerary setting (S-365, W-196). Since the chariot in the Book of Mormon is never mentioned in a military setting, it was undoubtedly such a cultic vehicle rather than a war-chariot. Other indexed terms of interest to students of the Book of Mormon include items such as: bow (26), elephant (40), iron (29), silk (6), horse (16) and barley (2). Thus the index can serve as an excellent springboard into further research into some of the technical problems in Book of Mormon studies.

The main value for this work is as a reference tool for the serious researcher in transoceanic contacts between the Old and New worlds. One of the major issues debated among historians and archaeologists of pre-Columbian America is whether pre-Columbian civilizations originated through diffusion of ideas from the Old World or as independent developments. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries diffusionist ideas held sway. In recent decades, independent development has increasingly become academic orthodoxy. Sorenson's and Raish's bibliography offers a fundamental challenge to current non-diffusionist thinking. Sorenson and Raish wisely do not take an extreme diffusionist position; they agree with the non-diffusionists that many of the cultural characteristics of pre-Columbian civilizations should be interpreted as the result of independent development. They are, rather, clearly moderate diffusionists, insisting that maritime technologies that would have permitted transoceanic voyages have existed for thousands of years and that at least some of the numerous cultural parallels between the Old and New worlds indicated in their bibliography can best be explained as resulting from transoceanic contacts. In a period when the long-term and ancient cultural interdependence of the various civilizations of the Old World is becoming increasingly recognized, it makes perfect sense to reexamine the hypothesis that similar cultural contacts, although certainly less frequent and intense, existed between the Old and New worlds. Solely based on the fact that a bibliography of over 5000 items can be collected on various questions of transoceanic contact one can conclude that the moderate diffusionist position can no longer be cavalierly dismissed out of hand, but requires serious
scholarly attention. The text of the Book of Mormon (as opposed to many Latter-day Saint and non-Latter-day Saint misinterpretations of the text) is best understood from just such a moderate diffusionist perspective.

For Book of Mormon studies the publication of this work symbolizes a new and important trend. As I see it, historical study of the Book of Mormon (as distinct from doctrinal interpretation) has gone through three overlapping phases: In the first phase, Latter-day Saints were mainly concerned with defending the authenticity of the Book of Mormon from outsider attacks. Works of this nature are still being published today. During the second phase, beginning perhaps in the 1950s, there was an increasing attempt to utilize the rapidly increasing knowledge of ancient studies and the Book of Mormon not only in an apologetic sense, but in an attempt to see how our advancing understanding of the broad range of ancient studies can increase our insight into the text of the Book of Mormon itself. Finally, I see Sorenson’s and Raish’s work as indicative of a new third phase in Book of Mormon studies that has begun to develop in recent years. Here the historical implications of the Book of Mormon are used to help us gain a more complete understanding of the history and religions of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica and the ancient Near East. In other words, the increase of understanding is beginning to flow both ways. Our understanding of the Book of Mormon is improved by our knowledge of other ancient civilizations, but likewise, our understanding and interpretation of ancient history, culture, and religion is now beginning to be informed by the insights derived from the study of the Book of Mormon, although these interpretations are being presented to non-Latter-day Saints in academic discourse devoid of explicit references to Latter-day Saint texts.

In conclusion, all future academic study of transoceanic contacts between the Old and New worlds will be fundamentally dependent on the bibliographical foundation created by Sorenson and Raish. For Book of Mormon studies, this work prepares the way not only for a vast improvement in our understanding of the historical implications of the transoceanic contacts of Book of Mormon peoples, but for more accurately placing the Book of Mormon in its historical and cultural context in pre-Columbian American history and in world history as a whole.

Reviewed by L. Ara Norwood

There is to be an opposition in all things. In mortality, there will always be darkness to contemn light, falsehood to challenge truth, and the proud to point the finger of scorn at the Saints (1 Nephi 8:33). This is part of the plan of God, a necessary part of our time of testing while on this earth.

Thus, it should not come as any surprise when individuals seek every means of sophistry to discredit truth. One of the more recent attempts to cast a dull shadow of doubt on the Book of Mormon is the publication under review here. The husband-and-wife team of Jerald and Sandra Tanner has added yet another title to their anti-Mormon arsenal. Yet, like Ananias and Sapphira of old (see Acts 5), they have withheld much—in this case, much evidence—which ultimately weakens their hypothesis. Yet many have come to expect this from the Tanners, who have a long history of writing a steady stream of polemics against anything and everything Mormon. Although they have tried in recent years to gain acceptance as serious students of Mormon history and doctrine, they remain to Mormon literature what the tabloids are to journalism.

In this review, I will enumerate a few of the examples I have found where additional evidence was avoided by the Tanners—evidence which, if taken into account, would more than cast doubt on their thesis.1

The Black Hole theory is not a new one, but only a detailed restatement of an old Fawn Brodie theory that attempts to explain away the Book of Mormon. Since the world simply cannot and will not accept the book on its own terms, critics from the earliest days of the restoration have sought to devise alternate explanations for its existence. The Tanners' act is not the newest and is sure to be followed by many more players, all

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1 The Tanners' Black Hole theory is contained in Part 1 of their book. Part 2, which contains examples of what they feel are plagiarisms from the Bible in the Book of Mormon, will not be addressed in this review, due to space limitations. A shorter discussion of their theory is in their *Salt Lake City Messenger* 72 (July 1989), 16 pages.
seeking center stage where they can “take their brief bows in the secular spotlight.”

What is the Black Hole theory of the Book of Mormon? It all begins with the episode of the loss of the first 116 pages of manuscript, which constituted the book of Lehi. The Tanners are certain that the tenor and style of these pages were very similar to the material which now comprises Mosiah through Moroni. At the same time, they feel the material in these pages was very different from the current portion that eventually replaced the lost pages (i.e., 1 Nephi through Words of Mormon). In this they are undoubtedly correct.

The Tanners charge that, since the Book of Mormon text from Mosiah through Moroni contains great detail on names, places, geographic directions, dates, and the like, and since the lost book of Lehi must also have also contained the same sort of detail, and since the small plates of Nephi which replaced it are sparse in those kinds of details, Joseph Smith (who, in the Tanner’s mind, was obviously a fraud from the start) must have written the small plates “translation” in a style radically different from the large plates in order to avoid detection in the event that the lost 116 pages turned up. In other words, it would have been dangerous and foolhardy for Joseph Smith to try to replace the lost pages with an exact reproduction, for it would have been impossible for anyone without prophetic gifts to try to reproduce a verbatim transcript. If Joseph made the attempt to do so and the lost pages turned up, the differences might be apparent upon comparison, and the credibility of Joseph Smith as a prophetic figure could be ruined; thus, the need for a replacement that just happens to be as vague and imprecise as possible. Hence comes the idea that the small plates would have to deal with historical details very scantily (see Jacob 1:4). It is this vague nature of the small plates that, in the Tanners’ minds, constitutes a “black hole” in the Book of Mormon.

A central assertion of the Black Hole theory is that “the entire Book of Mormon is . . . lacking a significant number of important things that should be there if the book were really a history of ancient Jewish people in the New World” (p. 46; cf. pp. 59-63). The Tanners spend several pages identifying just

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3 1 Nephi 9:2-4 and Jacob 1:1-2, 4, seem to indicate that the contents of the small plates were different from that of the large plates.
what “should be there,” which, in their view, includes items involving measurements, a monetary system, the names of various colors, and items or issues of a personal nature (i.e., romance, divorce, how women dealt with pregnancy, and even the way in which Jesus interacted with people). They then analyze both the Bible and the Book of Mormon to see how much each of them mentions a wide variety of words or ideas associated with such things as lodging, furniture, food, illness, death and burial, royalty, and music.

The Tanners follow a rather predictable and flawed pattern in their analysis. First, they choose several words or concepts that fall in a given category. Then they count how many times those words or ideas are mentioned in the Bible and in the Book of Mormon. (In every instance, they find the carefully selected idea or word mentioned more often in the Bible than in the Book of Mormon.) In many instances, they determine that the Book of Mormon reference is actually borrowed from the Bible, and it is therefore discounted. In other instances, they determine that the Book of Mormon reference only uses the term symbolically or in a different context, so these are discounted as well. Thus, when most of the Book of Mormon references have been filtered out, they compare the remaining few references (if any) to the corresponding biblical references and conclude that the Book of Mormon does not match up in terms of the number of times certain things are mentioned. Here is one typical conclusion: since the Bible mentions food much more frequently than does the Book of Mormon, the latter could not possibly be an ancient record. This is hardly convincing evidence!

In characteristic fashion, they carefully avoid mentioning the numerous Jewish features in the Book of Mormon—many of which have been published and available for years. The

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4 The Tanners are apparently not aware of a F.A.R.M.S. preliminary report entitled “Nephite Weights and Measures in the Time of Mosiah II,” which offsets their offhanded comments such as, “the [monetary] scheme set forth in the Book of Mormon would lead to chaos” (p. 50). This is, moreover, a curious comment coming from the Tanners, since they claim, on the same page, that they “do not pretend to have any great knowledge concerning monetary systems.”

5 How the presence of food in the Book of Mormon would contribute to its stated purpose of the “convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ” escapes me.

6 An example is John A. Tvedtnes, “King Benjamin and the Feast of Tabernacles,” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., By
Tanner and Tanner also feel that, if the Book of Mormon were a valid record of Jewish peoples, it would contain much information on the Passover, feasts, new moons, the Sabbath day, circumcision, tithing, the temple, and so forth. Since it does not, according to the Tanners, it is obviously the fabrication of Joseph Smith. While one can understand the Tanners' surprise, they reach hasty and naive conclusions. Following their reasoning, one must be consistent and declare as fabrication the fifth-century Jewish documents from Elephantine in Upper Egypt. The Jewish colony there (like one later in Lower Egypt) built a temple for traditional animal sacrifice and other offerings and rites. Yet their papyri never mention the Exodus, Moses, the Law, Levites, the Sabbath, and the like.7 Does it make sense to dismiss the Book of Mormon for its alleged failure to discuss certain concepts found in the Bible when they are lacking in the Elephantine writings as well? But, in fact, the Tanners have overstated this supposed deficiency in the Book of Mormon.

The Tanners have a tendency to raise questions that, with a little more thought, need not have been raised in the first place. For instance, on page 17 they mention the fact that, according to Jacob 1:11, all of Nephi's successors to the throne took on the royal name-title of "Nephi," but when we come to the large plates, we find kings Benjamin and Mosiah with no indication that they had any such name-title. The Tanners go on to speculate that Joseph Smith must have devised this "scheme" so as to avoid having to come up with the actual names of the kings in the small plates, since "it is very possible that Joseph Smith forgot the name[s] he had given" (p. 17).

It must be remembered that when kings Mosiah and Benjamin were on the scene, the Nephites had already merged with the Mulekite nation. Since the Nephites were in the minority it is possible that the older system for naming kings had


7 Unleavened Bread is the only Jewish feast specifically mentioned in the papyri (and Passover, if it is to be restored in a fragmentary part of one of the papyri), although the Sabbath "is to be found in the ostraca, letters about personal affairs." Bezalel Porten, Archives from Elephantine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 126. Cf. Arthur E. Cowley, Aramaic Papyri of the Fifth Century B.C. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1923), 60-65, and Harold I. Bell, Cults and Creeds in Graeco-Roman Egypt (Liverpool, 1954), 28.
been abandoned. The Nephite practice of naming the kings after their first king took place in the land of Nephi, and the Nephite/Mulekite kings were now in a different land altogether (Zarahemla). Hence, it need not strike one as odd or suspicious that some of the former customs of the Nephites might go through a transition.

Another issue that comes up is their treatment of Jacob 5. They make several telltale comments, such as that "it was obviously taken from the Apostle Paul's writings found in Romans 11:17-24 and from statements made by Jesus" (p. 24). They also claim the material in Jacob 5 is merely filler, and they claim it "is probably the most repetitious and uninteresting part of the Book of Mormon." To support their views, they then go on to quote the now-deceased Wesley Walters (another anti-Mormon) who describes the allegory as "perplex[ing]" and "bewilder[ing]." 8

Both the Tanners' and Walters's comments on Jacob 5 are superficial. They fail to point out many important things which have been known by scholars for a number of years. For instance, Hugh Nibley, Robert F. Smith, Blake T. Ostler, and others have argued that the parable in Jacob 5 has parallels in other ancient (nonbiblical) works unknown to Joseph Smith. 9

Additional superficiality appears in a comment they make on page 23 regarding 1 Nephi 20-21, which they claim is also

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8 Walters's terminology is far different from that of the Tanners; "repetitious and uninteresting" is a far cry from "perplex[ing] and bewilder[ing]," which in some instances could be meant in a respectful and complimentary sense.

filler. Even though the material is claimed to be taken from the brass plates, to the Tanners "it is obvious to anyone who takes the time to critically examine the matter that the material really comes from the 48th and 49th chapters of the book of Isaiah." But how "critically" did the Tanners examine the material? Did they do much more than read the chapter headings to the Book of Mormon chapters in question, which openly alert the reader to the Isaiah parallels? Nibley dealt with this very issue over twenty years ago and, in doing so, vindicated the Book of Mormon as a translated work.\(^\text{10}\) Are the Tanners unaware of Nibley's work? Or worse, are they going to claim that his work is irrelevant? If so, they must assume the task of explaining how his work is flawed. Until then, one is justified in questioning the Tanners' motives for ignoring (or withholding) some rather pertinent evidence.

The Tanners also ignore various striking examples of textual consistency between the small and large plates, some of which have been published. How is it, for example, that Alma is able to openly quote Lehi in Alma 36:22, when the source in 1 Nephi 1:8 does not yet exist? And how could 3 Nephi 8 be a fulfillment of Zenos's prophecy in 1 Nephi 19:11-12, if the latter was composed last by a Joseph Smith desperate to replace the lost 116 pages?\(^\text{11}\) The speed of translation alone makes it highly improbable that these and other such internal consistencies were concocted or coordinated.\(^\text{12}\)

The Tanners comment on the visit of Christ to the Nephite people in Bountiful (p. 52). Although it is one of the most illuminating passages in the Book of Mormon, it brings to the Tanners' minds "a production line in a factory." The Tanners then go on to quote M. T. Lamb, another anti-Mormon, who makes several mocking comments about the event, claiming that it is a farce, to suppose five persons could thus pass the Savior every minute, giving each one only twelve seconds to thrust his hand into the side and feel the print of the nails both in his hands and in his feet.

\(^{10}\) Nibley, _Since Cumorah_, 113-18. See also Sidney B. Sperry, "The Book of Mormon and Textual Criticism," in _Book of Mormon Institute_ (Provo: Brigham Young University, 1959), 1-8.


\(^{12}\) F.A.R.M.S. Update, "How Long Did It Take to Translate the Book of Mormon?" February 1986.
But at this rapid rate it would require just eight hours and twenty minutes of time!!

Speculative and irreverent comments such as these are as useless to our understanding of the Book of Mormon as they are brazen. We simply don't know the particulars of that event, and to assume we do is to overstate the facts.13

On pages 63-71, the Tanners spend a great deal of time discussing the fact that Jesus' name appears in the Book of Mormon during the pre-Christian era.14 While space will not allow me to discuss all of the ramifications of this important issue, one comment they make is noteworthy. On page 66, the Tanners cite the book of Moses to the effect that Adam was informed by revelation that the name of the Son of God was “Jesus Christ.” The Tanners feel this presents a very serious problem to those who are familiar with the development of language. How could two Greek words derived from two Hebrew words possibly be in existence at that period of time when neither Hebrew nor Greek were in existence?

But Joseph's use of the words Jesus Christ in this instance simply represents his best effort to express in his language (i.e., nineteenth-century American English) the meaning of the words revealed by God to Adam, whatever they may have been in the language of Adam. It should be clear, too, that any rendering of words or ideas from ancient times into a modern language must necessarily use words that would have been unavailable anciently. This is as true of a modern translation of Cicero, Aeschylus, or Confucius as it is of Joseph Smith's translation of the Book of Mormon or of the words revealed to him in the book of Moses.

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13 Suppose, for example, that five people went forth every twelve seconds (to use the Lamb/Tanner model) but each one felt only one wound. If five people went forth at one time (each examining either a hand, a foot, or the side) then the whole event took less than two hours. There is a wide difference between “less than two hours” and “eight hours and twenty minutes.” Again, we simply do not know the details of the event, only that it occurred. As usual, the Tanners apply one set of standards in judging the Book of Mormon, and a wholly different set in examining the Bible.

14 This is yet another issue already dealt with by Nibley. See *Since Cumorah*, 167-68.
In a sense, the Tanners are helpful in that they raise questions on occasion that force one to study the Book of Mormon from an angle one might have overlooked. For instance, the Tanners make note (p. 65) of the fact that the title “Christ” was on the small plates (see 2 Nephi 10:3), but then in the book of Mosiah, Benjamin reports learning the name of Christ via revelation from an angel (see Mosiah 3:2, 8). The Tanners raise a valid question: “Why would king Benjamin have to receive a special revelation informing him of the name of Christ if the plates of Nephi already contained this information?”

The answer can be found by careful study of both passages. In the case of Benjamin, we find that a great deal more than the name of Christ is revealed. For instance, in Mosiah 3, we discover that Benjamin learned many things from the angel concerning the ministry of Jesus that he could not have learned from reading 2 Nephi chapter 10. Specifically, Benjamin was told by the angel that, during the atonement, blood would come from every pore (2 Nephi 10:7), that Christ’s full title would be “the father of heaven and earth, the creator of all things from the beginning,” and that the Savior’s mother would be called Mary (2 Nephi 10:8), that salvation would come through faith on his name (2 Nephi 10:9), that he would be resurrected on the third day (2 Nephi 10:10), that he would judge the world (2 Nephi 10:10), that his blood would atone for all unintentional sins (2 Nephi 10:11), and that his name would be preached to all nations (2 Nephi 10:13).15

This is much more information than Benjamin could have received from the revelation Jacob recorded in 2 Nephi 10.16 But even if it were not, Benjamin, as an independent witness, had every reason to record his sacred experience—just as the various gospel writers in the New Testament had every reason to record their overlapping testimonies of the life of Christ.

Another tendency of the Tanners is to draw premature conclusions from ambiguous evidence. On page 62 they cite Mosiah 2:3 to the effect that firstlings were used by the Nephite/Mulekite peoples as burnt offerings according to the law of Moses. They then go on to quote their anti-Mormon

15 I am indebted to John W. Welch for pointing out these items to me.
16 I am sure the Tanners would respond by saying that, while Benjamin may not have found the material in 2 Nephi 10, he could have found some of it elsewhere in the small plates, but the majority of the revelation to Benjamin is actually unique.
predecessor, M. T. Lamb, to the effect that firstlings were never used as burnt (holocaust) offerings in the Mosaic system. And they are right. They therefore conclude that "the author of the Book of Mormon . . . was unfamiliar with the biblical material concerning offerings." And the Tanners apparently share the conclusions of Mr. Lamb: "This one little blunder . . . proves beyond the chance of question that the Book of Mormon could not have been inspired."

But have the Tanners (or M. T. Lamb) considered other possibilities? For instance, have they considered that it is the prophet/historian Mormon who wrote those words in Mosiah 2:3? Have they considered that Mormon, who lived hundreds of years after the Mosaic law was fulfilled, may not have been clear himself on the particulars of Mosaic sacrifice? It is entirely possible that Mormon, after reviewing the records left by Mosiah and abridging them, may have incorrectly recorded just how their various sacrifices took place. If that seems unlikely, consider the following:

In researching this issue, I spoke to perhaps a dozen people who, I thought, would have known the answer to the simple question, "Were firstlings ever used as burnt offerings under the Law of Moses?" I posed that question to various professors of Hebrew and Old Testament as well as several Jewish rabbis. Only one knew the answer: a professor at a major Western university, an eminent scholar of priestly law. I then consulted several Old Testament commentaries and Bible dictionaries, but my quick search turned up nothing. This tells me that the question covers a rather obscure issue that might have been as unfamiliar to Mormon as it was to the various professors and rabbis with whom I spoke.

Another possible solution comes to mind when one studies the text of Mosiah 2:3, which reads as follows: "And they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses." After I discussed this verse with the above-mentioned scholar, he wondered aloud whether the firstlings mentioned in Mosiah had reference to the sacrifice, the burnt offerings, or both. I pointed out that I felt they referred to both, yet he was hesitant to agree with me; he seemed to feel that, based on his experience in interpreting biblical texts, there was just enough ambiguity in the passage to cause hesitation in making quick and final conclusions as to just what the firstlings were being used for aside from sacrifices (apart from burnt offerings) under the law
of Moses.\textsuperscript{17} Thus, if this distinguished Jewish scholar, who possesses a comprehensive understanding of ancient texts dealing with the law of Moses, is not quick to condemn passages such as Mosiah 2:3, how can the Tanners be confident that they have settled the issue once and for all?

The Tanners not only ignore the complementary parallelism possible in Mosiah 2:3, but also miss the context of that verse as merely part of a dependent list of reasons for the gathering of everyone to the temple of Zarahemla beginning at Mosiah 2:1 and concluding at Mosiah 2:3. Thus, the people of Zarahemla were gathering to hear King Benjamin speak the appropriate words and to offer blood and holocaust offerings in accordance with the Mosaic code. The clause about firstlings does not, in the light of typical ambiguities of this sort in the Bible, tell us that they were making holocaust (wholly burnt) offerings of their firstlings.\textsuperscript{18}

One last problem is worth mentioning. The Tanners have a tendency to be less than forthcoming in their use of statistical evidence. This tendency is seen or sensed all through their writings. One example that comes to mind is their analysis of the allegedly “impersonal” nature of the Book of Mormon (pp. 51-52.). In one portion of their study, they contend that the Book of Mormon does not discuss the dwelling places of its people as often as does the Bible:

Although they are missing through the period of the black hole, the Book of Mormon eventually says that the ancient inhabitants of the New World had “houses.” The computer shows that the words \textit{house, houses, home or homes} are used 244 times in the Book of Mormon. This is rather low when compared with the Bible which has 2,210 instances where the words \textit{house, houses or home} appear (the Bible does not have the plural form of \textit{home}). Most of the 244 places in the Book of Mormon where these words are found do not refer to actual structures

\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Book of Mormon Critical Text}, 2:362-363. Note also Exodus 12:1-13, 21-23, on the partially burned Passover sacrifice to the Lord in commemoration of the Angel of Death passing over the firstborn of animals and men protected by lambs’ blood (see also Exodus 13:15, Luke 2:23).

\textsuperscript{18} Jeremiah 7:21-22 is a similar passage which indicates that sacrifice and burnt offerings are two separate types of offerings and that they can appear in complementary rather than synonymous parallel.
where people live. For instance, 136 of these occurrences mention either the "house of Israel" or the "house of Jacob." (pp. 51-52)

One is justified in wondering if any of the 2,210 biblical references above also include references to the "house of Israel" or the "house of Jacob." And although the entire issue of dwelling places is not decisive, when one discovers that more than 200 of the above biblical references do, in fact, refer to the "house of Israel" or the "house of Jacob," one cannot help wondering just how often the Tanners are guilty of padding.

This is not a work of serious scholarship. On the surface, the Black Hole theory is interesting, yet the deeper one digs into the underlying assumptions and premises of the argument, as well as the specific evidence presented, the harder it becomes to take their conclusion seriously.

After reading Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, I am reminded of a rather poignant couplet:

Two men looked through prison bars
One saw mud, the other saw stars.

That this couplet applies here should be apparent. Metaphorically, one man casts his eyes down, one up. One sees nothing but filth and dirt and darkness, but the other peers through the darkness and sees the beauty of light—stars shimmering in the distance. The one has nothing of value to speak of; the other has hope. While the Tanners often see mud, while they hear little more than the din of a "production line in a factory" (52), the spiritually discerning and intellectually thoughtful soul sees a second witness of the majesty of the Messiah.

Reading this book brought to mind a court of law. Imagine hearing a case where the only arguments presented were those by the prosecution. If no defense was heard, the jury would get a very lopsided picture of the facts. But the Tanners, certain that they have the Book of Mormon figured out, seem more than confident that theirs is the only side worth hearing: "We feel that the evidence we now have against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is at least a thousand times as strong as

the textual evidence we had against the Hofmann documents” (p. 75).20

Yet when the student examines all pertinent studies available on the Book of Mormon,21 he or she cannot help but be impressed that it is one of the most singular documents available to mankind today. And when that knowledge is augmented by a source that goes beyond human understanding, beyond intellect or scholarship, then one understands why I boldly claim that the Book of Mormon is the greatest and most important book currently on the face of the earth. It is a book that is turned to again and again to better the lot of humankind. Its precepts are God-inspired, its principles are correct, and its witness of the supremacy of Christ is unsurpassed.

20 One is tempted to wonder why the Tanners aren’t confident that their evidence against the Book of Mormon is a million times as strong.

21 The F.A.R.M.S. catalog is an excellent resource for many of these studies.
Since the publication of the Book of Mormon in 1830, critics have pointed to the similarity of language between it and the Bible as a gross anachronism. Joseph Smith, it is alleged, plagiarized the Bible while writing the Book of Mormon and attempted to pass this new book off as an ancient work. For many of these critics the presence of phrases and ideas in the Book of Mormon also found in the New Testament is especially absurd. In their recent book, Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon, Jerald and Sandra Tanner have presented perhaps the most extensive list of alleged plagiarisms ever assembled by hostile critics of the Book of Mormon.

"In the light of computer research and the advances that are being made in this field," the authors solemnly assure us, "the future of the Book of Mormon looks very dim indeed."1 "We feel that the evidence we now have against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon is at least a thousand times as strong as the textual evidence we had against the Hofmann documents" (p. 75). "The material we have published . . . and the parallels to the Bible which follow, furnish irrefutable proof that the Book of Mormon is not the ancient text it claims to be . . . . It cannot be accepted as a genuine document" (p. 84).

The Tanners suggest that Martin Harris's loss of the 116 pages of the Book of Mormon left a serious void in Joseph Smith's work, which they call the "black hole." Having lost so much, Joseph feared that if he attempted to rewrite this portion of the manuscript he would be unable to remember all the details of the lost narrative. Therefore, to avoid being detected as a forger and a deceiver, Joseph was deliberately vague concerning matters of history in the small plates (pp. 12-14). This is why, according to the authors, the section 1 Nephi through Omni contains so few details concerning wars, names of kings, cities, women, etc. (pp. 14-23). To replace what had been lost, Joseph plagiarized from the Bible with the hope that he would not be detected. Today, using the computerized scriptures of the Latter-

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day Saint Church itself, it is possible, the authors say, to detect where Joseph Smith plagiarized the Bible.

**Plagiarism and the Bible**

The Tanners’ theory conjures up an image of Joseph Smith hiding behind a curtain, poring over his Bible, frantically plucking out choice tidbits of doctrinal matter here and there, splicing them into the Book of Mormon narrative, all the time hoping that no one would notice the source of his plagiarism. One problem with this hypothesis is the fact that none of those who witnessed the work of translation ever mentioned that Joseph used a Bible while working, and several of them emphatically denied that he had a manuscript or book of any kind. It appears that the curtain was used only with Martin Harris, whom Joseph had reason, at first, to distrust, but others who participated as scribes and witnesses state that no curtain was used. Even Reuben Hale, who never joined the Church and believed the Book of Mormon to be a hoax, and who was surely looking for anything suspicious, is silent concerning any Bible use during translation. Thus if Joseph had been cribbing from the Bible, it is strange that no one ever mentioned his using one. The apparent absence of a Bible during the work of translation makes the hypothesis of plagiarism less easy to maintain.

Why then does Joseph make use of King James English in the translation of the Book of Mormon? Simply because that was the accepted biblical language of the day.

When Jesus and the Apostles and, for that matter, the angel Gabriel quote the scriptures in the New Testament, do they recite some mysterious Urtext? Do they quote the prophets of old in the ultimate original? Do they give their own inspired translations? No, they

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3 Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 133-34.
do not. They quote the Septuagint, a Greek version of the Old Testament prepared in the third century B.C. Why so? Because that happened to be the received standard version of the Bible accepted by the readers of the Greek New Testament. When “holy men of God” quote the scriptures it is always in the received standard version of the people they are addressing. . . . Inspired men have in every age been content to accept the received version of the people among whom they labored, with the Spirit giving correction where correction was necessary.4

How did the translator do this without the use of a Bible? Although there is still much to learn, it seems perfectly reasonable to me that the Holy Ghost could have conveyed King James English to the mind of the Prophet, while he translated through the gift and power of God. This seems perfectly acceptable, since King James English was the accepted medium of scriptural expression in Joseph Smith’s day.

Plagiarism and the New Testament

Pages 75-164 of the Tanners’ work are devoted almost entirely to a long list of comparisons between Book of Mormon language and the New Testament, which constitutes the main thrust of the evidence for plagiarism. I believe that comparative studies can sometimes enhance our understanding of scripture, as long as they are balanced and fair. Yet the Tanner parallels are seriously flawed for several reasons. First, the authors assume that they can prove their case for plagiarism by mere comparison with the King James Version—yet, without examining the linguistic complexities behind each passage, comparison with the King James Version leaves too many questions unanswered. Indeed, they have in fact proved little more than was known before. Merely noting similarity does little to show why such a translation could not be appropriate from a linguistic standpoint, if Joseph Smith was inspired by God to render it so.

Secondly, the Tanners’ argument assumes that many of their New Testament passages are unique to the New Testament. The presence of similar passages in the Book of Mormon is therefore seen as sure evidence of plagiarism, since the New

Testament was unavailable to Book of Mormon authors (pp. 79-81). Yet there are serious reasons to question this assumption.

Nibley pointed out long ago that the familiar “faith, hope, and charity” passage, which the Tanners compare with Moroni 7:44-46, may not necessarily be original with Paul, but rather may go back to an even older, as yet unknown source. Thus the authors’ argument for plagiarism from Paul in this passage falls apart. The truth of the matter is that, until we can learn more about the background of such passages, the possibility that the Book of Mormon and the New Testament are independently quoting from an older source remains a very real one.

Another example of the problems with assuming that certain passages from the New Testament represent later developments, peculiar to Christianity, is seen in the Book of Mormon usage of the terms “Son of God” and “Son of the Most High God” (1 Nephi 11:6-7). These terms are seen by the Tanners as obvious plagiarisms from New Testament gospels (pp. 89-90, 159). Yet both titles have recently turned up in an unpublished Dead Sea Scroll fragment written in Aramaic from before the time of Jesus. Although it is unknown to whom the prophecy refers, the fragment states:

[X] shall be great upon the earth. [O king, all (people) shall] make [peace], and all shall serve [him. He shall be called the son of] the [G]reat [God], and by his name shall be hailed (as) the Son of God, and they shall call him Son of the Most High.”

The writer for Biblical Archaeology Review states, “This is the first time that the term ‘Son of God’ has been found in a Palestinian text outside the Bible. . . . Previously some scholars have insisted that the origin of terms like ‘Most High’ and ‘Son of the Most High’ were to be found in Hellenistic usage outside of Palestine and that therefore they relate to later development of

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5 Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 112; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 216. Since the Tanners quote from Nibley in their books, they should have mentioned this significant point.
Christian doctrine. Now we know that these terms were part of Christianity’s original Jewish heritage.”

If one small fragment can change our understanding of this term, is it really that hard to believe that other ideas and phrases found in the Book of Mormon, heretofore thought to be anachronistic, might also be verified in the future?

A third problem with the authors’ parallels is that they have made no attempt to show where Book of Mormon prophets may have drawn upon Old Testament material, which could have been found on the brass plates. This is certainly an important issue in evaluating the worth of their comparisons. Yet they have failed to include this kind of information in their list. Since I used the same computer media they did, I can only assume that they have ignored those passages altogether. It is unfortunate that they would suppress this information.

Having reviewed the material in question, I conclude that most of the evidence may be divided into three groups:

1. Examples where Old Testament language is equal to or closer to the that of the New Testament passage given by the authors as proof of plagiarism.

2. Examples where Old Testament language can be found which very closely resembles that of the New Testament language.

3. Examples in which the Book of Mormon could have drawn upon Old Testament ideas.

What follows is a small sampling from a longer study by the present writer. For purposes of brevity, this review will only examine several of the Tanners’ comparisons with passages from 1 Nephi. This will provide a good overview of the comparisons in general. The New Testament passages listed are those given by the Tanners as evidence of plagiarism.

Examples Where an Old Testament Rendering Is Equal to or Better Than the New Testament Reading Given by the Tanners

1 Nephi 8:19 a rod of iron (1 Nephi 11:25)
Revelation 12:5 a rod of iron
Psalms 2:9 a rod of iron

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1 Nephi 11:25 fountain of living waters
Revelation 7:17 living fountains of waters
Jeremiah 2:13 they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters
Jeremiah 17:13 they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living waters

1 Nephi 11:25 the tree of life
Revelation 2:7; 22:2 the tree of life
Genesis 2:9 the tree of life

1 Nephi 12:5 And ... after I saw these things, I saw the vapor . . . passed from off the face of the earth
Revelation 7:1 And after these things I saw four angels . . . on the four corners of the earth
Numbers 22:5 the face of the earth

1 Nephi 15:16 true olive tree
Romans 11:24 good olive tree
Jeremiah 11:16 a green olive tree

1 Nephi 2:10-11 Steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord! Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel.

1 Corinthians 15:58 Be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord.

Psalms 78:7-8, 37 That they might . . . not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments: And might not be as their fathers, a stubborn and rebellious generation; . . . whose spirit was not stedfast with God. . . . Neither were they stedfast in his covenant.8 (see also Isaiah 48:18-19 and 1 Nephi 20:18-19)

In this last comparison, the authors have only circled the Book of Mormon phrase "steadfast and immovable" (p. 85), yet while the words steadfast and unmoveable occur together in the New Testament, it seems clear that the passage of 1 Nephi 2:10-11, taken as a whole, fits best into the context of Psalms 78, especially since Nephi always compares his family’s experience with the Israelite Exodus from Egypt.

The Tanners have theorized that Joseph Smith used much of the book of Exodus to create the narrative in 1 Nephi. But, it would be surprising if there were not such thematic similarities between the two. Nephi frequently compared his own family’s experience with that of his Israelite forebears (1 Nephi 4:2-3; 17:22-44). It is likely that Nephi deliberately drew upon this theme when he made his compilation on the small plates. Recent studies have shown us how the Israelite theme is interwoven throughout the Book of Mormon with admirable skill and complexity, all of which suggests that this is more than sloppy plagiarism.

Examples Where Old Testament Passages Are Nearly Identical in English to Those Found in the Book of Mormon

1 Nephi 1:14 Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty!

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9 For a good discussion of the poetic complexity of this passage see Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 84-92.
Revelation 15:3  Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty
Psalms 139:14 Marvellous are thy works
Psalms 92:5  O Lord, how great are thy works!

1 Nephi 7:11  What great things the Lord hath done for us (2 Nephi 1:1)
Mark 5:19  how great things the Lord hath done for thee
1 Samuel 12:24  for consider how great things he hath done for you
Psalms 106:21  They forgat God their saviour, which had done great things in Egypt
Psalms 126:3  The Lord hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad

1 Nephi 10:8  cry in the wilderness: Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make his paths straight (1 Nephi 11:27)
Matthew 3:3  crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight
Isaiah 40:3  The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

1 Nephi 10:19  For he that diligently seeketh shall find
Matthew 7:8  he that seeketh findeth
Deuteronomy 4:29  But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him.
Proverbs 8:17  I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me
Jeremiah 29:13  And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart

1 Nephi 13:27  pervert the right ways of the Lord
Acts 13:10  pervert the right ways of the Lord
Jeremiah 23:36  for ye have perverted the words of the living God

1 Nephi 14:11  the whore of all the earth, and she sat upon many waters (1 Nephi 13:10; 14:12)
Revelation 17:1  the great whore that sitteth upon many waters
Jeremiah 51:13  O thou that dwellest upon many waters

1 Nephi 19:16  the four quarters of the earth
Revelation 20:8  the four quarters of the earth
Isaiah 11:12  the four corners of the earth (see also Jeremiah 49:36; Ezekiel 38:6)

1 Nephi 22:18  blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke
Acts 2:19  blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke
Joel 2:30 blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke

Examples Where Similar Ideas Could Have Been Found or Formulated from the Old Testament

1 Nephi 10:4  a Savior of the world (1 Nephi 13:40)
John 4:42  the Saviour of the world
Isaiah 43:11  I, even I, am the Lord; and beside me there is no Saviour
Isaiah 52:10  all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God (Psalms 65:5; 67:7; 98:3; Isaiah 41:5; 45:22; Jeremiah 16:19)

1 Nephi 10:10  the Lamb of God, who should take away the sins of the world (1 Nephi 11:21, 27, 31-32; 13:40)
John 1:29  the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world
Genesis 22:8  God will provide himself a lamb
Isaiah 53:6-7  The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.
... He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.

1 Nephi 10:12 branches should be broken off
Romans 11:19 branches were broken off
Jeremiah 11:16 The Lord called thy name, A green olive tree
... and the branches of it are broken (see also Ezekiel 17:22-3)

1 Nephi 10:18 For he is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever
Hebrews 13:8 the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever
Psalms 102:24-27 Thy years are throughout all generations. Of old [yesterday] hast thou laid the foundation of the earth.
... They shall perish, but thou shalt endure. ... They shall be changed: But thou art [today] the same, and thy years shall have no end [forever].
Psalms 90:2 From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God (see also Malachi 3:6; Isaiah 46:10)

1 Nephi 12:10 Lamb of God their garments are made white in his blood (1 Nephi 12:11)
Revelation 7:14 made them white in the blood of the Lamb
Genesis 49:11 he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes
Leviticus 8:30 And Moses took of the anointing oil, and of the blood which was upon the altar, and sprinkled it upon Aaron, and upon his garments, and upon his sons, and upon his sons’ garments with him; and sanctified Aaron, and his garments, and his sons, and his sons’ garments with him. (see also Exodus 29:21; Daniel 12:10)

1 Nephi 12:18 a great and a terrible gulf divideth them (1 Nephi 15:28)
Luke 16:26 a great gulf fixed
Exodus 8:23 And I will put a division between my people and thy people.

It will be remembered that the Lord divided the Red Sea—a great and terrible gulf, allowing the Israelites to pass through safely while the Egyptians were destroyed. Clearly the Lord separated the righteous, symbolized by the Israelites, from the wicked, symbolized by the Egyptian armies. It was the gulf which caused the inevitable separation (Exodus 14:21-30).13

13 For other examples compare 1 Nephi 5:18, Revelation 11:9, Genesis 10:20, Isaiah 66:18, and Psalms 22:27; 1 Nephi 6:5, John 17:14,
One comparison that deserves closer attention than the Tanners have given it is the one made between Nephi’s vision and John’s Apocalypse. Doesn’t the similarity in passages prove that Joseph plagiarized the New Testament? I believe this assessment to be incorrect. Out of the 28 items John lists in his catalogue of Babylonian goods (Revelation 18:12-13), only five (gold, silver, fine linen, silk, and scarlet), are to be found in 1 Nephi 13:6-7. Why only these? Here is where a comparison with Old Testament passages would have been of real value. Unfortunately the Tanners have provided no Old Testament background against which 1 Nephi 13:6-7 can be measured. I am convinced that John and Nephi were both drawing upon the same familiar imagery of Israel and the temple. Note, for example, the comparisons below.

1 Nephi 13:7 And I also saw gold, and silver, and silks, and scarlets, and fine-twined linen, and all manner of precious clothing
Revelation 18:12 the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood...and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble.

Exodus 28:6, 8, 15 And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue, and of purple, of scarlet, and fine twined linen. . . . And the curious girdle of the ephod, which is upon it, shall be of the same, according to the work thereof; even of gold, of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen . . . And thou shalt make the breastplate of judgment with cunning work . . . of gold, of blue, and of purple, and of scarlet, and of fine twined linen.

Ezekiel 16:10-13, 15 I clothed thee also with broidered work. . . . I girded thee about with fine linen, and I covered thee with silk. . . . Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work . . . but thou . . . playedst the harlot. [It is profitable to examine 1 Nephi in light of this whole chapter]

It is interesting to note that, while John uses the term “fine linen,” Nephi uses the term “fine-twined linen” which is also used in Exodus in the description of the tabernacle and the garments of the High Priest. In short, there appears to be a closer relationship between 1 Nephi 13-14 and the Old Testament imagery of the temple than there is with the New Testament book of Revelation. Thus the case for plagiarism in this passage seems unwarranted.

Frankly, I was surprised to find that so much of the material had reasonable precedents in Old Testament scriptures. Still, the problems associated with examining only the English translations are clear. I would like to see an in-depth study of the Semitic background behind the New Testament passages which most resemble those in the Book of Mormon. I believe that such a study would show how frequently the New Testament draws on older material. Given the tentative and preliminary nature of this kind of evidence, it seems a little presumptuous for the authors to proclaim that they have “proved” the Book of Mormon a modern forgery (p. 84), especially since they have excluded any discussion of the Old Testament background behind these passages, and in some cases seem to have suppressed evidence where the Old Testament provides a closer reading.

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14 For a treatment of the Old Testament backgrounds to Matthew 5-7, see Welch, Sermon at the Temple, 113-29.
The Small Plates: A Conglomeration of Odds and Ends

The authors assert that the small plates of Nephi contain little significant historical information (pp. 12-27) But I think that they have oversimplified the situation. I would agree that some portions of the Book of Mormon give less information on history than others, but this may be said for many parts of the book (4 Nephi for example), and not the small plates alone. But even so, how can the Tanners’ theory account for what is there? Critics have had a field day, for example, with Nephi’s description of life in the Arabian desert. Yet scholars who have taken the time to examine this part of the Book of Mormon in detail have demonstrated that it displays an astounding degree of historical and literary complexity. The Tanners’ theory does little to account for this.

I find it odd that, while the authors would quote a statement by Hugh Nibley on page 84, they are completely silent about his landmark studies dealing with this section of the Book of Mormon, to say nothing of the work of more recent scholars. The complex situation at Jerusalem, strange descriptions of desert life, directions of travel, the complex

15 See for example M. T. Lamb, The Golden Bible: Is It from God? (New York: Ward and Drummond, 1887), 60-68, whom the Tanners recommend. “It certainly would not have been possible for them to journey from Jerusalem to the Red Sea in three days, approximately 175 miles, with a party which included women and children and the old patriarch Lehi.” Gordon H. Fraser, What Does the Book of Mormon Teach? (Chicago: Moody Press, 1964), 35, cf. 33-38. As recently as 1985, one critic saw the idea of a place called Bountiful as just too funny for words. “Arabia is bountiful in sunshine, petroleum, sand, heat, and fresh air, but certainly not in ‘much fruit and wild honey,’ nor has it been since the creation of time.” Thomas Key, A Biologist Looks at the Book of Mormon (Issaquah, WA: Saints Alive in Jesus, 1985), 1-2. In light of the research which has been done on Lehi’s desert experience, such criticisms seem almost comical.


17 Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 3-24; The Prophetic Book of Mormon, 380-406.

18 Nibley, Lehi in the Desert, 43-123; Approach to the Book of Mormon, 59-144; Since Cumorah, 264-90;
motif of the Tree of Life, the broken bow incident, a bountiful oasis along the southeastern Arabian coast (just to name a few elements), make the authors' assertion that the small plates are merely a hodgepodge with no significant historical information hard to swallow.

Another example of the superficial nature of the Tanners' work is their assertion that Joseph Smith used the Isaiah chapters in 1 and 2 Nephi as filler material to make up for what was lost in the 116 pages. "It seems rather obvious," say the authors, "that Joseph Smith did not have any important historical Nephite-Lamanite material to fill in the gap. Consequently he was forced to insert a conglomeration of 'odds and ends' to use up space" (p. 23). "While [Nephi] claims that he is copying from the 'plates of brass,' it is obvious . . . that the material really comes from the 48th and 49th chapters of the Book of Isaiah in the King James Version of the Bible" (p. 23). "Nephi


then proceeds to quote *thirteen chapters* of Isaiah . . . from the King James Version!” This is really a surprise to the authors. “That Joseph Smith would have to throw in so many chapters of Isaiah as filler shows that he was having a very difficult time trying to find something suitable to replace the material in the lost 116 pages . . . . The fact that we already have the same material in our Bible makes the situation even more ridiculous” (p. 24).

Yet all this is nothing new. The more important questions, which the Tanners never get to, are what to make of the Isaiah variants in the Book of Mormon and what to say of the sensitive selection and use of these quoted passages.24 John Tvedtnes has done a rather thorough study of these and has shown that the Book of Mormon variants accord remarkably well with other texts of Isaiah, and in some cases provide a superior reading to the King James Translation.25 This fact greatly weakens the Tanners’ case that this material was just filler to save time and worry.26

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24 Book of Mormon critics of the past objected not so much to the Bible passages as they did to the variants between the two. H. Stevenson complained in 1839, “I likewise object to the undue liberty which the author of Mormon has taken with the language of the Holy Ghost, in making so many unwarrantable alterations in many of the passages which he has quoted,” *Lecture on Mormonism* (Newcastle: Blackwell, 1839). For William Palmer these passages are a “wretched mangling,” a “horrible mutilation of scripture” which “would be truly laughable were they not too shocking to be ridiculous,” *Mormonism Briefly Examined* (London: Hall, 1849), 2. If the Prophet was plundering the Bible to save time, he certainly made it hard on himself by going to the trouble of changing everything. The authors seem to be unaware of the significance of those variants.


26 The Tanners have also claimed that the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi 12-14 represents another example of “filler” material in the Book of Mormon (p. 72). They have again ignored the complexities of the variants and also the Old Testament background behind such material. Larson’s arguments, to which the Tanners vaguely refer, have been answered by Welch. See Welch, *Sermon at the Temple*, 91-129, 145-63.
Other Problems

Although the authors dislike the small plates of Nephi, they object to other portions of the Book of Mormon as well. "Our research with regard to the black hole in the small plates of Nephi made us aware of the fact that the entire Book of Mormon is also lacking a significant number of important things that should be there if the book were really a history of ancient Jewish people in the New World" (p. 46). The authors are puzzled as to why the Book of Mormon rarely mentions its money system after the chapter 11 of Alma. For them this is evidence that "Joseph Smith never did take his money system very seriously. Perhaps he was too lazy to look back in the manuscript to see what names he had given to the various pieces" (p. 50). But perhaps the Tanners might wonder how this "lazy" boy came up with a money system so brilliantly complex, which happens, incidentally, to make very good sense in an ancient setting, and may even have employed a few ancient Near Eastern names. Just another lucky guess?

Since a computer check of the Book of Mormon does not reveal the existence of words such as "passover," "Jubilee," or "booths," the authors conclude, "In the Book of Mormon there is not even one case where a Jewish Feast or Festival was celebrated in the New World!" (p. 59). Although I would like to give the authors the benefit of the doubt, I find it difficult to believe that they are completely ignorant of the work that has been done in recent years on King Benjamin’s address. On page 84 they quote from Hugh Nibley; why don’t they mention his studies on Near Eastern festivals and the Book of Mormon? Contrary to the authors’ assertion, it can be shown—rather convincingly, in my opinion—that Mosiah 1-6 represents a prime example of a New Year rite in the ancient Near East, such

28 Ibid.
as the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles. Scholars have also noted elements of the ancient coronation rite and covenant renewal ceremony in Mosiah 1-6.

King Benjamin’s speech also appears to contain all the major elements of a classic farewell address.

One has to wonder if the authors are deliberately suppressing such information. The authors would give their readers the impression that they have at last come up with “absolutely devastating” evidence against the Book of Mormon’s authenticity, yet most of the criticisms which they raise are merely rehashes or expansions on familiar criticisms of previous


33 Lawrence Foster, a non-Latter-day Saint historian states, “Even when the Tanners backhandedly praise objective Mormon scholarship, they do so primarily as a means of twisting that scholarship for use as yet another debater’s ploy to attack the remaining—and in their eyes insurmountable—Mormon deficiencies.” Foster also notes that “until the Tanners are prepared to abide by accepted standards of scholarly behavior and of common courtesy, they can expect little sympathy from serious historians.” Lawrence Foster, “Career Apostates: Reflections on the Works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner,” Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought 17/2 (Summer 1984): 45-46.
anti-Mormon polemicists, with little attempt to understand why such arguments have proved inadequate in the past.\textsuperscript{34} Although their latest work presents an interesting theory, that theory ignores or fails to account for most of the complexities found in the Book of Mormon. The last decade alone has seen a virtual avalanche of information which tends to support the view that the Book of Mormon is not only ancient, but remarkably complex in ways we had not thought of before.\textsuperscript{35} Until the authors are willing to deal seriously with such information, honestly and objectively, their “black hole” arguments will amount to little more than an insignificant perturbation on the continuum of warped anti-Mormon space and time.

\textsuperscript{34} Their predictions of doom regarding the future of the Book of Mormon (pp. 75, 84) seem completely out of touch with current advances of Book of Mormon research. (See the most recent F.A.R.M.S. Catalogue for information on recent research).

\textsuperscript{35} The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies has recently published a whole volume dealing with the complexities associated with warfare alone in the Book of Mormon. See Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, \textit{Warfare in the Book of Mormon} (Salt Lake City: Deseret Books and F.A.R.M.S., 1990). Such scholarship suggests that the Book of Mormon is far more complex than the authors would like their readers to believe. See the reviews of this book by David Honey and Kurt Weiland in this issue. See also Sorenson and Thorne, eds., \textit{Rediscovering the Book of Mormon}. 

Reviewed by John A. Tvedtnes

Jerald and Sandra Tanner are two of the best known critics of the Latter-day Saint Church, its doctrines, history, and scriptures. As such, it is strange to see them come out with a book in which they profess themselves to be the "good guys" (my wording) in the anti-Mormon debate. They claim, for example, to have believed in the divine origin of the Book of Mormon as late as 1960, and that they began a sincere search to prove that the book was true, but found more and more evidence that it was not. This, they write, was painful to them (pp. 1, 7).1

If these don't seem to be the Jerald and Sandra you know, read on. They note that they disagree with anti-Mormon critics who "twist the facts to make their arguments stronger" (p. 1) and point out that it is they (the Tanners) who have exposed the fraudulent nature of some anti-Latter-day Saint writings. And, unlike others, they didn't swallow Mark Hofmann's story and the documents he forged (p. 5).

Despite these initial departures from their usual pattern, the Tanners are true to form throughout the rest of the book. For example, they frequently cite "Mormon scholars," with the implication that these scholars were pointing out problems in the Book of Mormon when, in fact, they were writing favorably of it. As usual, they use this book as a vehicle for selling some of their other publications, to which they frequently make reference.

The Tanners are thorough in their research, but frequently wrong in their interpretations of what they have discovered. Thus, the Latter-day Saint scholar, while finding the book interesting, is hard-pressed to take it seriously. On the other hand, those with only a cursory acquaintance with the Book of Mormon may easily believe that the Tanners have, as they claim,

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1 These statements are at variance with what Sandra Tanner once told me about how she came to lose her faith as a teenager, and make me wonder how they can criticize Joseph Smith for making similar "changes" in his story.
amassed a fantastic array of evidence against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

An example of their inability to consider seriously evidence favoring the Book of Mormon is that, in this book, the Tanners denounce the idea of chiasmus in the Nephite record, believing it to be "merely evidence of Joseph Smith's repetitive style of writing" (p. 31). The rejection out of hand of evidence for chiasmus is typical of their approach, which is to dismiss anything favoring Joseph Smith's account of his spiritual experiences. They cite John S. Kselman's unfavorable review of John Welch's work on chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, but fail to note that his review compliments Welch's work as clean, admirable, and fair (simply stating that he "would draw different inferences from the evidence"), and that several other non-Latter-day Saint scholars have been very impressed by the phenomenon.

A Pattern of Forgery and Deceit?

A common theme in many of the Tanners' publications is the idea that the "Mormon" Church is out to hoodwink people. Not content to charge Joseph Smith with fraud and forgery (as they term it) in the case of the Book of Mormon and the book of Abraham, they point out that the official History of the Church was not really written by Joseph Smith and that changes in the early records from third to first person have been made "to deceive the reader" (p. 3). They believe that this pattern of forgery is common to Latter-day Saint culture, and point not only to Mark Hofmann's work, but to the forged Howard Hughes will, leaving a sizeable portion of his estate to the Church, and to Ronald Vern Jackson's forgery of a document to support Joseph Smith's story. Having laid this foundation, the Tanners define the Book of Mormon as a "forgery," i.e., a book

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written by Joseph Smith and falsely claimed to have been written by ancient scribes.

Nature of the "Black Hole"

Most of the first part of the book (pp. 9-46) is devoted to the Tanners' explanation of their "black hole" theory for the Book of Mormon. Believing Joseph Smith to be the sole author of the Book of Mormon, they propose that when the 116 pages were lost, Joseph became distraught. Knowing that he could not reproduce them exactly as they had been written, he feared that if the pages still existed he could be exposed as a fraud. Following a brief pause in the work, he returned to it and just continued from where he left off. After rejecting several possible replacements for the missing first part, he concocted the story of a second set of "small" plates prepared by Nephi which would cover the same time period as the 116 pages.

In replacing the original 116 pages, however, Joseph Smith had difficulty remembering dates and the names of persons and places. The lack of such details in that portion of the Book of Mormon said to have been taken from the small plates is cited by the Tanners as evidence of what they term "the black hole." They further cite the fact that Joseph used filler material, mostly from the biblical book of Isaiah.

By the Tanners' reckoning (p. 36), Joseph Smith waited until after he had completed the bulk of the Book of Mormon (Mosiah through Ether) before coming up with the material he used to replace the 116 pages. But if Joseph had authored the Book of Mormon, wouldn't he be taking a big risk to rewrite the story of Lehi, even if it was less detailed? And wouldn't the risk of contradiction with the lost 116 pages increase if he intentionally waited until completing Mormon's abridgment before proceeding with the writing of the small plates of Nephi? The Tanners reason (pp. 32-33) that Joseph's delay gave time for Martin Harris and others who had seen the translation to forget enough details to make the deception possible. But how could this be, if Joseph believed that the 116 pages were still out there—as the Preface to the 1830 edition, as well as D&C 10:11, 15-19, 29-32, clearly implies?

Lack of Detail

The relative vagueness in the small plates is seen as an attempt on Joseph's part to avoid contradicting details he had
included in the 116 pages. There is, however, quite a bit of
detail concerning some of the events which occurred during the
desert sojourn of Lehi’s family (1 Nephi 1-18). The Tanners
argue that Joseph remembered only details about Lehi’s
immediate family and forgot only those given after the group’s
arrival in the New World (p. 14). To me, it seems more likely
that the latter part of the 116 pages would be freshest in his
mind. Moreover, there are other parts of the Book of Mormon
(notably 4 Nephi and Ether) also lacking in detail that cannot be
explained by the necessity to avoid contradictions.

The Tanners claim (p. 17) that Nephi does not mention any
New World prophets, though he names three unknown prophets
from the Old World, Zenock, Neum, and Zenos (1 Nephi
19:10). Their concern is unwarranted, however, for Nephi did,
in fact, name all of the prophets known among his people during
his lifetime, i.e., himself, his father Lehi and his brother Jacob.
Nephi probably mentioned Zenos and Zenock by name because
they were ancestors of Lehi (3 Nephi 10:16; cf. Helaman
15:11).

The Tanners note (p. 14) that 1 Nephi names only eleven
people (aside from biblical personalities) and names only one
woman, Lehi’s wife Sariah. Nephi does not mention his wife’s
name, nor those of his children or the children of his brothers,
or any of the children of Ishmael. There is, however, nothing
suspicious in this. Only one biblical prophet—Hosea—gives
his wife’s name (Hosea 1:3) and also names his daughter and
two sons (Hosea 1:3-9). Isaiah, while listing his children
because the names he gave them relate to his prophecies, refers
to his wife only as “the prophetess” (Isaiah 8:3). Though Job’s
wife is mentioned in the book of that name (Job 2:9; 19:17;
31:10), she is not named, nor are any of Job’s children. The
wife and mother-in-law of Simon Peter are mentioned, but not
named, though their names were quite likely known to Matthew
(Matthew 8:14), to Mark (Mark 1:30) and to Luke (Luke 4:38).

Vagueness on the matter of names is evident in other parts
of the Book of Mormon where there is no hint that Joseph Smith
needed to avoid details for fear of contradicting the stolen 116
pages. The book of Ether is notorious for failing to name the
brother of Jared (though the place Moriancumer, mentioned in
Ether 2:13, was evidently named after him). And while it
indicates that he had twenty-two sons and daughters (Ether
6:20), only one son (Pagag) is named (Ether 6:25). Nor do we
find the names of their twenty-two friends and their friends’
families (Ether 1:36-37; 2:1; 6:16). Jared's four sons are named (Ether 6:14) but not his eight daughters (Ether 6:20). The wives of Jared and his brother are also not named. Orihah also had a large family, twenty-three sons and eight daughters, but only one is named (Ether 7:1-3). And so it goes throughout the book of Ether.

On the surface, the lack of names for Nephi's successors as king (Jacob 1:9-11) appears to be valid evidence that Joseph was avoiding giving details for fear of contradicting the 116 pages he had already written (p. 17). But surely he would have remembered at least the name of Nephi's successor. After all, the Lehi colony was not yet large enough to make the genealogy sufficiently complicated to cause Joseph to forget the name of the second king. Why, then, did he not supply that name in Jacob, before adding that it was traditional for each king to take the throne-name "Nephi"? The most reasonable explanation is that Jacob was, as he claimed, actually following Nephi's instructions to stick to sacred matters, and not to get caught up in history. The Tanners object that "it is especially strange that Jacob would not reveal the name of the new king since in chapter 7, he gives a known Antichrist the dignity of a name" (p. 24). But this is not strange at all, for Jacob had personal dealings with the anti-Christ Sherem. The same phenomenon is found in the Bible. For example, neither the Judaean prophet slain by the lion nor the Israelite prophet who hosted him is ever named (1 Kings 13:11-32; 2 Kings 23:16-18), while some false prophets are mentioned by name because they had personal encounters with true prophets (e.g., Jeremiah 28:24-32; 2 Chronicles 18:10, 23).

The Tanners ask why Mosiah, who appears to have been the Nephite king, was not called—following the pattern mentioned by Jacob—something like "Nephi XI" (p. 17). The likely answer is that the system had changed during the four centuries which had passed since Jacob's time. If Jacob's statement about the kings being called "first Nephi, second Nephi," etc., is correct for the early period of Nephite history, then we would expect that this would also be mentioned in the 116 pages, which was taken from the history kept by the kings. If the 116 pages do not contain this information, then Joseph Smith ran the risk of being caught in a contradiction should those who had stolen the pages ever present them for public examination. Had he been the author of the Book of Mormon, he would have been on safer ground had Jacob simply left out
the statement about the title bestowed on the kings. Here, as in other examples, the Tanners’ logic can be turned against their theory as well.

Imprecision of Dates

The Tanners contrast the precise dates found in that part of the Book of Mormon which begins at Mosiah with the paucity of such precision in the small plates. They point out that Amaleki failed to give dates in his record (Omni 1:12-30), while in Mosiah 29:46 it is recorded that the second Mosiah died “in the thirty and third year of his reign, being sixty and three years old; making in the whole, five hundred and nine years from the time Lehi left Jerusalem.” They attribute this sudden precision to the fact that the black hole has now been passed (p. 17).

But there is another possible explanation for this precision. We are, after all, dealing with Mormon’s abridgment in the book of Mosiah. The dates are therefore probably Mormon’s doing, and hence attributable to the character of the author, rather than to a cover-up by Joseph Smith. Moreover, it is the precision in Mosiah 6:4 or 29:46 that would be Joseph Smith’s undoing had he been the actual author of the Book of Mormon. It is a simple matter to find, by calculating back from Mosiah’s death, that his father Benjamin had abdicated the throne some thirty-three years previously, making it 476 years after Lehi’s departure from Jerusalem. Would Joseph Smith have been so precise about Benjamin if he thought that this figure might contradict dates already written in the 116 pages?

The thirty years mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:28, contrary to the opinion of the Tanners (p. 18), represents an historical occurrence, for it was when Nephi made the small plates (2 Nephi 5:29-31). They also note (p. 18) the forty-year time period in 2 Nephi 5:34, which marks the journal entry in which he tells us when he wrote the preceding material. Similarly, the reference to fifty-five years in Jacob 1:1 (p. 18) denotes when he received the plates from Nephi. The imprecision in Jacob 7:1-2 (p. 18) is due to the fact that the whole chapter is a journal entry added to Jacob’s record “after some years had passed,” when he was an old man. Jacob had made a formal ending at Jacob 6:13 and evidently had no intention of writing more. As an afterthought, he added the story of Sherem, then updated the preface to his book, where he had—following Nephi’s example—left space for an explanation of the book’s contents.
The increased precision in dates found in the rest of the Book of Mormon can be explained by the fact that the small plates comprise first-person journal entries—each covering several years of history—while Mormon was a chronographer. He was able to reconstruct the time from Lehi to Mosiah (Mosiah 6:4; 29:46). Following Mosiah, years were counted from the institution of government by judges (Alma 1:1). This was changed once again after the sign of Christ’s birth (3 Nephi 2:8). The latter two systems were clearly a departure from the earlier pattern, but there is justification for it. The pattern typically used in the ancient Near East was a short-term calendar, based on the regnal years of each king. Since Lehi’s group left all that behind, they had no system they could use except to count the number of years since their departure from Jerusalem. This became the pattern for the later two systems.

Geographical Imprecision

The Tanners (p. 19) contrast the geographical details found in Nephi’s account of events in the Old World with the lack of such detail after the group arrived in the New World. In the former, there is mention of such geographical and cultural details as Jerusalem, its wall and its king (Zedekiah), the prophet Jeremiah, the Red Sea, the direction of Lehi’s travels, and the building of a ship. When the group arrives in the New World “the account of their landing is very vague” (see 1 Nephi 18:23), and they don’t even give any dates. They could have arrived at “any place from Alaska to the tip of South America.”

Some degree of vagueness is, however, natural enough. Having never seen the place before (and having forgotten to bring their Hammond’s atlas with them), Lehi’s people called it “the promised land” (1 Nephi 18:23). They couldn’t have given a date for the landing. Surely we cannot expect that Nephi would have dated the landing “in the X year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah” (which was the Israelite pattern in his day) when, for all he knew, Zedekiah was no longer king.

Indeed, had the Book of Mormon contained more precise details along the lines the Tanners suggest, I have no doubt that this, too, would have been used—with more justification—as evidence that Joseph Smith made it all up! But let’s take it one step further. In the biblical story of Jacob, there are no geographical indications for his travels into Egypt, except for the
name of his point of embarkation and the place where he settled down (Genesis 46:1-28).

The Tanners assert (p. 20) that Nephi never mentions the names of any Nephite or Lamanite cities and that he does not refer to any New World lands by name. But since the two groups were, in Nephi’s day, merely extended families, each living at a single site, there were probably no other “cities” (and no “lands”) to name until a few generations had passed. If there were no large political entities and no other towns involved in the early Nephite history, there would certainly be no reason to mention them. Indeed, the city of Zarahemla may have been their first outside contact.

The Tanners contrast the paucity of place-names and directional indications in the small plates with the large quantity of such data in the rest of the Book of Mormon (over 200 in Alma alone), and cite this as evidence of the “black hole” (p. 20). A simpler explanation is population growth and increased interaction between different settlements—including warfare, which was of interest to Mormon, abridger of the book of Alma and himself a military leader.

By noting the abundance of geographical details in the book of Alma, the Tanners work against their own theory regarding Joseph Smith’s need to be vague about geography in the small plates. It makes little sense that he would be vague in the small plates and then give sufficient detail in Mosiah 7-24 and Alma 17-27 regarding directions and places to enable us to ascertain the approximate geographical relationships between the city of Nephi and other nearby lands and topographical features which would have figured prominently in the history found in the 116 pages. If the small plates were dictated by Joseph after Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates (a proposition the Tanners support—pp. 32-37), then Joseph Smith could have simply drawn city names from the passages in Mosiah and Alma to lend more authenticity to the first part of the Book of Mormon. The fact that he did not do so suggests that he was, as he claimed, merely translating what he found on the small plates.

The Tanners state (p. 21) that the small plates mention no rivers or mountains in the New World. To this, I respond that, in all of Paul’s very extensive travels recorded in Acts 13-28, there is only one mention of a river (Acts 16:13) and only one of a hill (Acts 17:22), with absolutely no mention of valleys or plains. To the Tanners’ note that Nephi, who mentioned no New World towns or rivers, wrote of Bethabara and the Jordan
River (1 Nephi 10:9), we need only reply that this important religious information is in the account of a vision, in a set of plates dedicated to religious rather than geographical and historical matters.

I don't see how the failure to mention "houses" in the New World in the small plates (p. 20) provides evidence for the "black hole." The same writers fail to mention clothing, drinking water, knives, and so forth. They were not concerned with such mundane matters and probably assumed that everyone knew they had places to live, clothing, and utensils. Since mentioning houses would not have placed Joseph Smith in danger of contradicting anything written in the 116 pages, he would have had no reason to avoid the word deliberately had he been writing the book himself.4

War Stories

The Tanners believe that Joseph Smith was intensely interested in warfare, and hence included many battle accounts in that part of the Book of Mormon which deals with the period following the "black hole" (pp. 21-23, 27). They further believe that the lost 116 pages must have contained much more information about wars which Joseph, for fear of contradiction, left off the small plates. The difference can just as easily be explained by the fact that Mormon, as a military leader, would have been more prone to speak of warfare than others. (The same is true of his son, Moroni, who included many stories of war in his abridgment of Ether.) Mormon's purpose was to show how the people had periods of war and peace according to their righteousness—a fact he stressed when discussing the period immediately following Christ's appearance in the land of

4 Besides, Jacob (7:26), Alma (13:23), and Ammon (Alma 26:36) noted that the Nephites were "wanderers." It is very possible that, during the period when the small plates were written, they dwelt exclusively in tents or temporary dwellings. When Nephi and his followers separated themselves from those who followed Laman and Lemuel, they took tents with them (2 Nephi 5:7). Even in later times, we find much use of tents among the Nephites. Excluding the use of tents by search parties and armies, we have them mentioned in Mosiah 2:5-6; 18:34; 22:2; 23:5; 24:20. At least some of the Lamanites also lived in tents (Alma 22:28; 27:25). Indeed, the "buildings" mentioned in the Nephite record are very often identified as places of worship (2 Nephi 5:15-16; Alma 16:13; 21:4, 6, 20; 22:7; 31:12-13; 32:5; Helaman 3:9, 14).
Bountiful. The abundance of geographical detail given in the abridgment of the large plates (and lacking in the small plates) was necessary for Mormon's explanation of military strategy—something in which he was an expert.

Indeed, the lack of such details in all writings except those of general Mormon can be used as evidence to support the idea of multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon. The objections of the Tanners make sense only when one has made the a priori assumption that Joseph Smith was the sole author of the Book of Mormon. Besides, in view of their small numbers, the early battles of the Nephites could have been nothing more than armed gang fights, with a few dozen participants. Taking place in a forest clearing (or some other nondescript place), they can hardly have called for much strategy and troop movement.

By the Tanners' reckoning (p. 27), Joseph had to substitute more spiritual material for the original bloody war stories when he redid the first part of the Book of Mormon. However, had Joseph Smith been the author of the Book of Mormon, intending to recount war stories, how do we account for the presence of the very spiritual stories in Mormon's abridgment, such as the mission of the sons of Mosiah (Alma 17-27); the preaching of Alma and Amulek (Alma 5-15, 29-35); Alma's counsel to his sons (Alma 36-42); Samuel's prophecy (Helaman 13-15); Christ's visit and teachings (3 Nephi 11-28); Mormon's teachings (Mormon 5, 7); plus Moroni's doctrinal expositions in Mormon 8-9, Ether 4-5, 12, and his own book? In other words, the record is not all "blood and guts" after the small plates.

Old Testament Filler

The Tanners (pp. 23-24) believe that, in order to make up for lack of historical detail which would have contradicted the material contained in the 116 pages, Joseph Smith used filler from the Old Testament, citing a number of chapters of Isaiah. They find it odd that Nephi would quote this material rather than recount the history of his people. In view of the fact that the material is already found in our Bible, the Tanners term its inclusion in the Book of Mormon "ridiculous." Actually, Nephi's work in this respect is no less ridiculous than the fact that the Bible repeats the genealogy lists of Genesis 5, 10-11, 36, in the early chapters of 1 Chronicles, that Isaiah 36-39 repeats material already found in 2 Kings 18-20, or that much of
the history found in the books of Samuel and Kings is repeated in the Chronicles, etc. The Tanners use the same tactic as many other anti-Mormon writers, attacking the Book of Mormon in the same manner that unbelievers attack the Bible. This double standard compromises their work.

Nephi used most of the Isaiah quotes as a vehicle to explain the meaning of his own revelations from God. He could not have done this as effectively had he not quoted them for his readers. More to the point, the Book of Mormon also includes extensive quotes from Isaiah and Malachi in Mosiah 14-15 and 3 Nephi 22, 24-25, at places where there can be no supposed "black hole" requiring biblical filler.5 As with Nephi, Abinadi and Jesus used these quotes as background for explanations (in the surrounding chapters) of doctrinal matters.

An Apparent Inconsistency

The Tanners cite (p. 37) what Brent Metcalfe believes to be an inconsistency in the Book of Mormon, i.e., that while Nephi knew when the Messiah would come (1 Nephi 10:4; 19:8), Alma did not have this information (Alma 13:25). They further note that Samuel the Lamanite did not refer to the prophecy of Nephi when he spoke of the imminent advent of Christ (Helaman 14:2). Because these later Nephites knew nothing of Nephi’s prophecy of Christ’s coming, the Tanners conclude that the story of Nephi’s prophecy was not yet in Joseph Smith’s mind, since he had not yet invented the “small plates.” They support their contention by noting that Alma should have known what Nephi wrote since, in Alma 3:14-17, he quoted Nephi. The words quoted, however, are not in the writings of Nephi from the small plates and must have been on the 116 lost pages. I used the scripture computer search program to determine this, and the Tanners should have done the same.

There is, in fact, no evidence that any of the later Nephites ever referred to the small plates, on which the prophecy in question was written. Mormon noted that he had been unaware

5 The Tanners (p. 72) consider the sermon in 3 Nephi 12-14 to be a borrowing from Matthew 5-7. Latter-day Saints consider this sermon to be so important that Jesus delivered it to his disciples in both the Old and the New Worlds. For an in-depth discussion of the relationship between the two sermons, see John W. Welch, The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1990).
of the existence of the small plates until his work of abridgment was well under way (Words of Mormon 1:3). How can we expect that Samuel, who was not a Nephite, should have had access to them? Moreover, it is very doubtful that we can take the “600 years” of Nephi’s prophecy as literal, since Lehi left Jerusalem no earlier than the first year of Zedekiah (1 Nephi 1:4), which would have been 598 B.C.—already too late for the prophecy to have been fulfilled precisely 600 years later. Thus, Alma could have been aware of Nephi’s statement and taken it as an approximation only, rather than as a precise date. It is Mormon’s rewriting of the history which has the birth of Christ occurring in the six hundredth year (3 Nephi 1:1). And it was this same Mormon who acknowledged that there could have been errors in the chronology (3 Nephi 8:1-2).

Amaleki: Beyond the “Black Hole”

The Tanners believe that Amaleki, whose brief account appears in Omni 1:12-30, “was apparently on the other side of the black hole,” and that “his role was to set the stage for the next act—i.e., Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi” (p. 25). I believe this assumption to be incorrect. Had Joseph Smith not taken up the former translation work at the point where he left off, anyone possessing the 116 pages could have shown that he had skipped over part of the story, relegating it to the small plates. Thus, Amaleki’s cursory mention of Benjamin in Omni 1:23-25 leads me to believe that the more complete historical account in the 116 pages should tell us more about this king. But when we encounter him in Mosiah, he is an old man, ready to retire in favor of his son Mosiah. Obviously, quite a bit is missing.

The 116 pages must have had an account of king Mosiah and his son Benjamin. (D&C 10:41 says that Joseph Smith had translated “to the reign of king Benjamin.”) To speak of them in Omni and Words of Mormon, Joseph Smith, had he authored the Book of Mormon himself, would have run the risk of contradicting what he had written in the 116 pages. Here are some of the implications of this reasoning:

1. Clearly, the 116 pages must already have discussed Mosiah’s immigration to Zarahemla, where those who followed him joined with the Mulekites. (There is, after all, very little history of Mosiah in the small plates, so it must have been in the 116 pages, even if Joseph Smith invented the Book of
Mormon.) This being so, the Tanners’ assessment (p. 25) of the story of the immigration as an attempt to place the Nephites in a new geographical environment to avoid contradictory geographical details found in the 116 pages is incorrect. Moreover, as noted above, parts of the books of Mosiah and Alma give geographical details of the land from which Mosiah’s people had fled. Mosiah 11:13 informs us that the hill north of Shilom had played an important role in Mosiah’s exodus from the land of Nephi. Surely the hill would have been mentioned in the 116 lost pages.

2. The story of the Zeniff colony, mentioned by Amaleki (Omni 1:27-30), is, in fact, found in Mormon’s abridgment (Mosiah 7-24). The departure of that group from Zarahemla must have been on the 116 pages, and by referring to it again in Omni, Joseph Smith—had he authored the Book of Mormon himself—would have run the risk of contradicting what he had written earlier.

3. The Tanners comment that “even with Amaleki’s help in getting the Nephites to a new land, the small and large plates of Nephi do not come together in a very smooth manner” (p. 25). This is actually evidence that we are dealing with two separate documents, the small plates and Mormon’s abridgment. But I believe that the juncture between the two sets of plates is quite different from what the Tanners and others believe it to be, and this issue will be discussed below.

As evidence that Amaleki’s entry covers a time period post-dating that of the “black hole,” the Tanners note (p. 16) that he introduces new names and gives new details. This assessment, however, is at odds with the Tanners’ assertion about the lack of dates in Amaleki’s account, and also with the fact that he left a very sparse record. Elsewhere, the Tanners use these latter points as evidence of the “black hole” (p. 25). Joseph Smith seems damned if he does and damned if he doesn’t give details.

In another place, the Tanners note their belief that, “by the time [Joseph Smith] came to the book of Omni . . . he had safely passed the point where he could be trapped by the 116 pages, [so] he rapidly brought the project to a screeching halt” (p. 19). But if Joseph Smith had already passed the terminus a quo of the 116 pages, why then would he rush on a few hundred years in just a short space? If he was already on safe ground, what was the point? On the other hand, if the time of Benjamin was at the end of the 116 pages, as the Tanners suggest early on (p. 11), then their reference to Joseph Smith’s rushing through Omni to
terminate the “small plates” project is totally invalid. Their observation that there seems to be a push to finish off the book of Omni should be contrasted with the explicit statement in that book that the reason for the short entries was the diminishing space available on the small plates (Omni 1:30; cf. Jarom 1:2, 14). The fact is that Amaleki wrote nineteen of the verses in the book of Omni, contrasted with the eleven verses written by his four predecessors. It is not Amaleki’s account which was greatly shortened to conclude the story on the small plates.

**Words of Mormon**

The part of the small plates of Nephi known as the “Words of Mormon” is seen by the Tanners (p. 11) as a contrived transition between the account invented to replace the lost 116 pages and the abridgment by Mormon beginning in Mosiah. This theory falls apart when one understands the true nature of the Words of Mormon.

We note that Mormon wrote that it was after he had “made an abridgment from the plates of Nephi, down to the reign of this king Benjamin” that he “searched among the records . . . and . . . found this small account of the prophets . . . down to the reign of this king Benjamin” (Words of Mormon 1:3). This prompts the question of why Mormon searched the records at such a propitious time. On the surface, it appears to be contrived, as the Tanners assert (p. 30). But I suggest that his reason for searching through the records was to locate the small plates he had found mentioned in the large plates in connection with king Benjamin (cf. Words of Mormon 1:10). Having found them, he was pleased with their contents and appended them to his abridgment (Words of Mormon 1:6-7).

I further believe that Words of Mormon 1:12-18 is part of the translation from Mormon’s abridgment of the large plates of Nephi, and that these verses were *not* found on the small plates and should therefore not be part of the Words of Mormon. To understand this proposition, we must turn to an examination of the printer’s manuscript of the Book of Mormon, copied by Oliver Cowdery from the original manuscript written from dictation (the latter, as far as I can determine, being missing for this portion of the text). The manuscript, as originally copied, does not show a title for the book of Mosiah, presumably because that title appeared on one of the 116 lost pages. Even more important is the fact that there is, on the manuscript, no
original indication of a separation between Words of Mormon and Mosiah. Rather, Mosiah begins with the notation “Chapter II,” as if it were a continuation from Words of Mormon. A later correction to the beginning of Words of Mormon added the words “Chapter I,” changed “Chapter II” to read “Chapter I,” and added the title “The Book of Mosiah” before the latter. I believe that this title was misplaced and should have been after Words of Mormon 1:11. Here are my reasons for this belief:

1. Mormon’s statement that he was “about to deliver up the record which I have been making into the hands of my son Moroni” and had witnessed “almost all the destruction of my people, the Nephites” (Words of Mormon 1:1; cf. vs. 2) implies that he was near the end of his abridgment. This means he was not working on the story of Benjamin at the time he wrote these words, explaining how he had come across the small plates, but it may have been a long time since he had discovered them. (Words of Mormon 1:1-11 were, of course, written on the small plates, as we learn in Words of Mormon 1:5.)

2. Mormon wrote that he was going to “finish my record” on the small plates (Words of Mormon 1:5, 9). Since the bulk of his abridgment was written after he wrote of king Benjamin’s time, he could not have “finished” his record by writing about that king in Words of Mormon 1:12-18. How did he finish that record? I suggest that he summed up an explanation of the two sets of plates (Words of Mormon 1:10-11), then wrote the first part of the title page, perhaps only as far as the words “To come forth by the gift and power of God unto the interpretation thereof.” Moroni evidently added the rest of the title page, as Sidney B. Sperry first suggested many years ago.6 Joseph Smith indicated that “the title page of the Book of Mormon was taken from the very last leaf, on the left hand side of the collection or book of plates.”7 Presumably, Mormon added the small plates just before this title page, though this is less certain. It would, in any event, explain why Joseph Smith translated the small plates last.

3. Mormon’s concluding remarks in Words of Mormon 1:11 reflect the thoughts he expressed in the last chapter he wrote in Mormon 7. He wrote of the preservation of the records (cf. Mormon 7:1) and of the judgment (cf. Mormon 7:6, 10). In

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6 Sidney B. Sperry, Book of Mormon Compendium (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1968), 42.
7 HC 1:71.
Words of Mormon 1:8, he expressed the hope—also given in Mormon 7:5, 10—that his brethren might come to believe in Christ. This makes me wonder if the last part of Mormon (chapters 6-9) may have been written on the small plates. Indeed, Mormon 6:1 begins with the words, “And now I finish my record,” which is reminiscent of Words of Mormon 1:5, 9. In any event, the similarity of words found in Mormon 6-7 and in Words of Mormon 1:1-11 may indicate a temporal proximity of the writing of those two records.

4. There is a smooth flow from Words of Mormon 1:12 through the end of this “book” and into the beginning of Mosiah, which indicates that the record was continuous.

5. Joseph Smith may have chosen to place the title “Book of Mosiah” in its current place because Mosiah 1:1 is where he took up the story after turning over the 116 pages to Martin Harris. If this is true, then Words of Mormon 1:12-18 evidently represent part of the record already translated before the loss of the 116 pages. Joseph may have retained this part (cf. D&C 10:41) because it was on a page which had not yet been filled. The book of Mosiah, in this case, was probably named after the first Mosiah, whose history would have been part of the lost pages; otherwise, one might expect the book to be named after Benjamin. But this is by no means certain.

Multiple Sets of Plates

The Tanners wonder “why so many plates were made which covered the same period of Nephite history” (p. 45). We have Mormon abridging the Nephite history from the large plates of Nephi, while the small plates of Nephi overlap the history covered by both the large plates and Mormon’s abridgment (represented by the 116 lost pages). And Lehi’s genealogy is said to be found not only on the brass plates, but in Lehi’s own book as well as in the larger account prepared by Nephi (1 Nephi 3:3, 12; 5:14, 16; 6:1; 19:2; Alma 37:3). But this is not so unusual. The Bible has many examples of such parallel histories. Most of the stories in the books of Samuel and Kings (which, the majority of scholars agree, are a single history) are repeated in Chronicles, a post-exilic attempt to rewrite the history. Moreover, we are frequently reminded in Samuel and Kings that the information contained therein originally came from the chronicles of David, of the kings of Judah, and of the kings of Israel, as well as from records kept by various early
prophets whose works have been lost to us. Parts of Jeremiah and Isaiah repeat some of the history from 2 Kings, and the genealogies at the beginning of 1 Chronicles repeat information recorded earlier, mostly in Genesis. Parallel histories are nothing new to the world of holy writ.

The Plates of Lehi

The Tanners believe (p. 10) that Joseph Smith contradicted himself regarding the contents of the lost 116 pages. Thus, in the preface to the 1830 Book of Mormon, he wrote that the lost pages contained his translation of “the Book of Lehi, which was an account abridged from the plates of Lehi, by the hand of Mormon,” while in D&C 10:44 he wrote that the missing pages contained “an abridgment of the account of Nephi.” Why should Joseph thus contradict himself? If he was a charlatan, couldn’t he do a better job than this? And wouldn’t the people who stole the pages be able to prove him wrong by producing the original pages?

In Mosiah 1:6, where Joseph took up the Book of Mormon story again, we read of the “plates of Nephi,” but not the “plates of Lehi.” Surely at that early stage Joseph must have remembered from which plates Mormon had been abridging. The fact that the “plates of Lehi” are mentioned only in Joseph’s 1830 preface may indicate that this was an error for “plates of Nephi,” or that Mormon abridged plates from both Lehi and Nephi. In any event, the fact that Lehi’s plates are not mentioned anywhere in the Book of Mormon text except perhaps by allusion in 1 Nephi does not bode well for the Tanners’ theories. The absence of references to these plates further reinforces the idea that there could have been “small plates of Nephi” also not mentioned in Mormon’s abridgment.

Abridgment from the Plates of Nephi

The Tanners believe that Joseph’s earlier intention was to replace the lost 116 pages abridged by Mormon from Lehi’s record with “an account abridged by Mormon from another large set of plates which were prepared by Lehi’s son, Nephi, and his descendants” (p. 40). This theory rests on the assumption that the 116 pages were Mormon’s abridgment from the plates of Lehi and that Joseph Smith intended to replace them with Mormon’s abridgment from a parallel account made by Nephi. The theory further rests on the assumption that the title page,
submitted for copyright on June 11, 1829, before the translation work was completed, records Joseph Smith's plan prior to coming up with the idea of a set of "small plates." The theory fails, however, on several points:

1. The Tanners' assumption that the title page was written as a description of the contents of the Book of Mormon as Joseph Smith conceived it in June 1829 is unwarranted. It was clearly intended to describe Mormon's abridgment only, and not the small plates which became an addendum to his work. Consequently, the abridgment "taken from the plates of Nephi" refers not to the intended replacement for the 116 pages, but to Mormon's work in general.

2. In D&C 10:39, we read that in the record contained on the 116 pages "it was said . . . that a more particular account was given of these things upon the plates of Nephi." Since Joseph Smith believed that the 116 pages still existed, we must conclude that the stolen account actually spoke of the "plates of Nephi" from which Mormon was abridging his record. Indeed, in D&C 10:44, we read that those who stole the 116 pages "have only got a part, or an abridgment of the account of Nephi."

3. The Tanners try to support their thesis by noting that none of the authors of the small plates is named in the title page. But this absence of names proves nothing. Another notable absentee should make this clear: While the title page mentions the Jaredite record, it doesn't name Moroni, the abridger of Ether, despite the fact that, even by the Tanners' reckoning (p. 45), Moroni's work with the book of Ether had already been dictated by Joseph Smith by the time the title page was written. If Moroni was not named, why should it name the authors of the books on the small plates? The answer, again, is that the title page was written principally as a description of Mormon's abridgment, with a later addition by Moroni. There is a strong thread of consistency here, which the Tanners ignore.

4. If Joseph's original intention was to present the Book of Mormon as Mormon's abridgment from the "plates of Lehi," subsequently intending to use a parallel abridgment from the "plates of Nephi" to substitute for the missing 116 pages, why didn't he continue this claim in Mosiah through Mormon? Instead, that part of the Book of Mormon frequently affirms that it is taken from the "plates of Nephi." Why should Joseph Smith complicate matters? If he was clever enough to produce a fraud, why didn't he do it right?
5. That Joseph Smith did not, as the Tanners believe, invent the “plates of Nephi” after completing his work through Ether (or Moroni)\(^8\) is evidenced by the fact that the plates of Nephi are mentioned as early as Mosiah 1:6, 16; 28:11. In Alma 37:2; 44:24, we read that Alma kept a record on the plates of Nephi passed down to him. At a point long before Joseph Smith dictated the small plates, by best evidence, Mormon noted that he had taken his record from the plates of Nephi (3 Nephi 5:10). Some of his wording implies that he was abridging from those plates (Helaman 3:14; 3 Nephi 26:6-11; Mormon 6:6). Indeed, Mormon made both a complete account of the events of his days on the plates of Nephi and then abridged his own account for “these plates” (Mormon 2:18), meaning his abridgment.

### The Plates of Nephi

D&C 10, which the Tanners believe was written in 1829, before Joseph produced the small plates, is seen by them (p. 35) as Joseph Smith’s means of explaining his inability to reproduce the missing 116 pages. They point to the lack of reference to two sets of plates by Nephi, or to the “small plates” of Nephi in D&C 10:38-42, 44-45, as evidence that Joseph was going to replace the lost 116 pages by a translation of “the plates of Nephi” (p. 43). They reason that if the small plates were meant, the large plates should also be mentioned. But since the large plates of Nephi were not part of the collection Mormon passed to Moroni to be completed and buried (Mormon 6:6), while the small plates were appended by Mormon to the abridged records (Words of Mormon 1:3-6), the only “plates of Nephi” which came into Joseph Smith’s hands were the “small plates.”

Another point brought out by the Tanners (pp. 44-45)—and one which has confused many Latter-day Saints—is the fact that D&C 10 indicates that Joseph Smith should “translate the engravings which are on the plates of Nephi, down even till you come to the reign of king Benjamin” (D&C 10:41) and that he “should translate this first part of the engravings of Nephi, and send forth in this work” (D&C 10:45). The small plates, of course, have a beginning (with 1 Nephi) and an end (with Omni, plus the Words of Mormon). All evidence indicates that we

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\(^8\) That Moroni was not an “afterthought,” as the Tanners believe, is shown by the fact that Moroni 2 fulfills a promise made by Mormon in 3 Nephi 18:36-37.
have a translation of all of these plates, not just of the “first part.” A logical conclusion reached by the Tanners is that either Joseph Smith disobeyed the Lord, going beyond the “first part” of Nephi’s record, or that he originally intended to translate the first part of a longer record by Nephi, then changed his story when he realized that such an account would have such detail that it might contradict the missing 116 pages.

But there is a simpler explanation, i.e., that the words “first part” in D&C 10:45 refer to the first part of the Book of Mormon, not to the small plates of Nephi, and that the word “of” is to be read in the sense of “from”—a usage not unknown to Joseph Smith. Hence, he was told to provide, as the first part of the Book of Mormon, a translation from the “engravings of Nephi.” Besides, if Joseph Smith was changing his story as he went along, why didn’t he modify the wording of D&C 10 before publishing it?

**The Small Plates of Nephi**

The Tanners believe (p. 41) that Joseph Smith, finding himself confronted with the problem of needing to avoid detail in that part of the Book of Mormon which would substitute for the lost 116 pages, changed his mind about having this part represent an abridgment by Mormon from the “plates of Nephi” (as they misread the title page) and, instead, had the authors of the small plates apologize for the lack of details due to the necessity to stick to religious matters and point out that there was a second, more complete record kept by the Nephite kings. There are problems with this theory, too:

1. The Tanners contend (p. 42) that the small plates started out as a supposed abridgment of Nephi’s plates by Mormon and that it was only in 1 Nephi 9 that Joseph Smith switched to his “small plates” story. However, since Nephi wrote in first person from the beginning of his work (1 Nephi 1:1), with no hint that it was an abridgment by Mormon, the most logical conclusion is that it was intended from the beginning to represent firsthand accounts.

2. Had Joseph authored the book himself, he could just as easily have had Mormon, in his abridgment of Nephi’s plates, make apologies for the lack of material on the plates of Nephi (and refer to the more complete record by Lehi).

3. The theory further fails when, as we have seen above, we realize that it is the major portion of the Book of Mormon
(Mosiah through Mormon) which claims to be an abridgment from the plates of Nephi! The Tanners have obviously misunderstood the construction of the Book of Mormon.

The Tanners suggest that "if the book of Nephi had been written first, it seems reasonable to believe that Joseph Smith would have told about these small plates being handed down from father to son throughout the entire Book of Mormon" (p. 42). They contrast the frequent mention of the double sets of plates in the early part of the Book of Mormon with the fact that Mormon knew nothing of them until he discovered them (pp. 42-43). The fact is that the small plates were not mentioned after Benjamin’s time because no more was written on them. Mormon didn’t know of their existence because the larger plates perhaps didn’t mention the smaller ones or, as I suggested above, mentioned them only in connection with their receipt by King Benjamin. The small plates were, after all, briefer and referred of necessity to the more complete history for further details. This phenomenon is also found in the Bible. Throughout the books of 1 and 2 Kings and 1 Chronicles, we are referred to more complete accounts in the chronicles (annals) of the kings.

Since the small plates had already been virtually filled by the time Amaleki turned them over to Benjamin, there was no reason to pass them on, except for archival purposes. The existence of such archives is, in fact, mentioned in Mormon’s abridgment from the large plates (Helaman 3:13-16). There are, moreover, several references to the fact that the large plates of Nephi were being passed down from generation to generation, in order that records might be added to them by each successive historian (Alma 37:2; 44:24; 3 Nephi 5:10; 26:7, 11).

The Tanners (p. 41) find it strange that Nephi did not mention the existence of two sets of plates until 1 Nephi 9. They conclude (pp. 42-43) that it was at this point that Joseph Smith decided to change his story and invent the small plates to cover up the “black hole,” so that he could avoid giving details (in a longer account by Nephi) that would conflict with the story on the 116 pages. What they fail to note is that 1 Nephi 9 marks the end of Nephi’s first journal entry, as denoted by the concluding words, “And thus it is. Amen.” (See other such entries in 1 Nephi 14:30 and 22:31.) Nephi saved this explanation for the end of the initial journal entry, which is a perfectly logical thing to do. The colophon in 1 Nephi 9 begins with an explanation that the foregoing eight chapters comprised
all that “my father [Lehi] did see, and hear, and speak, as he
dwelt in a tent, in the valley of Lemuel, and also a great many
more things, which cannot be written upon these plates.” That
is, the first part of 1 Nephi is evidently an abridgment from the
record of Lehi, made by Nephi (rather than Mormon, whose
abridgment of that record was lost with the 116 pages). Indeed,
in 1 Nephi 1:16-17, Nephi informs us that he was abridging his
father’s account, after which he would “make an account of
mine own life.” It is significant that it was immediately after the
colophon in 1 Nephi 9 that he wrote, “And now, I, Nephi,
proceed to give an account upon these plates of my proceedings,
and my reign and ministry; wherefore, to proceed with mine
account, I must speak somewhat of the things of my father, and
also of my brethren” (1 Nephi 10:1).

The mention of Nephi’s “reign and ministry” here may
seem strange, in view of the fact that Nephi did not become king
until some years later, as recorded in 2 Nephi 5:18.9But it is
precisely in this latter chapter (2 Nephi 5:28-34) that Nephi
informs us of the preparation of the second (small) set of plates
in the thirtieth year, and tells us that the journal entry he has just
written was made in the fortieth year. Nephi’s large plates had
been prepared years earlier, soon after the group’s arrival in the
New World (1 Nephi 19:1-6). The Tanners’ suggestion (p. 41)
that the beginning of 1 Nephi should have mentioned the second
set of plates on which the record was being written is ludicrous.
Why begin an account by stating that it is written on a secondary
set of plates and that it has predecessors? The way in which
Nephi handled it is much more logical.

Another “Plate” Theory

The Tanners, building on their theory of an evolving
solution in Joseph Smith’s mind to the problem created by the
loss of the 116 pages, add another plan to the growing list (p.
44), based on their examination of Words of Mormon 1:3.
Because Mormon records that the small plates “contained
this small account of the prophets, from Jacob down to the reign of

9 The book of 2 Nephi was evidently not a separate work by
Nephi, despite the fact that it has a title and preface. In the original
manuscript, it is preceded by the notation “Chapter VIII,” showing it to be a
continuation of 1 Nephi. This was changed, however, in both the original
and the printer’s manuscript, and the word “second” was added for the 1830
edition.
this king Benjamin, and also many of the words of Nephi," they conclude that Joseph Smith had, at one point, intended to put forth a collection of small plates which were authored by Jacob and his descendants, and only after a moment's hesitation added that the plates also contained "many of the words of Nephi." They suggest that "this statement may have come from a section of material which was prepared by Joseph Smith before he decided to make Nephi the main character in the book" (p. 44) evidently meaning that Joseph Smith dictated Words of Mormon before the preceding books on the small plates. This suggestion contradicts their theory that the Words of Mormon were deliberately prepared in a manner which enabled Joseph Smith to tie the story in the small plates to those taken from Mormon's abridgment of the large plates. It is one of several examples of how the Tanners try to support multiple and conflicting theories. It is much more logical to assume that Mormon singled out Jacob because most of the writings on the small plates were by his descendants and because the plates were passed down in that line.

**D&C 10**

Part of the Tanners' "black hole" theory rests on the difficult issues of dating D&C 10 and whether the printed version (first appearing in the Book of Commandments in 1833) represents the original wording (pp. 37-38). The Latter-day Saint Church has variously dated the revelation to May 1829 or to the summer of 1828, with the latter view currently reflected in the editorial notes in the Doctrine and Covenants. The Tanners believe (p. 35) that the real date was May 1829 and that the revelation was Joseph Smith's means of explaining why he

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10 After pointing out that the Book of Commandments dates the revelation to May 1829, while the 1989 edition of the Doctrine & Covenants dates it to the summer of 1828, the Tanners remark that "the idea of two different dates does not give a great deal of confidence in Joseph Smith's methods." What they fail to tell the reader is that the first edition (1835) of the Doctrine & Covenants, prepared under Joseph's direction, also gives the date of May 1829. The change was made by later editors, not by Joseph Smith. But the Tanners are so convinced that Joseph Smith was a charlatan that they overlook such facts when they blurt out accusations against the Mormon founder.
could not reproduce the 116 lost pages, thereby laying the foundation for the replacement of those pages.\textsuperscript{11}

The Tanners (p. 34) use Max B. Parkin's interpretation of D&C 10 as evidence that Joseph Smith had "begun" the translation again where he had left off at the time of king Benjamin by the time he received the revelation. This they take as evidence that Joseph didn't concoct the story of the "small plates" until after having done a considerable amount of work on the book from the point where the 116 pages left off. But the passage in D&C 10:3 could just as easily be interpreted that he had "begun" with the book of Lehi and went down to the first part of Mosiah, but had not yet resumed the work at the time of the revelation. The word "retained" in D&C 10:41 is not, as Parkin and the Tanners take it, solid evidence that Joseph had already completed the translation of the plates of Mormon before receiving the revelation in D&C 10. It is much more logical to read this as meaning that at the time Joseph Smith gave Martin Harris the 116 pages, he "retained" some of that translation, and that it was to this point that he would be translating the small plates. We have already noted evidence that Words of Mormon 1:12-18 may have been part of that early translation from Mormon's abridgment.

I believe that D&C 10, in mentioning the plates of Nephi, has reference to all the plates prepared by Nephi. If this assumption is correct, then, from the wording of verses 39-41, 44-45, it would appear that both the small and the large plates of Nephi must have been more detailed than the 116 pages. To test whether this is true, I noted that one of the pages from the original manuscript, which contains the account covered in 1 Nephi 4:20-37,\textsuperscript{12} is represented by 7.5 column inches in the

\textsuperscript{11} That the correct date for D&C 10 is 1828 is evidenced by the fact that, at the time of its writing, the gift to translate had just been restored to him (D&C 10:3). Since Oliver Cowdery's attempt to translate is dated to April 1829 (D&C 8-9), the plates must have been returned by then, and not in May of that same year. D&C 5:30, written in March 1829, clearly shows that Joseph Smith had already returned to the translation by that time. He was told to stop "for a little season," then he resumed when joined the following month by Oliver Cowdery as scribe.

\textsuperscript{12} This page is illustrated in Stan Larson, "'A Most Sacred Possession,' The Original Manuscript of the Book of Mormon," \textit{Ensign} September 1977): 86.
1830 edition of the Book of Mormon. Since each page in the 1830 edition is 6 column inches, the 116 handwritten pages would have produced 145 pages of text had they been published in that edition. This compares favorably with the content of the small plates, which cover 147.5 pages in the 1830 Book of Mormon (page 5 through the middle of page 153). This is reduced to 122.5 pages if we discount the 25 pages of Isaiah passages found in 1-2 Nephi in the first edition. Still, that is a fair amount of material, and supports the idea found in D&C 10 that the plates from which Joseph Smith would translate were more detailed, at least when it came to Nephi’s account. If Joseph intended to publish a more detailed account from Nephi to replace the 116 pages, as implied in D&C 10:39, this seems very audacious indeed, for it would give more opportunity for potential contradictions, were he the author of the Book of Mormon.

The Tanners cast doubts on D&C 10 on other grounds as well. They note that “it would be almost impossible to alter the manuscript without detection,” making the premise in D&C 10:10-19 invalid (p. 10). I know too little of the paper and ink used by Martin Harris to judge this matter. But I do know that palimpsests from ancient times are known, in which the original has been erased and replaced with a new text. Some of these were not discovered until modern techniques such as ultra-violet photography and computer digital scans were available. But the question that the Tanners’ theory brings up is why Mrs. Harris didn’t expose Joseph Smith (whose revelation in D&C 10:10-19, 29-32, said the 116 pages still existed) by saying that she had burned the documents. Or, if she didn’t burn them, why didn’t she produce them to prove that Joseph’s contention that they had been altered was false? If Joseph were involved in a fraud, Mrs. Harris had ample opportunity to refute his claims. Why didn’t she do so?

The Tanners write that D&C 10:7-8 reflects Joseph Smith’s belief that Martin Harris was part of a conspiracy to destroy him and that Joseph later “concluded that Harris had nothing to do with the theft” of the 116 pages (p. 33). If the

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13 I chose to calculate page length based on the 1830 edition because it has only text, while the current edition has footnotes which vary in size from page to page.

14 These are represented by 3.5 pages (pp. 52-56) for 1 Nephi 20-21, 2.5 pages (pp. 75-78) for 2 Nephi 7-8, 16 pages (pp. 86-102) for 2 Nephi 12-24, and 3 pages (109-112) for 2 Nephi 27.
revelation contained false suppositions by Joseph Smith, why did Martin Harris not proclaim him a phony and go merrily on his way? Why stick with him and continue to support the "false prophet" decades after his death?

Two-Way Evidence

The Tanners, following Brent Metcalfe's lead, note that while Joseph Smith used the word "therefore" frequently in revelations dated prior to June 1829, those dated after this time tend to use the word "wherefore." They claim that this same phenomenon appears in the Book of Mormon, where the word "therefore" predominates in the books of Mosiah through Mormon, with the word "wherefore" predominating in Ether and Moroni, as well as in the books said to derive from the small plates. This, they believe (p. 35-36), is evidence that the small plates were translated last, after Joseph Smith had begun using "wherefore" instead of "therefore." While this may be true, there is another possible explanation, i.e., that "therefore" is peculiar to Mormon, since it predominates only in those books which he abridged. The change to "wherefore" in Moroni's work could be evidence of different authorship for Ether and Moroni, and, of course, for the small plates. I am not proposing that this interpretation is right and that of the Tanners wrong. My point is that this statistical data is inconclusive.

"Missing" Items in the Book of Mormon

Having discussed their "black hole" theory, the Tanners move to a discussion of other criticisms of the Book of Mormon. Though they don't seem to realize it, their basic concepts are at variance one with another. Part II of the book, for example, accuses Joseph Smith of "plagiarizing" the Bible because so many biblical expressions appear in the Book of Mormon. At the same time, the latter portion of Part I (pp. 46-63) attempts to discredit the Book of Mormon by showing that it contains too few biblical words. They seem so anxious to prove the Nephite record false that they move in opposing directions to prove their point.

The lack of certain biblical words, according to the Tanners, proves that the Book of Mormon was written by a single author, who must have been Joseph Smith. Their claim "that the entire Book of Mormon is also lacking a significant number of important things that should be there if the book were
really a history of ancient Jewish people in the New World” (p. 46) is presumptuous. They set themselves up as judges of what such a record should contain, then denounce the Book of Mormon because it does not meet their criteria.

Among the “missing” items listed are women, measurements, colors, commercial terms, and others. The absence of specific words proves little, however. One could just as well ask why the word “dew,” found in the Old Testament, is nowhere to be found in the New. Dew is known to have existed in that part of the world anciently, and even today. Did it mysteriously “disappear” during the time of the New Testament? More likely, the New Testament was written for a different purpose, hence leaving out some words. The Book of Mormon should be given at least as much latitude in its failure to use words which the Tanners believe should be found therein. But rather than gloss over this subject, it behooves us to examine the major “missing” categories listed by the Tanners, who determined the lack of words by means of a computer search.

We start out with their criticism (pp. 50-51) that the Book of Mormon has almost no references to such colors as red, blue, brown, crimson, green, purple, and yellow. Of these, only red, green, and purple are really common in the Bible, though even they are not found in every book. None of the other colors they name even occurs in the New Testament. The word “brown” appears four times in one chapter only (Genesis 30), while “yellow” is also found only four times, three of these being in the book of Leviticus and the other in Psalm 68. The color “crimson” is mentioned three times in 2 Chronicles (chapters 2-3) and once each in Isaiah and Jeremiah. Most occurrences of the word “blue” are in the book of Exodus, with a few also in Numbers, 2 Chronicles, Esther, Jeremiah (once), and Ezekiel. Color words, therefore, are not of frequent occurrence in the Bible, and many biblical books don’t mention any colors at all.

In the area of measurements, the Tanners performed computer searches on words such as “measure/measured/measuring” (in only eight Bible books), “balance(s)” (in only twelve Old Testament books and Revelation 6:5) and concluded that the Bible contained “a great deal of information” about such matters (p. 48). Some of the measurements, such as “hin” and “log” are Hebrew words and are found only in the Old Testament, and only in connection with the tabernacle or the temple. That is, they were not everyday measuring cups, such as would be found in ancient Nephite kitchens! Two of the units
of measurement listed by the Tanners are found only in the New Testament and are likewise not to be expected in the Nephite record. These include "firkins" (only in John 2:6) and "bushel" (only in the synoptic gospels). Other words in the Tanners' list have limited occurrence in the Bible, such as "acre(s)" (twice), "scales" (once), "omer(s)" (six times, all in Exodus 16), "bath(s)" (only in 1 Kings chapter 7, 2 Chronicles chapters 2 and 4, Ezra chapter 7, Isaiah chapter 5, and Ezekiel chapter 45), "homer(s)" (once each in Leviticus, Numbers, and Isaiah, in chapter 45 of Ezekiel and in only one verse of Hosea). Of the 39 books of the Old Testament, "ephah" appears in only eighteen, and is absent from the New Testament.

Even some relatively common biblical measurements are completely missing in a number of books of the Bible. "Cubit(s)," for example, is not used at all in nineteen books of the Old Testament and is found only four times in the New Testament. "Span" is found in only five Old Testament books and is not found at all in the New Testament.

Closely related to measurements is the concept of money. Before stamped coins were invented in the late sixth century B.C. (nearly a century after Lehi's departure from Jerusalem), pieces of precious metals of varying weight were used as a medium of exchange. It is undoubtedly in this context that we must read of the Nephite monetary system in Alma 11. The most common unit of weight was the shekel, deriving from the verb meaning "to weigh." The word is found in less than half (17) of the Old Testament books and is not used at all in the New Testament, though archaeological evidence has shown that the shekel, in coin form, was in use at that time. Most occurrences of "shekel" are in Exodus through Numbers, with the heaviest concentration in the latter book. The term "gerah," denoting a smaller piece of money, is found only in the Old Testament books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Ezekiel. Indeed, "gerah" and "shekel" are terms usually found in texts relating to the tabernacle or the temple. The word "pound(s)," aside from its occurrence in the New Testament books of Luke and John, is found only four times in the Old Testament, and only one of these is in a book (1 Kings) written prior to Lehi's departure from Jerusalem. "Talent," in addition to its New Testament occurrences in Matthew and Revelation, is found in nine Old Testament books, of which only four existed in Lehi's time. As for the Tanners' complaint that the word "money" is rare in the Book of Mormon, while plentiful in the Bible, we
must note that the Hebrew word rendered "money" in the Old Testament of the King James Version really means "silver" (the way it is most often translated), and that this latter word is of frequent occurrence (53 times) in the Book of Mormon.

One of the areas in which the Tanners see a deficiency in the Book of Mormon is in commercial terms. They note the infrequent mention of trade and purchasing words. As with other words in their list, however, many of these are scarce or of restricted occurrence in books of the Bible. For example, words based on the root "market" are found only in Ezekiel chapter 27 in the Old Testament and in the gospels and Acts of the New Testament. "Trade" words are found in only two Old Testament books (Genesis chapters 34 and 46, and Ezekiel chapter 27) and once each in only three New Testament books (Matthew, Luke, Revelation). Words relating to "traffic" are found once each in the books of Genesis, 1 Kings, and Isaiah, and three times in Ezekiel.

Another item the Tanners consider critical but "missing" from the Book of Mormon is reference to Jewish festivals. In this, they appear to be unaware of the fact that I published, in 1978, a rather detailed article showing that the Nephites practiced the Feast of Tabernacles. That work has since been considerably enlarged and was again published in 1990. Some five or six years ago, I participated in a F.A.R.M.S. round-table discussion in Provo in which scholars who had been following up on my earlier work presented their most recent findings. All of the Old Testament festivals have now been identified in the Book of Mormon from their particular characteristics.

The Tanners, after citing the lack of women’s names in the small plates as evidence that Joseph Smith was omitting detail to avoid contradiction with the 116 pages, point out that this

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15 Six different Greek words are translated "money" in the KJV New Testament.
evidence is weakened by the fact that women are extremely rare in the Book of Mormon anyway (p. 14). They do, however, find it strange that the Bible should name so many women, while the Book of Mormon names almost none (p. 15). In reply, we note that the Bible, as a whole, has a longer history, and includes books by a wide variety of authors, some of whom did not mention women. A quick glance through the books of the minor prophets in the Bible shows that most include no feminine names. Indeed, most of the women named in the Bible are found only in genealogical listings, rather than as characters in the stories. Since the Book of Mormon barely touches on genealogy, the paucity of women’s names does not “throw a serious cloud of doubt” over the ancient origin of the Book of Mormon (p. 15). Nor does this provide evidence “that the Book of Mormon was written by only one author.” Nevertheless, we must note that it is true that a single author—Mormon—produced most of the book. The only portion of the Book of Mormon which is comprised exclusively of firsthand accounts is the small plates, a work dedicated to religious matters.

The Tanners note (p. 15) that Paul mentioned the names of women in some of his epistles. Perhaps the Nephites did the same, but the Book of Mormon contains no epistles of this nature. The only extant letters deal with military matters or were written by Mormon to his son Moroni, rather than to a group of people to whom it would have been appropriate to send greetings.

The list of “missing” Bible words goes on, with the same kinds of results. It seems unreasonable to expect the Book of Mormon, most of which was written by a single man (Mormon), and which is so much smaller than the Bible, to use all of the biblical terms the Tanners think an authentic ancient Israelite book should contain. More serious, however, is the fact, mentioned above, that when the Tanners do find biblical terms in the Book of Mormon, they accuse Joseph Smith of “plagiarism.”

New Testament “Plagiarism”

Early in their book (p. 1), the Tanners argue that the Book of Mormon should not use the same language as the Bible, since it was translated from a different tongue. They expand on this in Part II (pp. 75-164), which comprises parallel columns of passages from the Book of Mormon and from the New
Testament, showing how Joseph Smith “plagiarized” the New Testament. They particularly object to the fact that the Book of Mormon, when using biblical passages, employs the form found in the King James Bible.

My response to this criticism is that Joseph Smith deliberately used the King James Version wording because it corresponded to the Bible known to his contemporaries.18 His work would undoubtedly not have been well-received had he done otherwise. But this takes us away from our current study, which involves apparent New Testament quotes found in the Book of Mormon.

There is, of course, no problem if the Book of Mormon quotes from Old Testament books written prior to Lehi’s departure, which presumably were found on the brass plates obtained from Laban (1 Nephi 4:16; 5:10-14; 13:23; 19:21-23; 2 Nephi 4:15; Omni 1:14; Alma 37:3). Nor can there be a problem with passages from later books which Jesus revealed to the Nephites, such as Malachi 3-4 (3 Nephi 24-25), or in the fact that Jesus delivered essentially the same sermon to his disciples in both the Old World (Matthew 5-7) and the New (3 Nephi 12-14).19

The same cannot be said of quotes from the New Testament, which was written long after Lehi’s time and could not have been known to the Nephite historians. It is these quotes which the Tanners see as strong evidence against the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Some Latter-day Saints have responded to such objections by saying that God could surely reveal the same ideas to people in different parts of the world. The Tanners agree with that concept, but believe it unlikely that he would use the same words found in the King James translation of the Bible in such revelations. The use of precise New Testament phraseology is not negative, however, as long as the idea fits the passage. After all, Joseph Smith rendered the Book of Mormon in English theological terms of his day, most of which derived from the King James Bible. Because of their extreme bias against Joseph Smith, the Tanners find themselves in the ironic position of believing him brilliant


19 The Tanners object (p. 72) that here, too, the King James wording is used.
enough to write the Book of Mormon but stupid enough to believe that he could get away with using New Testament quotes in Book of Mormon passages supposedly from pre-Christian times.

The Tanners used the computerized scripture search program distributed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to find the New Testament passages from which they propose certain Book of Mormon passages borrowed. Their use of the computer to perform word searches is admirable, and I commend it to everyone.

Old Testament Phrases in the New Testament

What concerns me most, however, is that the Tanners neglect to tell us that many of the Book of Mormon concepts and phrases which they claim were borrowed from the New Testament are also found in the Old Testament. While some of them are merely common phrases found in Jewish culture, in some cases, the New Testament is actually quoting from the Old. Here are a few examples of both kinds:

The Tanners claim that the words “the mysteries of God” in 1 Nephi 1:1 were taken from 1 Corinthians 4:1. In the Bible, the word “mystery” appears only in the New Testament. This is because different parts of the King James Bible were translated by different committees, and the Old Testament translators chose to use the word “secret.” The term “secret of God” appears in Job 15:8; 29:4.

The Tanners claim that the words “Great and marvelous are thy works, O Lord God Almighty” (1 Nephi 1:14) were taken from Revelation 15:3. But that New Testament verse says that these words derive from “the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.” The Bible contains a few songs attributed to Moses (Exodus 15:1-19; Deuteronomy 31:19-22; 31:30-32:44; Psalm 90—see preface). Wording similar to that of Revelation 15:3-4, however, appears in several Old Testament passages, as the following comparison shows:

“Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy: for all nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy judgments are made manifest.” (Revelation 15:3-4)
“Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Exodus 15:11)

“He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without inquiry, just and right is he.” (Deuteronomy 32:4)

“Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord; neither are there any works like unto thy works. All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name. For thou art great, and doest wondrous things: thou art God alone. Teach me thy way, O Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore.” (Psalm 86:8-12)

“O Lord, how great are thy works!” (Psalm 92:5; cf. Psalm 40:5)

“Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy. The king's strength also loveth judgment... worship at his footstool; for he is holy. Moses and Aaron among his priests;...” (Psalm 99:3-6)

These biblical passages have much more in common than most of the Book of Mormon passages listed by the Tanners have with the New Testament passages to which they are compared. Two of the examples listed above (the ones from Exodus and Deuteronomy) are from songs attributed to Moses, while the rest are from songs (Psalms) attributed to David. The one closest to the passage in Revelation 15 is found in Psalm 86, which may have been attributed by earlier people to Moses, just as nearby Psalm 90 is. It is perhaps no accident that Psalms 86, 92, and 99 are in close proximity to Psalm 90 in the Bible, and this may have led to the attribution to Moses in Revelation 15:3.

The Tanners believe that the idea of Lehi being warned “in a dream” to flee (1 Nephi 2:1-3) was taken from the story of Joseph in Matthew 2:13. But the Lord’s use of dreams need not be questioned. He said to Moses, “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will make myself known unto him in a vision, and will speak unto him in a dream.” (Numbers 12:6; cf. Jeremiah 23:28). While most divinely inspired dreams in the Old
Testament were prophetic, there are cases in which the Lord came in dreams to give instructions (e.g., Genesis 20:3, 6; 31:24). Indeed, in Genesis 31:11-13, he appeared to Jacob in a dream and told him to leave his home, just as he later warned Lehi and Joseph.

It is true, as the Tanners point out, that the phrase “being grieved because of the hardness of their hearts” (1 Nephi 2:18) is nearly identical to that found in Mark 3:5. However, the idea, in both cases, probably derives from an Old Testament passage, where we read, “Forty years long was I grieved with this generation, and said, It is a people that do err in their heart.” (Psalm 95:10; quoted in Hebrews 3:10). The idea of being hard-hearted is, of course, common in the Old Testament. (Note that the Tanners also compare the words “the hardness of their hearts” in 1 Nephi 14:7 with Mark 10:5.)

The Tanners compare the first part of 1 Nephi 5:8 with some of Peter’s words in Acts 12:11. Though the stories are quite different, some of the same expressions are used. But these are common Old Testament expressions and should not be suspect. For example, in Genesis 15:13, one finds the words “know of a surety,” while variants are found in 1 Samuel 28:2 and Ecclesiastes 8:12 (cf. also John 17:8). The expression “deliver out of the hand(s) of” is found 77 times in the Old Testament, while in nine instances the same Hebrew expression is rendered “deliver from the hand(s) of.”

The Tanners compare small parts of 1 Nephi 8:10, 13, with Revelation 22:1-2, whence they believe Joseph Smith took them. But since the topic is the tree of life in both cases, we should not be surprised to find that both passages describe it as near a river and bearing fruit. Indeed, the Book of Mormon would be more suspect if its description of the tree differed from that of the Bible. As for the expression “river of water,” which the Tanners seem to think is found only in these two passages, compare Psalm 65:9, “the river of God, which is full of water.” The Tanners also list Revelation 2:7 as the source of the words “the tree of life” in 1 Nephi 11:25. The expression, of course, appears first in Genesis (2:9; 3:22, 24) and is also found in Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4. The concept of the “fountain of living waters,” in the same Book of Mormon passage, found in a variant form (“living fountains of waters”) in Revelation 7:17, is from the Old Testament. Zechariah (14:8) wrote of the “living waters” (cf. Ezekiel 47:1-12), and Jeremiah (2:13; 17:13) wrote of “the fountain of living waters,” which is identical to the
1 Nephi wording rather than to the wording of Revelation 7. In the Song of Songs (4:15), we read of “a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters.” Jesus referred to himself as the source of “living waters” (John 4:10). The idea of the living waters being near the tree of life is, of course, paralleled in the story of the garden of Eden, where we have not only the tree, but also the river (Genesis 2:9-10).

The “rod of iron” in 1 Nephi 8:19 need not come from Revelation 12:5. The expression appears first in Psalm 2:9, which is quoted in Revelation 2:27 and then reappears in Revelation 12:5 and 19:15. I quite easily discovered this using the same computer search the Tanners claim to have used. Since the Tanners must have seen the Old Testament use of the term, why did they cover up this fact? From some of the material presented above, they seem to have covered up such evidence on a number of occasions. If not, then their attention to detail is surely to be questioned.

The Tanners compare the words “those who diligently seek him” (1 Nephi 10:17) with the nearly identical “them that diligently seek him,” in Hebrews 11:6. They then compare “he that diligently seeketh shall find,” two verses later (1 Nephi 10:19) with “he that seeketh findeth,” in Matthew 7:8. The fact that the expression is found in such diverse writings as Matthew and Hebrews should have told them that it is relatively common. Indeed, it is likely that the New Testament passages are based on the idea found in these Old Testament verses:

“But if from thence thou shalt seek the Lord thy God, thou shalt find him, if thou seek him with all thy heart and with all thy soul.” (Deuteronomy 4:29)

“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.” (Jeremiah 29:13, paraphrasing Deuteronomy 4:29)

“Therefore came I forth to meet thee, diligently to seek thy face, and I have found thee.” (Proverbs 7:15)

“Those that seek me early shall find me.” (Proverbs 8:17)

The Tanners maintain that “caught away in the Spirit of the Lord” (1 Nephi 11:1) was borrowed from Acts 8:39, while the words “into an exceedingly high mountain” they believe to have
been taken from Matthew 4:8. However, Ezekiel has similar imagery. In 37:1, he wrote, “The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley.” And in 40:2, the prophet wrote, “In the visions of God brought he me into the land of Israel, and set me upon a very high mountain.” Ezekiel was a contemporary of Lehi, and so should be expected to use similar language. In Ezekiel, the prophet noted that he was carried to Jerusalem by a spirit (Ezekiel 8:3) and that the Lord spoke to him (Ezekiel 8:4-5) and cried with a loud voice (Ezekiel 9:1). Thus, when the Tanners indicate Matthew 27:46 as the origin of the words “cried with a loud voice” (1 Nephi 11:6), we must point to the Ezekiel passage and further note that the expression is found ten times in the Old Testament.

The Tanners compare the words “blessed art thou” (1 Nephi 11:6) with the same words in Luke 1:28. However, these very words appear twice in the Old Testament, while “blessed be thou” is found six times.

The Tanners indicate that the words “descending out of heaven” (1 Nephi 11:7) derive from John 1:32. They could just as well be related to the same expression found in Matthew 28:2 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16. That is to say that the expression is so common as to evidently not be unique to John. The verb “descend” was not used by the King James Version Old Testament translators, who preferred to render it “come down.” Consequently, “come/coming down from heaven” appears eight times in the Old Testament. Especially note the following from Daniel 4:20 where the context is similar to that of 1 Nephi:

“an holy one came down from heaven” (verse 13)

“an holy one coming down from heaven” (verse 23)

The Tanners note that while, in 1 Nephi 11:34, it is “the multitudes of the earth” that “were gathered together to fight,” in Revelation 19:19 (which they see as the source for the Book of Mormon passage), it is “the kings of the earth” which were “gathered together to make war.” What the Tanners fail to note is that the Hebrew word “army” derives from the verb meaning

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20 While it is true that Daniel was written after Lehi left Jerusalem, the two men were contemporaries and should be expected to use similar language.
“assemble, gather,” and that armies always “gather together to fight” (twice in the Old Testament) or “gather together to war” (three times in the Old Testament). So this is the normal Hebrew way of describing preparations for war and should not be counted as a borrowing from the New Testament.

The Tanners’ idea that the quaking and rending of rocks in 1 Nephi 12:4 derives from Matthew 27:51 is weakened by the fact that, in the Book of Mormon passage, the word “quaking” appears long after the rending of the rocks, while in Matthew they are together. The idea is not unique to Matthew, however, and is found in 1 Kings 19:11. The Tanners believe that the listing of “lightnings . . . thunderings . . . earthquakes” in the same Book of Mormon passage derives from Revelation 8:5. But such combinations are found in the Old Testament as well. We have thunder and earthquake in Isaiah 29:6 and lightning and earthquake in Psalm 97:4. The words “thunder” and “lightning” are found together in four Old Testament passages. In a fifth, they are, like the passage in 1 Nephi and Revelation, listed with earthquake (Psalm 77:18). One could argue that both Nephi and John drew upon the Psalm for the imagery.

The idea of the Holy Ghost falling upon people (1 Nephi 11:7) is said by the Tanners to come from Acts 11:15. But in Ezekiel 11:5, we read, “the Spirit of the Lord fell upon me.” And in two Old Testament passages (Psalm 51:11; Isaiah 63:10-11), we read of the “holy spirit.” The Tanners also believe that the words “ordained of God, and chosen” are merely a variant of the words of Jesus found in John 15:16. But these two verbs are, in fact, used together in 1 Chronicles 9:22. It is true that this Old Testament book was composed after Lehi left Jerusalem, but it is based on older records, including, it appears, court records from the time of King David.

The Tanners point to Revelation 2:24 (“the depths of Satan”) as the source for the words “the depths of hell” in 1 Nephi 12:16. But the words “depths of hell” are found in Proverbs 9:18. It is much more likely that, if the Book of Mormon is copying biblical idioms, it took this one from the Old Testament book—which, of course, may have been available to the Nephites. By the same token, one could argue that John borrowed the Old Testament expression for the book of Revelation.

The Tanners believe that the words “vain imaginations” (1 Nephi 12:18) derive from Romans 1:21, “vain in their imaginations.” But it is more likely that both passages borrowed
the idea from Psalm 2:1, which is also quoted in Acts 4:25. (Actually, Helaman 16:22 is closer to the wording of Romans 1:21 and even includes the word “foolish.” But the Tanners don’t list this one.) And so it goes. We must conclude that the comparisons given by the Tanners would be valid if the ideas were unique to the New Testament. But most of them are from the Old Testament. There are, however, some exceptions, and we must deal with these.

The Book of Revelation

The Tanners note a number of parallels between the wording of 1 Nephi 11-14 and that found in the book of Revelation. In view of the fact that Nephi was shown the very same vision as John (see 1 Nephi 14:19-27), it should not be surprising that they described the vision in similar terms. Many Bible scholars have noted the dependence of the book of Revelation on such Old Testament works as Ezekiel, Zechariah, and Daniel, as well as on the pseudepigraphic book of Enoch. Most of the phrases the Tanners claim Joseph Smith borrowed from Revelation are also found in these other works. I have come to believe that all of these men, along with certain others (Adam, Moses, Abraham and Joseph Smith among them), saw the same basic vision, which I have come to call “the primordial vision.” I hope to make this the subject of a future work.

Special Cases

The Tanners note the similarity between the olive tree/vineyard parable of Jacob 5 and Paul’s statements in Romans 11:17-24, which they see as the source of the parable, along with Luke 13:6-8 and Isaiah 5:1-5. The tie has long been known among Latter-day Saint scholars, who have assumed that Jesus, Paul and Jacob used a common source, Zenos. We could also compare Matthew 7:17; 12:33; and 21:33 (which appears to be patterned on Isaiah 5). From known pseudepigraphic works, it appears that the parable was widely used anciently.

An early text from which Paul (1 Corinthians 12-13), Mormon (Moroni 7), and Moroni (Moroni 7, 10) quoted dealt with the gifts of the spirit and the importance of faith, hope, and charity/love. Indeed, the faith-hope-charity list is so pervasive in the scriptures that one is tempted to suggest that quite a number of prophets quoted from the same source. I hope to find
time to deal with both the olive tree parable and the faith-hope-charity scriptures in future works.

**Alma 19**

The Tanners compare four verses (Alma 19:1, 5, 8, 12) from the account of the raising of King Lamoni with the story of the raising of Lazarus in John 11, from whence they believe it was plagiarized. There are, to be sure, some similarities, since, in each case, someone was brought back from the dead. But the Tanners have gone too far. Even a cursory glance at their schematic comparison (p. 76) shows that the order of events is quite different in the two accounts. There are also substantive differences. For example, while Lamoni had been lying (presumably dead) on his bed for two days and two nights (Alma 19:1), Lazarus had been dead and buried for four days (John 11:17). The Tanners' use of selected verses from both accounts stacks the evidence of plagiarism in their favor. When one compares the complete accounts from Alma and John, the parallels seem insignificant indeed.

Nevertheless, one can say that if the parallels are all valid, because of their number alone, they could be taken as *prima facie* evidence that the account in Alma 19 was taken from John 11. It behooves us, therefore, to examine each of the supposed parallels to determine their validity.

The Tanners point, for example, to the fact that Lazarus had “lain in the grave” (John 11:17) and that the people were about to “lay [Lamoni’s body] in a sepulchre” (Alma 19:1). But where else would one lay a dead body? (Or do they expect Joseph Smith to have written “toss it”?!). If Joseph Smith copied from John, why didn’t he use the word “grave,” rather than “sepulchre”? The Tanners go even farther afield by comparing the word “laid” in John 11:34 with “laid” in Alma 19:5, without noting that, in these passages, Lazarus was laid in a tomb, Lamoni on a bed. Indeed, in a few Old Testament passages we find a dead person laid on a bed (1 Kings 17:19; 2 Kings 4:21, 32; 2 Chronicles 16:14).

The idea of the dead stinking (Alma 19:5; John 11:39) is not exclusive to John; it is found in Isaiah 34:3. So, too, the use of the term “sleep” in the sense of “die” (Alma 19:8; John 11:11) is found in several Old Testament passages (Deuteronomy 31:16; 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 1:21; Psalms 13:3; Jeremiah 51:39, 57; Daniel 12:2).
The words "he shall rise again," common to Alma 19:8 and John 11:24, are the only strong point in the Tanner's case. Though the phrase is used six times in the Old Testament, it is never used of the dead. But its very existence in pre-Nephite texts weakens the case for plagiarism from John 11.

There are several weak parallels which are made even weaker by virtue of the fact that the ones we have noted above are invalid. For example, the Tanners mark the simple phrase "he is dead" (Alma 19:5) as suspicious because John 11:14 reads "Lazarus is dead." In 2 Samuel 12:19, 23, we also read "he is dead." It would be ludicrous to conclude that John 11 took the phraseology from 2 Samuel, since this is a simple declarative sentence which must have been uttered in biblical times nearly every time a man died.

The Tanners make a point of the wording "go in and see" (Alma 19:5) and "come and see" (John 11:34), the latter appearing but once in the Bible in the imperative form.21 But the phrase would presumably have been such a common one that it is absurd to suppose that Joseph Smith took it from John 11, unless the other correspondences hold, which they do not.

The Old Testament contains two stories in which a young boy was raised from the dead by a prophet. In 1 Kings 17:17-24, we read of Elijah restoring life to the son of a woman of Zarephath. We note that the boy "fell sick" (1 Kings 17:17; cf. John 11:3, 6) and died. Elijah "laid him upon his own bed" (1 Kings 17:19; cf. Alma 18:43; 19:5) and prayed God to revive him (1 Kings 17:20-21; cf. John 11:41-42). When his prayer was answered, he announced to the mother, "thy son liveth" (1 Kings 17:23; cf. John 11:23-26). In 2 Kings 4:18-37, we find that Elijah's disciple Elisha brought to life the son of a Shunammite woman. We are informed that "he ... died" (2 Kings 4:20, 32; cf. John 11:14; Alma 19:5) and that his mother "laid him on the bed" (2 Kings 4:21, 32; cf. Alma 18:43; 19:5). She then went to get Elisha (2 Kings 4:22-27; cf. John 11:3; Alma 19:2). Elisha's servant reported that "the child is not awaked," thus tying death to sleep (2 Kings 4:31; cf. John 11:11; Alma 19:8). Elisha, like Elijah, prayed God to revive the child (2 Kings 4:33; cf. John 11:41-42). The reaction of the mother, at seeing her son alive again, was to fall down at the...

21 However, the idea of going to see is found in Genesis 37:14; 2 Kings 7:14; 9:34, while coming to see can be found in 2 Kings 10:16; Psalm 66:5; Isaiah 66:18.
prophet’s feet (2 Kings 4:37; cf. John 11:32). We could further compare the declaration of the widow of Zarephath (1 Kings 17:24) with that of Martha (John 11:27)

**Miscellaneous Issues**

The Tanners quote J. N. Washburn, who noted that Mormon’s abridgment is complex in that it pyramids stories upon stories “without premeditation or apparent design” (pp. 26-27). Actually, there is great evidence that Mormon planned all this. Indeed, in only two cases did he radically digress from his story (e.g., Alma 11:4-19; Alma 22:27-34), and in each case it was to provide background information necessary to the story he was about to tell. In each case, he returned to the account in a smooth manner. Mormon had to pyramid parallel stories, such as those of the Limhi and Alma colonies, the missionary efforts of the sons of Mosiah, etc. Cf. 1-2 Kings, in the Bible, where the story keeps jumping back and forth between the two kingdoms. Mormon did a better job. Besides, if Joseph Smith were the author, why would he return to the land of Nephi to recount stories, some of them dating perhaps from before the “black hole” proposed by the Tanners? Wouldn’t this be a literally dangerous expedition, leaving more chance for self-contradiction with the lost 116 pages?

The Tanners (pp. 45-46) find it strange that while Joseph Smith claimed that Moroni informed him that the record to be translated was “written upon gold plates” (JS-H 1:34), nowhere in the Book of Mormon itself does one read that the plates prepared by Nephi were made of gold. However, there is evidence from early non-Mormon sources that as early as the fall of 1827 there was talk of Joseph Smith finding a “golden Bible.” From this, it appears obvious that the idea of plates of gold was not a late-breaking idea in the development of the book. The Tanners are clutching at straws.

The Tanners note (p. 27) that there are a number of word combinations in the Book of Mormon which reflect what they believe to be Joseph Smith’s own peculiar style. They further note (p. 28) that these same unusual word combinations are used by a variety of supposed authors of books in the Book of

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Mormon (e.g., Nephi, Jacob, Enos, Moroni, and Mormon). This, they believe, is evidence that the book was written by a single author. It could just as easily be evidence that it was translated by a single translator, who used terms familiar to him! By the same token, the appearance of New Testament expressions, which the Tanners attribute to Joseph Smith, could be evidence that the translator used them because they were familiar to him, with no intent to plagiarize.

The Tanners (p. 28) compare the style of D&C 10 and of Joseph Smith’s preface to the first edition of the Book of Mormon with the text of the book itself and conclude that all four were authored by the same person. I suspect that had they gone to a modern writer who has also done translation work, they would find that the style of his own writings compares rather closely with that of the translations in many respects. Regarding D&C 10, they note that “although it was supposed to be a revelation from ‘Jesus Christ, the Son of God,’ the style was found to be remarkably like that [of] . . . Joseph Smith.” What they fail to realize is that divine revelations always reflect the language of the prophet who received them. Thus, Isaiah’s writings are different from those of Jeremiah or Hosea, though each wrote what the Lord revealed to him. It would be unreasonable to expect that Joseph Smith would not write the Lord’s word in his own style! Attempts such as those of the Tanners to prove that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon cannot be fruitful. If they want to find evidence against Joseph Smith’s work, it will have to be in other ways. My guess is that, reading my words, they will contrast them with those of the stylistic computer studies of the scriptures done at Brigham Young University and in Berkeley, California. I have my own reasons for rejecting those studies, however, and hope to express them elsewhere.

Since the Tanners presume to give evidence that Joseph Smith authored the Book of Mormon and that the book contains many expressions found in the New Testament, may we conclude that Joseph Smith also authored the New Testament? The fallacy in such a statement, of course, lies in the fact that the New Testament clearly predates Joseph Smith. But this fallacy is no greater than the false assumptions made by the Tanners.
Conclusion

The “black hole” theory offered by the Tanners, while intriguing, is unconvincing in the light of serious scrutiny. One cannot accuse them of not trying, however. They have put a lot of effort into this work. I am particularly impressed by the fact that they have turned to the use of the computerized scripture search program. I recommend it to all serious students of the scriptures, with one word of caution: Because the Old and New Testaments and the Book of Mormon were not originally written in English, a more complete view of parallel passages cannot be grasped by anyone unacquainted with Hebrew and Greek, due to the varying ranges of meaning of the words behind the English text. We are fortunate now to have a rising generation of Latter-day Saint scholars who possess these and other tools necessary for thorough investigation of the scriptures. It is the work of these scholars, along with the reading of the scriptures themselves, which I commend to all who seek a knowledge of God’s word to man.

**A Modern Malleus maleficarum**

Reviewed by Daniel C. Peterson

“Bow-wow,” said Mrs. Rattery. “You know you aren’t putting your heart into this.”

“Oh,” said Tony. “Coop-coop-coop.”

Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust*

The right honourable gentleman is indebted to his memory for his jests and to his imagination for his facts.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Last year, in this *Review*, I examined Peter Bartley’s polemic against the Book of Mormon, and termed it “rather worthless.”¹ I had not yet read Loftes Tryk’s *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon*, which is incomparably worse. For all his many, many flaws, Peter Bartley now seems to me by contrast the Shakespeare, the Michelangelo, the Aristotle, the Einstein of anti-Mormonism. If Bartley’s book is no Rolls Royce—if, indeed, it more closely resembles an engineless Studebaker sitting on grass-covered blocks behind a dilapidated barn—it is nonetheless infinitely more sober and respectable than Loftes Tryk’s literally incredible volume, a gaudily painted Volkswagen disgorging dozens of costumed clowns to the zany music of a circus calliope.

One of the chapters of *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* is entitled “A Basic Course in Faulty Logic.” That could have served as the title of the entire volume. Time and again, with tears of laughter flowing down my face, between telephone calls to share particularly funny passages with friends, I asked myself, “Can this fellow be serious? Does he really believe this?” I actually thought for a while that the book must be a joke. Somebody with the obviously spurious name of “Loftes Tryk” had managed to insinuate himself into the largely humorless ranks of the anti-Mormons, persuading them to

publish a side-splitting satire of themselves. It's the kind of thing, my friends can testify, that I would give my right arm to have done. Unfortunately, I must now report that the book appears to be—well, after a manner of speaking—serious.

Having admitted that, I face the legitimate question of whether it even deserves critique. Last year, despite our intention that the Review of Books on the Book of Mormon be comprehensive, we decided that Loftes Tryk's book should not be dignified with a review. That I have now changed my mind reflects my perception that, while it is utterly devoid of any intrinsic scholarly or historical or theological merit, The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon does serve to illustrate an interesting schism—by no means the first—in the ranks of career enemies of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and to introduce a new and quirky form of anti-Mormonism which has risen to prominence within the past decade or two.

I call it New Age anti-Mormonism. Perhaps the best way, initially, of explaining what it is is to make clear what it is not. It is not the old-time traditional anti-Mormonism, with which Latter-day Saints have long been familiar, and whose ranks have included such luminaries as Eber D. Howe, Walter Martin, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, and Wesley Walters. Traditional anti-Mormonism, in both its Protestant and its secular variants (and now, as exemplified by Peter Bartley, in its Catholic ones), is content to argue that Mormonism is untrue. Scripturally, it attempts to demonstrate that the Restored Gospel is incompatible with the Bible. Historically, it endeavors to prove that Joseph Smith's environment and his (wicked or pathological) character, perhaps assisted by a co-conspirator or two, are enough to account for Mormonism with no residue left over. There is, in the view of most traditional anti-Mormons, nothing remarkable in Mormonism, little that requires for its comprehension more than an understanding of human depravity and frailty. In recent years, a group of environmentalist reductionists—sometimes still nominally within the Church, always rejecting the title of anti-Mormon—has taken a somewhat more sophisticated version of the same position.

New Age anti-Mormonism is quite different. (We might think of it as a conservative Protestant variation on the New Age movement proper. Despite their fundamentalist Christian declarations, which include a deep hostility to anything smacking of New Age thinking, these critics of the Latter-day
Saints seem clearly to share virtually all of its assumptions. Almost anything Shirley MacLaine believes in, New Age anti-Mormonism believes in too. With a twist.) It admits the presence of the supernatural in the founding events of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and is quite willing to acknowledge continuous supernatural influence in the life of the Church today. Indeed, it revels in the supernatural. Environmental factors and the nineteenth century do not and cannot account for what New Age anti-Mormonism sees in the Gospel and the Kingdom. However, unlike faithful Latter-day Saints, New Age anti-Mormons see the supernatural agencies involved in the founding and progress of the Church as demonic, occultic, diabolical, Luciferian. Theirs is a mirror image, a thoroughgoing transvaluation, of the views of the Latter-day Saints. They can accept virtually every argument advanced against traditional anti-Mormonism by Latter-day Saint defenders of the faith, but remain nonetheless hostile—indeed, grow more so—because they regard anything in the Gospel and the Church that seems to exceed the humanly possible as simply demonstrating its dependence upon supernatural (i.e., Luciferian) power. Advocates of this position—including J. Edward Decker, James Spencer, and William J. Schnoebelen—are literally obsessed with demons. They see them everywhere. Latter-day Saint priesthood ordinances derive,
according to this view, from witchcraft and Satanism. These ordinances confer demonic power and bind their recipients to diabolical servitude. Latter-day Saint temples are deliberately designed, with carefully chosen symbols and geometric configurations, to serve as demonic power stations. “The trapezoidal shape” of the spires of the Salt Lake Temple, Bill Schnoebelen has said, “draw[s] demons like fly paper.”

What is more, according to New Age anti-Mormons, leaders of today’s Church very likely know precisely what it is they are up to. Indeed, Bill Schnoebelen claims that one current apostle of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints actually admitted to him and his wife, soon after their conversion, that the god of Mormon temple worship is none other than Lucifer. The sharply pointed spires of the temple at Washington, D.C., furthermore, are an open declaration for those with eyes to see, for they represent nails aimed at heaven to crucify Christ again. Within its walls (I have been solemnly informed by more than one New Age anti-Mormon), that temple supposedly has a precise replica of the Oval Office in the White House, from which a Mormon theocracy will dictate its will following a Latter-day Saint coup. (And if you think these

Schnoebelen—although I recommend the two volumes only for those who can endure discussions of sordidness in large doses.

4 Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges, 7. The notion of a building whose very architectural design generates demonic power may well have been suggested to Schnoebelen by the popular Hollywood film The Ghost Busters, which appeared at approximately the same time that he began to publicize the idea in anti-Mormon circles.

5 As with the National Institute of Coordinated Experiments (N.I.C.E.) in C. S. Lewis’s novel That Hideous Strength, or as in medieval legends about Isma’il Shī‘ite Islam, there are conspiratorial circles within circles. The deeper into the organization a person goes, or the higher he rises, the more fully he is initiated into the real nihilistic or demonic ideology undergirding the movement. Says Loftes Tryk, “Mormonism is so insidious and such a diabolical plot, that it is actually a form of devil worship, that the head ringleader behind the scenes is Beelzebub, himself, Satan.” See Tryk, “Opposition in All Things,” cited by Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges, 3.

6 Tanner and Tanner, The Lucifer-God Doctrine, 34-40, offer a highly skeptical account of this story.

7 Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges, 7. The Passantinos, responding to this ingenious speculation, justly deride Ed Decker’s “sloppy thinking” (cited at ibid., 28-29).
stories a tiny bit weird, consider the tales told by an erstwhile protegé of Ed Decker about racks of human skulls in the Holy of Holies in the Salt Lake Temple and about secret ceremonies centering on the blood of “diamond back rattlers” and the ritual slitting of one’s own wrists.8

A rivalry has long been simmering between New Age anti-Mormonism and the more austere anti-Mormon polemics of the traditional variety. But it is clear that the New Age strain, with its wild claims and its resemblance (in its more respectable moods) to the *National Enquirer*, with its slick movies and its often charismatic demagogues, with its horrifying tales of Satanism and sedition and conspiracy, has far more crowd appeal.9 Old guard anti-Mormons, with their scriptural arguments and their sometimes rather intricate historical arguments, can hardly hope to compete.

But back to the question of whether the present book merits review. “All men by nature desire to know,” Aristotle rightly says in the first line of his *Metaphysics.* And while New Age anti-Mormonism is far from being the most lofty object of knowledge and contemplation, it is, I think, undeniably interesting. (Rather like the circus freaks of bygone days—and, I freely admit, perhaps rather unworthily—it fascinates by its very weirdness.) Loftes Tryk’s book is a particularly vivid and concentrated specimen of New Age anti-Mormonism. (Significantly, it is distributed by Ed Decker’s organization, “Saints Alive in Jesus.”) That, in my judgment, along with the fact that it can be uproariously, screamingly funny—it has to be ranked as perhaps the silliest volume ever published on the Book of Mormon—may perhaps justify its treatment here. (I should note, however, that I have tried to excerpt the funniest parts for the readers of this *Review.*)

Well, on with the discussion. Tryk, who insists that his name is genuine, boasts that his background as a former Latter-day Saint enables him to “understand the complex issues” involved in Mormonism “better than non-members” ever can (p. 3).10 And better, of course, than believing Latter-day Saints

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8 On these matters, see Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 8-11. Decker himself has made analogous claims orally with regard to the Masons.
9 Its mass rallies have been compared—not without justice, in my considered opinion—to the famous Nazi gatherings at Nürnberg.
10 Another of Tryk’s alleged qualifications for undertaking his study can be inferred from a statement also found on p. 3: “The Book of Mormon
ever will, since, contrary to what common sense would seem to dictate, "the further you can distance yourself from the Mormon Church the clearer you will see the vision of it" (p. 181). Despite his natural advantages, however, he claims to have gone the extra research mile, using "fair caution" along the way, to produce what he hopes will be "recognized as a thorough investigation" (p. 3). For the "secrets" of the Book of Mormon "must be searched out, wrestled with, and uprooted, and with a great expenditure of time and attention to detail" (p. 217). His aim in undertaking such an arduous and demanding task is to increase public understanding of the Book of Mormon, which he characterizes as "an obscure and dark masterpiece" that deserves a leading position among such works as—hold your breath!—Machiavelli's The Prince, the Marquis de Sade's Justine, and Hitler's Mein Kampf (p. 1).

"That research," Tryk informs us at the beginning of his book, "has uncovered some astonishing, perhaps incredible, but vital information that is hidden between the lines of Mormon scripture" (p. 3), including "secret double meanings that have been craftily inserted in a perverse, persistent manner throughout the entire book" (pp. 1-2). "In reality," writes Tryk, who will eventually emerge as a kind of cosmic Joe McCarthy, "the Book of Mormon is a blueprint of persuasive propaganda to use to conquer the heavens and the earth" (p. 2). It is "a tool with potentially devastating destructive force," he says, designed (much like Orwell's Newspeak, I suppose) to deny Latter-day Saints even the possibility of independent thought (p. 3).

Such language already hints that this is no ordinary anti-Mormon book, content to argue for the falsity of the restored Gospel. Nevertheless, Tryk is conventional at first. He sees, for instance, no essential defects in the persecutors of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, Missouri, and Illinois and instead blames the difficulties there squarely on the Mormons themselves—they "being an audacious, obnoxious people" (p. 134). This thesis is, of course, not original with Loftes Tryk, although he

... has an occasional wry humor that is intangible unless you are raunchy enough to get the vision of Joseph Smith as he was. We will get to that too, before long." Apparently Tryk possesses the requisite quality!

Tryk himself, as cited by Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges, 5, has described his book as "revolutionary."
acknowledges no predecessors. And it has been far more plausibly argued elsewhere, with attempts at documentation that are wholly unparalleled in Tryk’s brief account. Furthermore, Tryk repeats the standard anti-Mormon claim that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has suppressed and distorted its own history. There is, he says, “an annoying amount of slight-of-hand [sic]” involved in the Church’s account of itself (p. 156; cf. 232-33). Yet it is difficult to know on what basis he makes this claim, for there is not the barest trace in his book of any acquaintance with the large and growing body of historiographical literature on the Latter-day Saints.

Tryk echoes contemporary environmentalist critics of the Book of Mormon in calling it “a psychobiography of Joseph’s early life and times” (p. 2), and “an article-artifact which gives evidence, yes, wide-open proof of its own fraud” (p. 4). However, his treatment of these claims is cursory and half-hearted, and he offers nothing new at all along the lines of either traditional anti-Mormonism or modern revisionist environmentalism. He promises much, for example, on the matter of the lost 116 manuscript pages of the Book of Mormon: “You are about to find what happened to those lost pages, at last,” he tells us. Yet his explanation—that Joseph Smith himself stole the manuscript in an improbable and unnecessary attempt to extort money from Martin Harris—is offered with hardly an attempt at argument and not a scintilla of evidence (pp. 18-33). On the question of the three witnesses to the Book of Mormon, Tryk offers his readers the Hobson’s choice of either “hypnosis”

12 He apparently never does. And it is not only legitimate scholarly work that he fails to note or to consult. He does not even take into account earlier anti-Mormon writing. The Tanners, Serious Charges, 5-6, remark that “his book seems to carefully avoid mentioning the names or writings of current Mormon critics or ministries to the Mormons. A cursory examination failed to reveal anything but his own work on the Book of Mormon.” I shall return to this issue more than once.


14 Evidently he means “sleight of hand.”
or “conspiracy” as an explanation of their testimony; their own explanation is airily dismissed without examination (pp. 34-39).15

Tryk furnishes us a list of themes in the Book of Mormon which “were current during the 19th century when it was written” (pp. 152-53). Among these are the book’s military aspects, the evident agrarian character of the societies it claims to describe, and the “overwhelming male dominance” reflected in its narrative. One scarcely knows what to make of such allegedly nineteenth-century characteristics. Does Tryk mean to imply that there were no wars in ancient times? That ancient peoples were industrialists? That they did not grow food? Does he imagine Mesoamerica or the Near East—ancient, or modern, or at any point in between—as some sort of egalitarian feminist utopia?

One item that clearly reveals the Book of Mormon’s modern origin, according to Tryk, is its use of the concept of divine omnipotence, “a Protestant idea which had originated since the 16th century.” Tryk does not explain how this supposedly post-Reformation idea, omnipotence, made its way into Plato, Aristotle, and Plutarch. Nor does he make clear how St. Augustine (d. A.D. 430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (d. A.D. 1274), in whose writings the notion of divine omnipotence occupies a central place, are to be considered Protestants. Neither does he account for the deep roots of the doctrine of “the Almighty” in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Apocrypha. And why on earth is this modern Protestant notion present in the fourth-century Nicene Creed? (Credimus in unum Deum Patrem omnipotentem, reads the first line of that famous creed in the Latin version attributed to Dionysius Exiguus.) Tryk seems eager to get on to more interesting quarry.

15 Uncharacteristically, Tryk does not insist here on a real (Satanic) supernatural event. He seems to have relaxed his usual standards and relied, this time, on his traditional anti-Mormon and environmentalist allies. Once again, however, as in the case of Peter Bartley, I must protest that Tryk discusses the witnesses—and even complains about a supposed lack of “information on their general characters and reputations”—with no reference whatever to Richard Lloyd Anderson’s classic study, Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), recently reissued in paperback. Analogously, Tryk pokes fun at the supposedly “nebulous geography” of the Book of Mormon (p. 90) while showing no awareness of recent writing on the subject by such scholars as John Clark, David Palmer, and John L. Sorenson.
Tryk promises an examination of "statistical indicators" which will prove that the Book of Mormon has only a single author (p. 3). One of these, it turns out, is the phrase "and it came to pass," for which he constructs a crude counting test. This he offers as a rebuttal to wordprint studies done by Latter-day Saint and other statisticians—studies which he first claims never to have seen and to know only by rumor, as at p. 42, and for which he then quite inconsistently cites specific bibliographical references on p. 47. He disposes of one published account of these studies by simply declaring that it was "intended to awe its audience with such terms as: multivariate analysis, cluster analysis, discriminate analysis, and a "38 dimensional profile"—technical concepts with which he clearly does not care to deal.16 The other he casually dismisses as "perhaps not intended as a deception." No real effort is made to deal with the statistical evidence or arguments involved in this question (see pp. 42-47).

The second "indicator" he discusses is the occurrence of the first person singular pronoun "I," followed by the speaker or writer's name (e.g., "I, Nephi," "I, Alma," and "I, Mormon"). This, too, is said to indicate unitary authorship. More seriously, though, it is said to parody the biblical "I, the Lord" (found at Jeremiah 17:10, and elsewhere) and to foreshadow the alleged Latter-day Saint attempt to put mortal, fallible human beings in the place of God (pp. 48-51), for which he helpfully cites Isaiah 14:13-14. With such accusations, Loftes Tryk begins to leave traditional anti-Mormonism behind, and to enter the strange world of New Age anti-Mormonism, where nothing is what it seems and where the preeminent cultural monument is Ed Decker's film, The God Makers.

Central to Tryk's efforts is an examination of what he calls "power words," which he believes are omnipresent in the Book of Mormon and which are designed to manipulate its readers through "subliminal messages" (p. 3). The whole intent of the Book of Mormon is "to gain control of your thinking." Using the oddly (but typically) irrelevant metaphor of the hobby craft known as "string art," Tryk warns his audience that, if the Book of Mormon is accepted, "eventual control will be taken of your mind. All you need to do is to string along with it faithfully" (p. 124; cf. 126). (Get it? "String art"? "String

16 Except where indicated, all italics in this quotation and elsewhere are present in the original.
along"? And there's more to come!) "The Book of Mormon has a fundamental purpose of accumulating power" (p. 132). "Satan is a liar and a destructive spirit, a master psychologist with a largely unfathomed talent for manipulating us anxious mortals," whose "mode of revelation is typically subliminal, occult, and laced with double meanings" (pp. 136, 223).17

Loftes Tryk notwithstanding, psychological research overwhelmingly suggests that "subliminal messages" are ineffective and that concern about them is almost certainly mere baseless paranoia.18 "Despite a long history of research on subliminal perception and its possible effects in advertising," one group of investigators reports, "there are few hard conclusions concerning effectiveness. Although some studies have shown contrary findings, the bulk of the research suggests that subliminal stimuli are not effective in changing attitudes or behavior." In fact, they comment, academic students of the subject tend to "scoff" at the "lack of scientific evidence" for subliminal influences, despite a virtual obsession with the issue

17 Alleged Mormon mind control has become a major theme of New Age anti-Mormonism. Consider Ed Decker's astonishing disclosures in the March 1991 Newsletter of his organization, Saints Alive in Jesus: Asserting that Latter-day Saints, in bearing their testimonies, rarely deviate by more than a few words from a rigidly robotic pattern, Decker affects to discern "a subtle mind-warp" controlling them. He was able to prove this, he claims, when he once sat with his own face just fifteen inches from a Mormon who was bearing testimony to the truth of the gospel. "As he began his recitation," Decker recalls, "I noticed that his eyes had dilated as though he were hypnotized..." I slapped my hands together right in front of his nose... The man bounced back, his eyes slowly returning to normal." "You see," Decker concludes, "what happens at every Fast and Testimony meeting is a form of group hypnosis... It is the same method used by torturers on POW's" (emphasis his).

among "popularizers." Another researcher announces that "empirical demonstration of the behavioral influence of subliminal stimuli has been virtually nonexistent in the consumer-behavior literature." Indeed, he continues, "there simply isn't any published literature that demonstrates the effects of subliminal stimuli in a marketing application." Yet another group of investigators concludes that "it is clear that subliminal embedding does not have the power or influence given to it by advocates." Citing an earlier scholar who had termed popular fear of subliminal programming "preposterous, absurd, ludicrous, laughable," they contend that public belief in the "folklore" of subliminal messages, and widespread public fear of subliminal control, should itself be investigated by social scientists.

But Tryk's approach to the question would be bizarre even if the notion of subliminal seduction had some credibility. He appears to have no concept of rigor or logical argumentation and no inclination to sift or evaluate—or even to mention—evidence. "A good technique," he writes, "is to play a word association type of game" (p. 60). And so he does. His reading of Mosiah 1 is, to put it mildly, peculiar. For instance, the "Egyptians" mentioned in verse 4 are linked with the words "gyp" and "Gypsy," while the fact that the Book of Mormon's plates are of gold and the plates of the Old Testament taken from Laban merely of brass is thought "to direct an insult at the Bible" (p. 61). These hidden Book of Mormon messages, Tryk solemnly informs his readers, are "massive deceptions," designed to cloak "surreptitious blasphemies" (p. 65) in a "book of profligate scripture" (p. 3).

Although the Book of Mormon seems outwardly to affirm such crucial Christian doctrines as free agency, resurrection, and the testimony of Jesus Christ, Loftes Tryk is here to inform us that its real, subliminal purpose is to undercut precisely those

22 Compare Tryk on p. 115: "When Nephi has his bands loosened (1 Nephi 7:18), or shocks his brothers (1 Nephi 17:54), or when Korihor is struck dumb as a sign (Alma 30:49-50), we are not looking at righteous power so much as a pack of Gypsy magicians."
ideals (p. 66). Thus, Tryk departs from the venerable anti-
Mormon claim that Lehi’s description of the grave as a place
“from whence no traveler can return” (2 Nephi 1:14) represents
plagiarism from Shakespeare’s Hamlet or the “Westminster
Confession of Faith,” arguing instead that “the more important
objection to Lehi’s words” is their denial, as he claims to see it,
of the resurrection of Christ (pp. 66-67). Similarly, Alma’s
explanation of the resurrection in Alma 40, with its careful
separation of that which the prophet knows from that on which
he can only speculate, is designed by the author of the Book of
Mormon to inculcate uncertainty and confusion in its readers
(pp. 68-70). “Who do you imagine,” Tryk asks, “would wish
for you to follow a prophet of such inconsistency and doubt?
Doubt is Satan’s first article of faith” (p. 70).

These “underlying messages of opposition were
maliciously premeditated,” according to Tryk (p. 70). Thus,
when 1 Nephi 4:13 says of Laban that “It is better that one man
should perish than that a nation should dwindle and perish in
unbelief,” using language similar to that of Caiaphas in John
11:50, “the insult that was intended” was an equation of the
Savior with a wicked, drunken man (p. 71). Thus, too, the
prophecy at Alma 7:10, which has Jesus born “at Jerusalem”
rather than, more specifically, in Bethlehem, calls into question
the birth or legitimacy of Jesus Christ (p. 72).23 And the Book
of Mormon’s account of the destructions preceding the Savior’s
appearance to the Nephites actually presents us with a
“counterfeit destroyer-Christ,” while the real Jesus, who walked
on the Sea of Galilee, is mocked by Joseph Smith’s assertion
that “the destroyer rideth upon the face” of the waters (p. 72;
compare Matthew 14:26 and D&C 61:18-19). Mosiah’s
abdication of his kingship in favor of a system of judges is
intended to prefigure the Messiah’s abdication of his sovereignty
in favor of mortal human beings. What the Book of Mormon is
calling for here and elsewhere is a denial of the atonement of
Christ (pp. 192-93). Similarly, Tryk reads the extended parable
of Jacob 5 as a “rude satire” on a competent servant (Satan) and

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23 A rather different (and much more plausible) explanation of Alma
7:10—and one which affirms the historical authenticity of the Book of
Morman—has, of course, long been available. See, for instance, Hugh
Niblley, An Approach to the Book of Mormon, 3d ed., vol. 6 in the
Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and
F.A.R.M.S., 1988): 100-102. The first edition of this book was published
in 1957.
his weak and incompetent master (Jesus Christ). It is, he says, "a sick, snide slap at our Savior" (pp. 206-7).

By now it should be apparent that, for Loftes Tryk, Satan was the "ghost writer" of the Book of Mormon (p. 76). Tryk sees definitive evidence for this in the phenomenon of chiasmus in the book. Here is a clear difference between traditional anti-Mormonism and the New Age variety. "I must admit," says Tryk, who is evidently just as impressed with chiasmus as any believing Latter-day Saint, "that almost any study of Book of Mormon chiasmi is going to fall short of perfection. The book is packed with them, each one a new source of pride to the Mormons" (p. 81). The Book of Mormon, he says, "was not the product of a 19th century mind." Joseph Smith's admittedly extraordinary intelligence "doesn't explain the unexpected appearance of sophisticated literary forms. Even a very high native intellect would not account for a computer-like selection of images which have been fitted into the story with such knife-edge precision. The closer we examine the Book of Mormon's literary character, the greater burden will be placed on the theory of an unaided creation. There are too many complex uses of symbolism and of sophisticated literary form in it" (p. 82). The linked chiasms he identifies in Alma 42 constitute, he acknowledges, "a formidable piece of writing," perhaps "unequalled in brilliance anywhere else in literature" (p. 84).

However, as we might expect, the recognition of complex chiasms in the Book of Mormon, which Tryk shares with a number of Latter-day Saint scholars—and in which he emphatically parts company with traditional anti-Mormons and environmentalists, who dismiss chiasmus as either illusory or insignificant—does not translate for him into a positive evaluation of the phenomenon. The admission that neither

24 "Loftes Tryk," the Tanners snort, "seems to be fascinated with the idea of 'chiasmus' in the Book of Mormon." See Tanner and Tanner, Serious Charges, 4.

25 The Tanners may be taken as representative of mainstream anti-Mormonism, as well as of environmentalist reductionism, in their dismissal of chiasmus: "We doubt very much that there is any deliberate attempt at chiastic structure in the Book of Mormon and feel that what has been identified as chiasmus is merely evidence of Joseph Smith's repetitive style of writing." Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990): 31. See the reviews of this book by L. Ara Norwood, Matthew Roper, and John A. Tvedtines on pages 158-230 of the present volume.
Joseph Smith nor any other nineteenth-century author could by himself have written the Book of Mormon, so central to the arguments of Hugh Nibley and other defenders of the faith, does not lead Loftes Tryk to acknowledge its divine origin. And, for a New Age anti-Mormon, that leaves only one possible author. How chiasmus has been used by our particular New Ager to identify that author is wonderful to behold:

"Since the chiasmus forms an X," Tryk suggests, "let's begin by examining the X as a symbol" (p. 82). Among the uses of the symbol X that, according to Tryk, "may be applied to Book of Mormon symbolism," four (listed on pp. 82-83) are worthy of mention here:

1. "It is used to represent the signature of a person who cannot write.
2. "At the bottom of a letter, it might signify a kiss (X O X O = 'hugs and kisses')."
3. "It is a method used to cross out written errors, to hide them when they cannot be deleted."
4. "The X may . . . show the mark of inferior quality (as in Brand X products)." (Tryk admits that the implication of this symbolism for the Book of Mormon—that it is "inferior scripture"—"may or may not have been intentional.")

The third symbolic usage is directly relevant to Tryk’s discussion of Alma 42, which he calls “one of the most important chapters in the Book of Mormon because it names more Christian doctrine than any other chapter in the book.” Latter-day Saints, of course, agree that this is an important chapter, and for much the same reason. Even traditional anti-Mormons might grant that it is a fairly good imitation of a Christian text. But not Tryk. For him, its message is precisely the opposite of that noticed by anybody else. He identifies six chiasms in the chapter, and then declares that “if you can picture a large X through each entire chiasmus in Alma 42, you will have X-ed out every [Christian] doctrine” contained in the chapter. Its real theme, he says, is expressed in the words “God would cease to be God,” which are repeated three times (Alma 42:13, 22, 25). “Thus repeated, it shows itself to be a subliminal message, as well as Satan’s tell-tale way to identify his hand in the work” (pp. 83-84).26

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26 On pp. 87-88, Tryk hints that diabolical chiasms exist even in the New Testament.
Tryk’s exegetical approach is even more apparent in the case of the great chiasm of Alma 36, which he discusses on pp. 85-87. “The secret that is going to be exposed here is who it is that has been nailing on all those crosses.” The central element of Alma 36 is Jesus Christ. In this, Tryk agrees with Latter-day Saint students of the chapter. The difference comes in the evaluation of what that means, for, whereas Latter-day Saints have claimed that the chiasm serves to point to and emphasize the Savior, Loftes Tryk contends that the purpose is to cross him out. “Several symbolic uses of the X can be related to this single chiastic chapter,” writes Tryk. “It is the Judas kiss that condems Christ; it nails him to the cross. It may represent a mistake that Satan would like to cross out. His x-like signature is disclosed in its deceitful, subliminal character.” Furthermore, Alma 36 is placed between the chiasm of Alma 42 and another, identified by Tryk, in Alma 22. It is thus intended to represent Christ, crucified between two thieves. Those, therefore, who venerate the Book of Mormon as scripture assent to the crucifixion of Christ—which fits the Latter-day Saints especially well, in Tryk’s opinion, since, with their pharisaical self-righteousness and their belief that they are modern Israel, they have actually become Christ-killing Jews. “Turning Mormons into Jews was not accidental,” Tryk declares. “It is part of a plot to convert them to condemnation.” But this is not yet all, for the chapter also twice advises Latter-day Saints to contend against God. Or so says Loftes Tryk. Thus, when the angel advises Alma the Younger that he should give up his persecution of the saints, even if he has no care for his own soul, he says, “If thou wilt of thyself be destroyed, seek no more to destroy the church of God” (Alma 36:9; repeated, for subliminal seduction, at 36:11). But the real message, according to Loftes Tryk, is not what appears on the surface. “For any who wish not to be destroyed, the advice which applies is to seek to destroy the church of God.”

27 Note the anti-Semitic overtones.

28 Tryk’s astonishing ability to misread scripture is evident also on p. 117, in his strange remarks on 2 Nephi 25:18: That verse, looking into the then-future, declares that “there is save one Messiah spoken of by the prophets, and that Messiah is he who should be rejected of the Jews.” “It isn’t the reader’s place,” Tryk comments, “to assume that Joseph Smith intended to use the word will or shall instead of should. As it stands, the word ‘should’ is making a recommendation to reject the Messiah.” (Of course, this “should” is simply the subjunctive mood of the future tense of
masterpiece. . . . It shows how he delights in the crucifixion and
would puff himself up by pasting it between the lines of his evil
book. Indeed, with no less than five signatures spread over this
canvas of shame, his personal mode of using graffiti
messages paints a picture of a disturbed, adolescent mentality.”
(On which assertion a reviewer who, like myself, lacks
psychiatric training is well advised to withhold the obvious
comment.)

Loftes Tryk’s account of chiasmus has been rather dark
and depressing. By contrast, his discussion of Book of
Mormon proper names—done in complete independence of the
prior research of Paul Hoskisson, Hugh Nibley, and John
Tvedtnes—is absolutely hilarious. “Much of the hidden
meaning in the Book of Mormon can be understood,” asserts
Tryk, “by carefully interpreting the name symbols of its
characters”—which, naturally, have “subliminal, symbolic
value.” “Many of the Book of Mormon name symbols are
common enough to locate with the use of a good collegiate
dictionary. It will serve as a decoding handbook” (p. 89).

No long and painful study of ancient languages for Loftes
Tryk! An English dictionary is all he needs. And the results of
his survey have all the profundity and reliability that one would
expect from such a method.29 A few examples, beginning with
the Jaredite onomasticon:

the verb “to be”—or alternatively, its potential mood. It carries here no
imperative force whatever.) Analogously, on pp. 121-22, Tryk twists D&C
84:117, where early Latter-day Saint missionaries were directed to go out
into the world “reproving the world in righteousness [and] . . . setting forth
clearly and understandingly the desolation of abomination in the last days”
(Tryk’s italics) to make it admit that the Restored Gospel is the “desolation
of abomination.”

29 Tryk’s method is not even as respectable as that used by Walter
F. Prince in his famous article on “Psychological Tests for the Authorship
of the Book of Mormon,” American Journal of Psychology 28 (July 1917):
373-89. Of those supposedly “rigorous tests,” as Prince himself quaintly
described them, the vocal anti-Mormon intellectual Theodore Schroeder
remarked that “they seem not at all rigorous nor a valid test of anything, and
not even an important contribution to any problem except perhaps to the
psychology of Dr. Prince.” Schroeder found Prince’s method “so defective
as to leave his conclusions wholly valueless. He reasons around in a
circle.” See Theodore Schroeder, “Authorship of the Book of Mormon:
Psychologic Tests of W. F. Prince Critically Reviewed,” American Journal
of Psychology 30 (January 1919): 66-72.
The name “Shule” is derived from “shul,” which Tryk correctly informs us is a Yiddish word for “synagogue.” And while the point behind that rather obscure subliminal link is never explained, Tryk claims that the purpose of the name “Corihor” is clear beyond dispute. It comes from the French word “coeur,” or “heart,” plus the element “hor.” Thus, its meaning is “whorish heart,” and it is designed to insult the Savior. “A whore gives her body cheaply,” Tryk notes. “Christ gave his life for something which Satan would seek to devalue, the souls of men.” “Coriantumr” in turn undoubtedly means “diseased heart.” (Get it? From “coeur” and “tumor,” of course.) And when Coriantumr decapitates “Shiz,” separating his head from his body, this can only be a Satanic foreshadowing of the “Schiz-m” that will arise through the work of Joseph Smith. Impressed? But the revelations continue! The name “Kib,” Tryk informs us, comes from “kibbe, a meal prepared in the Near East. The chief ingredient is finely ground lamb. This is a taunt, aimed at the lamb of God.” It also comes from the word “kibe,” which denotes “a painful sore (chilblain) upon the heel of the foot” and thus celebrates the enmity between the serpent and the posterity of Eve (alluded to in Genesis 3:15). The fact that the name “Jared” means “descent” in Hebrew leads Tryk to interpret the Jaredites’ voyage “across the great deep” as symbolic of Lucifer’s fall from heaven.30 Obviously, Satan is the hero of the tale (pp. 99-100, 162, 228).

My personal favorite among Tryk’s Jaredite etymologies is “Ether.” Unsurprisingly, he links the name with diethyl ether, “a spiritous substance, an intangible but powerful gas.” However, what he does with this linkage is fascinating. He reads the final Jaredite battle not as an account of an actual historical event, but as a prophecy of the last great battle of the apocalypse. “Ether dwelt in the cavity of a rock (Ether 13:13-14), suggesting [diethyl ether’s] eventual use in dentistry.31 Ether provides a good representation of Satan, an unembodied spirit.” Thus, Satan is predicting that he will survive the great

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30 On p. 115, Tryk comments that, “When we envision the brother of Jared moving a mountain, it is reminiscent of telekinesis, a wizardry that belongs in a Stephen King novel.” How telling it is that the ostensibly born-again Loftes Tryk evidently fails to recognize—certainly he fails to mention—the obvious biblical theme of “faith to move mountains” (e.g., at Matthew 17:20; 21:21; Mark 11:23; 1 Corinthians 13:2), preferring to read it as occultic and demonic!

31 I’m not making this up!
destructions of the last days, which will annihilate all of mankind. "It isn’t God’s version of what will take place in that last great battle. This is a more pessimistic view of us and is actually Satan’s wishful, suggestive thinking" (pp. 101-2).

Tryk’s Nephite onomasticon is every bit as bizarre. For instance, the smallest unit of Nephite “money”—Tryk incorrectly calls it “coinage”—is the “leah” (Alma 11:17). And, since “Leah” is a woman’s name in the Bible, the Book of Mormon signals thereby its low opinion of women (p. 92). “Amulek,” on the other hand, is intended to remind us of magic “amulets” (p. 204).

“Ammon” is one of the most important heroes of the Book of Mormon. “Joseph’s real-life hero was wealth,” according to Tryk, which proves that the name “Ammon” comes from the biblical Aramaic word “Mammon” (p. 94). Similarly, if you remove the “ar” from “Ammaron,” you come up with “Ammon” again—so that “Ammaron,” too, means “Mammon” (p. 158). “Moroni” comes from the word “more” and the word “onti,” which is one of the units of silver measurement—again, falsely described by Tryk as “coins”—listed in Alma 11 (p. 167). Similarly, the name “Mormon” comes from the English words “More Money.” Having opened our eyes to this marvelous hidden meaning, Tryk, whose literary style suffers painfully from self-conscious cuteness, comments that “The name is rich in symbolism, as anyone can see” (pp. 94-95).32

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32 Finances play a major role in the demonology of Trykian anti-Mormonism. “Profit is . . . a key word among Mormons” (p. 63, italics his). The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, he informs his reader, is “basically an economic kingdom” (p. 15). He even brings up the “Gold and Green Ball," noting that these are “Mormon colors" because they symbolize prosperity (p. 19 n. 2). Many examples of Tryk’s self-indulgent and self-amused writing style might be cited. However, a few will suffice: His discussion of celestial marriage and the notion of marriage “until death do ye part” concludes with the observation that “Marriage has always been a serious undertaking, hasn’t it?” (Italics his; p. 197.) Having declared that the Book of Mormon was created under Satanic hypnosis, Tryk then refers to it several times as a “trance-lation” (158). “Imagine the fierce destruction incurred,” he suggests on p. 255, “if angry ex-Mormons were to lay waste to [sic] Salt Lake City, thinking it would be suitable or just, in that ‘. . . the salt have [sic] lost his savor . . . it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.’ ” (Italics and ellipses in the original.)
Names like “Gidgidoni” and “Giddianhi” come from “gid,” a worm-disease that afflicts sheep. “It indicates a taunt, thrown at Christ, as if to say, ‘Well, good shepherd, I will infect your other sheep right before your eyes!’” (p. 95) The name “Helaman” represents “a slur on ‘Healer-man,’ a reference to Christ.” Likewise, the “onti” of Moroni’s name points to the silver coins offered to Judas for the betrayal of Christ, as well as to the silver offered by Zeezrom to persuade Amulek to deny the existence of God.33 As Tryk puts it, all these nifty interconnections can hardly be “coincidence”! (pp. 167-68). In the name “Ammoron,” we have an anagram for “a Mormon”; thus, when Ammoron is termed a “child of hell” at Alma 54:11, we should distinctly hear Lucifer chuckling over his latter-day dupes (p. 159).34

But the funniest explanation of a Nephite name has to be that given for “Amalickiah”: “Checking the code book (dictionary) for symbolism in Amalickiah’s name, we find that it is a combination of four words: A, plus mal (a Latin prefix meaning ‘bad’), ick (from ichor, an ethereal blood-substitute which flows in the veins of the gods of mythology), and iah (the suffix added to names of five Jewish prophets, including Isaiah, and the Messiah). A loose translation of the name Amalickiah might be rendered: ‘a bastard (bad-blooded) god-prophet’ ” (p. 167).35

This is marvelous stuff.

The arbitrariness of Loftes Tryk’s “word association type of game” is breathtaking. It takes a real, if shallow and

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33 Perhaps you are asking yourself, “What ‘onti’ in the name ‘Moroni’?” O ye of little faith!

34 The devil can scarcely stifle his laughter, although only Loftes Tryk seems to have ears to hear it. The Hebrew prophet Hosea’s condemnation of unrighteous Ephraim, says Tryk, “was appropriated by Satan as a form of ridicule that openly mocks the Mormons through countless Patriarchal Blessings” (226). Tryk fails to mention the scriptural passages of blessing that apply to Ephraim (of which Genesis 49:22-26 is only the most prominent).

35 Even granting Tryk his amazing polyglot etymology, to call it a “loose translation” is putting things mildly. Furthermore, Tryk evidently does not realize that the Hebrew suffix -iah, far from meaning “prophet,” actually represents the first part of the divine name “Yahweh,” or “Jehovah.” Nor does he seem to know that the “iah” of “Messiah” is no suffix at all, but only appears the same, being in fact part of the root of the word. There are perils in taking an English dictionary as one’s only “code book.”
perverse, *talent* to misread a text—any text—so spectacularly. There is no discipline in Tryk’s analysis. It is literary interpretation as inkblot test. It is onomancy. There are no rules of evidence, and no criteria for proof. Yiddish, English, Latin, misunderstood Hebrew, French, chemistry, Near Eastern cooking, classical mythology, veterinary diseases, a fragment of Greek metaphysical vocabulary, all are stirred into his strange brew. Any random fact or pseudo-fact is liable to be pressed into service if it will make the Book of Mormon appear Satanic. Even unnamed characters are evil symbols, for, “without names, [they] confirm the evaluation of mankind held by the author of the Book of Mormon, and expressed therein: ‘O how great is the nothingness of the children of men; even they are less than the dust of the earth.’ (Helaman 12:7)” (See p. 95.) Such whimsical readings underlie Tryk’s method throughout his book, including the distinctly weird manner in which he locates the “mark of the beast”—the number 666, alluded to in Revelation 13:18—in the book of Ether (pp. 104-7).

Anybody can play this game, of course. Just by looking at the name “Loftes Tryk,” for instance, we can easily see that the word “Tryk” is subliminally meant to recall the word “thrice.” (Think of your childhood “trike.”) Thus, we count the letters in

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36 *Anybody* can italicize. A “talent,” by the way (for those not “raunchy” enough to recognize my subliminal tricks), is a unit of gold or silver coinage in the Bible.

37 On pp. 167-68, Tryk ties the Nephite name-element “onti” to the technical philosophical term “ontic.” He also links it, as we have seen, to a unit of Nephite economic exchange. And why not? In the world of Trykian onomancy, a name can mean anything, or any number of anythings, and who can possibly say nay?

38 “While we are sorry to have to say this,” the Tanners write of Loftes Tryk’s New Age anti-Mormon allies Ed Decker and Bill Schnoebelen, “it seems that there are some who will accept any wild story or theory if it puts the Mormons in a bad light. They reason that since they already know that Mormonism is false, it is all right to use anything that has an adverse effect on the system. The question of whether an accusation is true or false appears to be only a secondary consideration.” Tanner and Tanner, *The Lucifer-God Doctrine*, 77.

39 The Tanners are impatient with what they term “these peculiar calculations.” “Mr. Tryk’s method of achieving the important satanic number,” they quite correctly observe in the course of refuting it, “depends on a set of rules which can be modified to fit his own whims.” Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 4.
the word "Loftes," and discover that there are six (6). Then, writing that resultant 6 "thrice" or three times, we come up with nothing less than 666, the mark of the beast! And we can confirm that this is indeed the meaning of the name "Loftes Tryk" by simply reckoning the value of its component letters as follows: First, we assign to each letter of the alphabet a numerical value based upon its position in the alphabet. Thus, a = 1, b = 2, and z = 26. If we add these values up for the name "Loftes," we arrive at the sum of 77. For "Tryk," the sum is 74. However, remembering the "three" implied in the word "Tryk," we now subtract three from that latter sum, yielding 71, and then, after multiplying the sums of the two names by three, to reach, respectively, 231 and 213, we combine them. The resultant sum is 444, meaning that, on average, each of the two names is worth 222. Thus, when a hypothetical "third" name is added—remember "Tryk" and "thrice"—the real numerical value of the name "Loftes Tryk" becomes—you guessed it!—666. This discovery is, to borrow Tryk's own words from p. 3, "astonishing, perhaps incredible, but vital." But there is more, much more. It cannot be denied, for example, that the purported name of our author is really intended to direct us to the English word "lofty," meaning "high" or "exalted," and to the German word "Dreieck," or "triangle," which is commonly used as a symbol for the Trinity. Clearly, by calling himself "exalted Trinity," Loftes Tryk has staked out a blasphemous claim to deity. But he has also echoed the name or title of the legendary "Hermes Trismegistos," or "Hermes Thrice Great," the founder of hermetic occultism, who is traditionally identified with Mercury and with the Masonic patron saint Enoch. By thus sacrilegiously linking the God of the Bible with an occultic pagan deity, Loftes Tryk has revealed himself beyond question. Furthermore, if we merely alter our accustomed pronunciation of his name, we can unmistakably hear his smug cry of triumph, uttered upon completion of a staggeringly ludicrous book: "Love this trick!"

I have often thought that one of the world's truly ideal jobs would be working as a writer or editor for one of the well-known supermarket tabloids. I envision myself in an editorial meeting with co-workers, all of us laughing ourselves under the table while inventing tales of orbiting UFOs, sightings of Elvis

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40 The expression "staked out" might be read as a clever subliminal reference on my part to the crucifixion. Actually, it means nothing at all.
in Sea World shark tanks, and three-headed calves born to pre-adolescent girls—to say nothing of cheesecake-and-egg nog weight-loss diets. If integrity were of no concern, it would be a good deal of fun. Loftes Tryk has clearly enjoyed his writing, too. But we err greatly if we see him only as a zany madcap with an unbridled imagination. For there is a dark side, dark indeed, to his mythological creations.

The "secret Mormon doctrine of destructive power" (p. 134) is subliminally present, according to Tryk, throughout the Book of Mormon, and it is meant with the utmost literalism. "Mormonism is no theoretical force or dogma only; its doctrines have applicable, practical value" (p. 137). And what a practical value it is! The Book of Mormon is actually a "Militant’s Handbook," a conspiratorial "operations manual," designed to prepare the Latter-day Saints for service in an actual war of aggression aimed at suppressing the human rights of their neighbors (pp. 137, 143, 144).

"Your imagination," Tryk wisely advises his readers in this context, "must serve as a sketch pad" (p. 137). Having thus laid out the totality of his research methodology, Tryk proceeds to describe a future Mormon prophet who "will take the young Mormon men away and send them to war" (p. 137). "Try to imagine the qualities that are likely to be a part of the facade assumed by that upcoming latter-day hero. He’ll probably be tall, broad-shouldered, good looking, and have the voice of a radio announcer. He must fit an image that we’d vote for. He must be dynamic and intelligent enough to be persuasive—and charismatic enough to carry it off smoothly. He must stand for democracy and freedom, and he’s got to make promises that glitter" (p. 197). All this, of course, in order "to motivate many thousands of young Latter-Day [sic] Saints into armed conflict" (p. 137). Not only young Mormon men but also young women and children will be conscripted, for the Book of Mormon clearly calls for this and justifies it with the message that life is cheap (p. 138).

Indeed, the story of Nephi’s killing of Laban will be summoned up to legitimize the assassination of

41 Skeptical readers of Loftes Tryk might well point to the quasi-pacifist Anti-Nephi-Lehies, who appear at first glance not to fit his interpretation. But, according to his reading, they were actually inserted into the Book of Mormon for the quite un-military purpose of "denying the cleansing power of the Savior’s atonement" (149). Go figure.

42 Tryk’s prooftext for this alleged teaching of the Book of Mormon is Helaman 12:7, which of course implies nothing of the kind.
high government officials (p. 139). Prisoners of war will be forced into slave labor, in accordance with the Book of Mormon (p. 147). All of this will occur in the spirit of the secret Mormon doctrine of *jihad*, or "holy war," which will be conducted along racial lines similar to those made notorious by Nazism (p. 140).

Do you find this a bit far-fetched? Don't, warns Loftes Tryk. Consider one of the practical steps already taken by the Mormons toward their goal of world domination: "Didn't Hitler have his Nazi youth wearing uniforms? Can it be mere coincidence that the Mormon Church is the major religious sponsor of the premilitary training provided in the Boy Scouts of America? They wear the uniform and operate with a similar power structure that is organized into packs, patrols, and troops. They make camp, run bivouacs, and march with the nation's flag held aloft. They learn survival methods: map and compass, observation and tracking, knot tying, hiking, camp cooking, and other useful skills. Their merit badges include those for archery, rifle sharpshooting, and first aid. Even a youngster who knows how to operate a camera can be of use to the military" (p. 142).43

Readers of this Review will certainly be pardoned if such paranoid fantasies remind them of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. The distinct similarity between that infamous anti-Semitic forgery and *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon* is one of the very many reasons why I cannot recommend purchase of Loftes Tryk's book, despite its obvious merits as slapstick comedy and its vast potential as a white elephant gift. For it was certainly not intended to be funny, and its evil far outweighs its humor.44 Books like this should, as a matter of principle, receive no financial support from decent people.45

43 A sinister group, indeed. In support of Loftes Tryk's Nazification of the Boy Scouts, I might note that, while I myself participated in a non-LDS (indeed, PTA-sponsored) Scout troop, my scoutmaster actually admitted, publicly and in my hearing, that his name was "Schmidt." Just one more piece of disturbing evidence, once you begin to see the big picture.

44 There is a very real threat that this kind of nonsense (much like that in Ed Decker's pseudo-documentary *Temples of the God Makers*) might incite certain types of people to anti-Mormon violence—whether or not such incitement is consciously intended.

45 With obviously different concerns in mind, Jerald and Sandra Tanner arrive at essentially the same recommendation: "We felt that because Loftes Tryk's book was filled with unnecessary speculation and questionable
I have previously noted that New Age anti-Mormonism is distinguished from the older variety by its acceptance of supernatural elements in the origin and history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While Fawn Brodie and Wesley Walters tried to show that Joseph Smith's first vision never occurred, Loftes Tryk insists upon it. A "being of great power" did actually visit Joseph in his fifteenth year (p. 159). "An angel of light must have indeed made a dramatic visitation to Joseph," he declares (p. 160). "It was no idle daydream or brilliant imagining. That visit to Joseph was so real, so vivid and physical, that Paul, the apostle, made a prophecy concerning it." But the prophecy to which Tryk refers, and by which he signals his acceptance of the New Age tendency to agree with Latter-day Saint claims of the supernatural while at the same time to transvalue them, is 2 Corinthians 11:14-15. "Somehow during Joseph's fifteenth year, Satan took possession of the young boy's soul" (p. 157).

During that same year, Tryk informs us, Joseph met "a special person, a mystic mentor he code-named Ammoron" (p. 158). We are of course to infer that this "mystic mentor" assisted Joseph Smith in the foundation of Mormonism. It hardly needs saying that Tryk offers no evidence for this, besides his gift of free-association and his assumption that the young Mormon represents the young Joseph Smith. It is clear that Loftes Tryk hates Joseph Smith, "this rank imposter, this leader-astray of so many of [God's] sons and daughters" (p. 175), and that it is his hatred, rather than fact or logic, that dictates his conclusions.

46 It seems, though, that the young Joseph was evil from the start, for Tryk says that his question as to which church was right was "purposefully asked in a misleading manner." Here, Tryk reveals his authentically Protestant anti-institutionalism: Joseph should rather have asked for "a personal relationship with the Savior." "Somewhere in the past two thousand years," Tryk says, blandly condemning hundreds of millions of Christians in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, "an unauthorized emphasis got placed on the church" (227). Tryk also criticizes those who seek religious wisdom from their neighbors or from Latter-day Saint missionaries—in terms that would make the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul himself rather suspect (230).
Tryk’s method of reading Latter-day Saint history and texts is, as we have abundantly seen, to seek for any word play or numerological quirk that he can possibly read into his materials, and to proclaim this arbitrarily reached information—pre-determined, really—as the true meaning of Mormonism. Not surprisingly, he rejects the obvious surface import of both history and text. “Every acknowledgment that Joseph made about the Savior, every confession or witness he gave of Christ’s divinity was a red-herring issue and a gambit” (p. 165).

Tryk notes, correctly, that several sections of the Doctrine and Covenants long contained peculiar code-names that had once served to conceal the identities of the persons to whom reference was being made. One of these names, “Baurak Ale,” was applied to Joseph Smith himself. Here, as often, Tryk’s commentary is both amusing and informative (although, frankly, not about Joseph Smith or Mormonism). “Barak is a Hebrew term for lightning. . . . Ale is the common English transliteration of El, the Hebrew word for power, almighty, or God. Joseph was ‘Lightning God.’” “Alternatively,” he says, the name “Baurak Ale” “may have identified a home-made brew sometimes known as white lightning, a slightly ribald reference to Joseph’s occasional heavy drinking” (p. 171).47

It is at moments like this that my resolve to review Lofastes Tryk begins to falter. Do speculations like this merit refutation? Do they deserve notice? Having come this far, though, I intend to push on to the end. I must nonetheless admit that I am powerless to refute Tryk’s alcoholic fantasy about “white lightning.” Refutations require arguments. One does not “refute” a question, or an expletive, or—more to the point in this case—a joke. But the “Lightning God” etymology does, by contrast, imply something vaguely resembling an argument. Let us see how it holds up.

The first thing that any student, even a beginning student, of Semitic languages would notice about the name or title “Baurak Ale” is that it cannot possibly mean “Lightning God.” This is so for the simple reason that (non-predicate) adjectives in Semitic languages follow the nouns they modify. They do not

47 Against the charge that (especially the young) Joseph Smith was given to heavy drinking and similar habits, see Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reappraised,” BYU Studies 10 (Spring 1970): 283-314; Milton V. Backman, Jr., Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980): 118.
precede them, as Tryk’s purported translation would require. Thus, even if “Baurak” were taken to mean “lightning”—“Ale” indisputably means “God”—the phrase could only be a Hebrew “construct” (Arabic $i_d_a_f_a$) meaning “Lightning of God.” (I pass by without elaboration the fact that a hypothetical Hebrew adjective “lightning” would be clearly distinct from the noun “lightning,” despite the coincidence that the English term is the same in both instances. Contrary to Tryk’s assumptions, they would not be interchangeable.) A sharp observer would also notice that the phrase “Baurak Ale” seems to have been transliterated according to the Sephardic or Spanish-Portuguese pronunciation of Hebrew. This points manifestly to the influence of Joshua Seixas, who taught the language to Joseph Smith and a number of early Latter-day Saint leaders at Kirtland, Ohio. Once we understand that we are dealing with Seixas’s Sephardic pronunciation, it becomes possible to determine what the word “Baurak” really means. In fact, the Jewish Hebraist Louis Zucker, speaking of our very phrase, has observed that “the form ‘baurak’ is not actually found in the Bible but is a perfectly valid hypothetical form.” And Prof. Zucker implicitly approves the translation of “Baurak Ale” as something like “God bless you” or “God blesses.”

Information such as this was readily available to Loftes Tryk. But an innocent and even edifying interpretation of the title “Baurak Ale” would not have served Tryk’s dark purposes. He insists—without evidence where possible, against the

48 This is an important point, because it invalidates one of the frequently heard arguments of New Age anti-Mormons—an analogously philological one, based again on arbitrariness and misunderstood Hebrew—for the allegedly diabolical character of Latter-day Saint temple worship. I will not enter into the details, but I will suggest that those who would argue philological points must possess a knowledge of grammar and syntax as well as a dictionary.


50 See Louis C. Zucker, “Joseph Smith as a Student of Hebrew,” Dialogue 3 (Summer 1968): 49. The relevant forms (for “baurak”) may be found at Seixas, Manual Hebrew Grammar, 29, 77. The translation “God bless you” was offered by Elder Orson Pratt on 16 August 1873. See Journal of Discourses 16:156. My Hebraist friend and colleague Prof. Stephen D. Ricks suggests that the intention may have been “Blessed of God.”
TRYK, BEST KEPT SECRETS IN THE BOOK OF MORMON (PETERSON) 257
evidence when he has to—that every detail in Mormonism, and
every element in Joseph Smith’s career, must bear the mark of
Luciferian domination.

“There is,” Tryk tells us, “an astonishing bit of evidence in
the Book of Mormon that Satan really did have control over
Joseph’s life.” It is “a mathematically precise clue” that yields
“an uncanny prediction of the length of Joseph’s life.” This is
how it goes: “Perhaps,” says Tryk, “we can consider
Coriantumr a symbol of Joseph Smith.” (Perhaps indeed!
Coriantumr could, of course, equally well symbolize Mahatma
Gandhi, or the Los Angeles Dodgers, or the Great Wall of
China, or nothing at all, so why not Joseph Smith?)51 Thus,
when we read at Omni 1:21 that Coriantumr survived among the
Nephites “for the space of nine moons” after their discovery of
him, we know immediately to take those 270 “prophetic
days” and divide them by seven, the number of days in a week. The
result is 38, with a remainder of 209. Joseph Smith, Tryk
reveals, lived 38 years and 187 days. This is within the
allowable prophetic margin of error (pp. 162-63). Wow. Who
could fail to be convinced? But Tryk is not finished. “Note
that Amalickiah died in the 26th year of the reign of the judges (Alma
52:1-3), and that his brother became king. Joseph’s brother
Alvin died at the age of 26, providing another Book of
Mormon/Smith family parallel” (p. 167).

Loftes Tryk will not allow even Joseph Smith’s death at
the hands of a murderous mob to escape service as a tool for his
condemnation. This is especially clear in an instance where he
insists on a supernatural incursion into the career of the Prophet
which has been rejected even by believing Latter-day Saints:
The occasion is the story, familiar to many, told by a certain
William M. Daniels about the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph
Smith. According to Daniels, a “ruffian” approached the body
of the Prophet with a bowie-knife, intending to decapitate him.
However, just as the “ruffian” was about to strike, a bolt of
lightning burst from the heavens paralyzing him and several
other members of the mob. Of course, students of the events at
Carthage jail, then and now, Mormon and non-Mormon, have

51 To be fair, Tryk thinks he has clinched the Joseph Smith =
Coriantumr equation: “Remember,” he says, “that [Coriantumr] represents a
diseased heart” (p. 162).
raised serious questions about this tale.\textsuperscript{52} But if a baseless story serves Loftes Tryk’s New Age anti-Mormon purposes, it is necessarily true. “Mr. Daniels was correct in his recounting of events; it wasn’t merely an over-reaction to a terrifying scene. That paralyzing bolt of light had been an intimate part of Joseph’s life ever since the spring of 1820 when he was held bound by a force that baffled his powers of description. It was none other than Satan, an angel of light, as he passed from the lifeless body of his late host, Joseph Smith, Jr., alias Baurak Ale” (p. 177).

In claiming, as he does near the end of his book (p. 222), that “Mormon Church leaders are aware of much, if not all, that has been discussed and brought into question here,” Loftes Tryk might seem at first glance merely to repeat the charge, common to several strands of traditional anti-Mormonism, that the leadership of the Church is and has long been involved in a systematic cover-up of the truth about its past. But he is not. The carefully concealed Satanism of Tryk’s fantasies is far different from the suspicious imaginings of Jerald and Sandra Tanner, or of the late Wesley Walters. It situates him unmistakably in the New Age camp. He himself recognizes this when he gently chides his erstwhile allies for having too limited a grasp of the Book of Mormon’s sinister nature: “Anti-Mormons appear to be too polite, calling it a book of false scripture. It is fully the most direct, concrete literary creation of Satan that is present upon the face of the earth” (p. 222).\textsuperscript{53}


\textsuperscript{53} The Tanners, seeming a bit astonished, complain that they have recently come under attack “from critics of the Mormon Church who feel that we are being \textit{too soft} on the Mormons.” See Tanner and Tanner, \textit{Serious Charges}, 1.
Lately, however, the chasm between traditional anti-Mormonism and its New Age cousin has been revealed in garish detail. Jerald and Sandra Tanner have recently accused Ed Decker and Bill Schnoebelen and Jim Spencer of fraud. "Their unsupported and sensationalistic claims," the Tanners charge, "are going to do serious damage to the responsible work of many who have labored to bring Mormons to Christ."\(^{54}\) Schnoebelen and Spencer and other allies of Ed Decker have countered with the accusation that the Tanners (and others who venture to criticize New Age anti-Mormon absurdities) are demon-possessed.\(^{55}\) Loftes Tryk has entered the fray with the claim that the Tanners are actually agents in the service of the satanic Mormon conspiracy. He points to their allegedly "deceptive image of deep sincerity," which masks—what else?—"their disposition toward conspiratorial methods."\(^{56}\) Jerald Tanner, far from being the dedicated career anti-Mormon he has long seemed to every observer, is for Tryk "actually a Mormon double agent, an apologist, another fake."\(^{57}\) The Tanners respond by noting that their problems with Loftes Tryk apparently began when they "failed to endorse or give attention to" his volume on *The Best Kept Secrets in the Book of Mormon.* "We looked over the book and concluded that it contained too much speculation to be of value for those working with Mormons."\(^{58}\) A dangerous conclusion to reach. "It appears," the Tanners conclude, "that anyone who takes a strong stand against the extreme ideas advocated by these people is

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54 Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 1.
55 Blaine Hunsaker, Randi Hunsaker, Donald Meyer, and Gwenda Meyer, *The Tanner Problem*, cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 2. On p. 12, the Tanners cite the pamphlet by the Hunsakers and the Meyers as attacking Craig Hawkins, an associate of the late "Dr." Walter Martin and a principal figure in the so-called Christian Research Institute. Hawkins had questioned certain claims of Schnoebelen, Spencer, and Decker, and so his past involvement in the martial arts was dredged up as proof of his subservience to occult forces.
56 Hunsaker et al., *The Tanner Problem*, cited by Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 2; Tryk, "Opposition in All Things." This mania for detecting satanic plots, and plots within plots, is apparently characteristic of Loftes Tryk’s thought generally: The Tanners (ibid., 2) cite (and quote) an earlier draft of Tryk’s article that suggests "the possibility that Ed Decker himself might be part of the Mormon conspiracy."
57 Tryk is cited at Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 5.
58 Tanner and Tanner, *Serious Charges*, 3, 4.
liable to be accused of being influenced by the occult or of being in league with the Devil.”59

Quite so. Perhaps they can now understand, to at least some degree, what Latter-day Saints feel when confronted with the wild claims of anti-Mormonism’s New Age zealots.

The situation is simultaneously predictable, amusing, and pathetic. It raises again a very old question: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: And if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand?” (Matthew 12:25-26.) The answer is clear, and divinely given: “If Satan rise up against himself, and be divided, he cannot stand, but hath an end” (Mark 3:26). “Ye shall know them,” said the Lord Jesus, “by their fruits. . . . A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit” (Matthew 7:16, 18).

But there are other questions posed by the book under specific consideration here: What do you get when you cross Philastus Hurlbut with Salvador Dali? A cut-rate Fawn Brodie with Stephen King? Loftes Tryk may well have written the worst volume ever published on the Book of Mormon. His arbitrary textual readings, his wholly unjustified dogmatism, his Luciferian obsessions, his rambling and impressionist style, his lack of interest in anything that can truly be termed evidence, the utter absence in his book of rigor or discipline, all of these appear to put him in a class with the infamous fifteenth-century manual for the persecution of witches, the Malleus maleficarum. Tryk is a living refutation of the oft-repeated claim that there is nothing new under the anti-Mormon sun, that contemporary critics of the Church merely recycle arguments that have been around from the beginning. He is genuinely original—and a spectacular illustration of the perils of innovation. (Even in anti-Mormonism, tradition may well have a legitimate place.) While Loftes Tryk raises few if any real theological or historical issues, the publication of his book in a time of mounting concern about the world’s forests does pose serious ecological ones.

59 Ibid., 12.

More Revisionist Legerdemain and the Book of Mormon

Reviewed by Louis Midgley

Essays on Mormon Scripture consists of fifteen essays, twelve of which were previously published. In addition to examining the stance taken on the meaning and authenticity of the Book of Mormon by its editor and publisher, in this review I will focus attention on (1) Susan Curtis’s “Early Nineteenth-Century America and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 81-96); (2) A. Bruce Lindgren’s “Sign or Scripture: Approaches to the Book of Mormon” (pp. 55-62); and (3) Mark D. Thomas’s “Scholarship and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 63-79), essays which deal explicitly with the Book of Mormon, though some attention will also be given to certain other essays in Essays on Mormon Scripture that tacitly take a stand on the meaning and prophetic truth claims of the Book of Mormon.

The RLDS Connection

A notable feature of Essays on Mormon Scripture is the inclusion of essays by RLDS authors James E. Lancaster, a mathematician; Geoffrey F. Spencer, a prominent “liberal” RLDS Apostle; Richard P. Howard, RLDS Church Historian with an M.A. in history; A. Bruce Lindgren, holder of a master’s degree in theology from St. Paul School of Theology (a

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1 Five of these essays appeared in Dialogue, three in Sunstone, and two were published in the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal, which is an RLDS publication, one in Courage and one in University Bulletin, both defunct RLDS magazines. Though not noted in Essays on Mormon Scripture, in two instances (both by RLDS authors) this is the third publication of an essay: James E. Lancaster’s “The Method of Translation of the Book of Mormon” (pp. 97-112) first appeared in the Saints’ Herald, on November 15, 1962, and then was later reprinted in the John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 3 (1983): 51-61; and William D. Russell’s “Beyond Literalism” (pp. 43-54) first appeared in Dialogue 19/1 (Spring 1986): 57-68, and then later in Marjorie B. Troeh and Eileen M. Terril, eds., Restoration Studies IV (Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1988), 192-201.
Methodist seminary in Kansas City) and an employee of the RLDS Temple School; and William D. (Bill) Russell, who studied for a time at St. Paul School of Theology, and who with a law degree from Iowa has taught history, political science, and religion at the RLDS Graceland College. Though Vogel neither indicates directly the grounds upon which he has made his selection of authors and essays, nor the standards by which he has in some cases rewritten the essays he included in his book, it seems clear that he desires to promote and legitimize something very much like the ideology that has stressed and altered the RLDS community since the 1960s.

Bill Russell insists that "there is no sure way to distinguish between the word of God and the words of men—or to distinguish between what is inspired and what is not" (p. 51), spelling out some of the assumptions at work in the RLDS liberal ideology. Hence, in his estimation, the authority of the Book of Mormon comes only "because it is the founding document of Mormonism and has drawn many converts to the church." And, for Russell, whatever authority the Book of Mormon may have "stems from containing the thought of the founding prophet just prior to the organization of the church. Mormon doctrine in both [the LDS and RLDS] churches has evolved considerably beyond the Book of Mormon, in ways not always consistent with the founding document" (p. 51).

2 Temple School is in the business of providing in-service training for RLDS teachers, and it also offers, through a night school at the former Presbyterian and now RLDS Park College, graduate training for their clergy.

3 For a recent account of these intriguing and instructive events, see Russell, "Defenders of the Faith: Varieties of RLDS Dissent," Sunstone 14/3 (June 1990): 14-19. Russell is, at least among Mormon historians, best known as one of the most outspoken of the RLDS "liberals." He is currently working on a history of post-1960 RLDS disputes in which he will examine the confrontation of the remnants of traditional RLDS faith with those who now control the RLDS bureaucracy and hierarchy. Even though Russell is personally sympathetic with the views of the RLDS "liberal" establishment, he seems anxious to expose some of the tactics used in dealing with RLDS primitive believers. He prefers to see all views flourish, even those with which he personally disagrees. That stance has put him at odds with the institutional imperatives of the current leaders among the RLDS.

4 Russell is willing to treat the Book of Mormon as scripture, as he understands that term, simply because "the Book of Mormon arose out of the founding experiences of Mormonism." Though some of its "teachings may not seem applicable today," Russell also allows that "some of the
Russell, who has been an important figure in the recent assault by RLDS revisionists on the traditional understanding of the Book of Mormon, claims that, in addition to his own work, five other essays provide grounds for jettisoning the traditional understanding of the Book of Mormon by reducing it to Joseph Smith’s thought prior to the organization of the Church, and hence turning it into an instance of highly imaginative and truly bizarre nineteenth-century fiction, or, put another way, into the earliest exemplar of Joseph Smith’s own primitive theological reflections cast (either knowingly or unknowingly) in archaemorphic form. These include the following:

1. Lancaster’s 1962 essay on the “method” of translation of the Book of Mormon (pp. 97-112).

Lancaster shows that the accounts provided by those seemingly situated to know indicate that Joseph Smith did not use the Nephite interpreter (later called “Urim and Thummim”) to translate portions of the Book of Mormon that we now have (see pp. 97-107). Instead, he employed a stone which he placed in a hat, with which he was able to dictate the text of the Book of Mormon. Lancaster lists some eight “facts” about which “all witnesses agree” (see pp. 105-6). But after setting out the contents of the available accounts, Lancaster draws conclusions that run against the evidence he presented; he flatly denies that Joseph Smith did what the witnesses reported. “In some of the testimonies witnesses stated
(2) Leland Negaard, “Literary Issues and the Latter Day Saint Student,” *University Bulletin* 18/4 (Spring 1966): 21-24. Negaard argued against the historicity of the Book of Mormon because of the so-called Isaiah problem, that is, because of the presence of quotations from portions of Isaiah that are now thought by biblical scholars to have been written only after the return of Jews from the Babylonian exile.\(^7\)

(3) Larry W. Conrad, “The Book of Mormon: An Inquiry into Its Historicity,” an unpublished paper, dated May 5, 1981. This paper was written during Conrad’s sophomore year at Graceland for a course on the Book of Mormon taught by Russell, while Conrad was sorting out his views on the Book of Mormon—a course, incidentally, which has not been taught since that time. Conrad was then RLDS, but has become a

that Smith saw, or said he saw, English words appear to him in the translation process.” “But regardless of this,” Lancaster insists, “Joseph Smith did not regard the process as mechanical” (pp. 107-8). Instead, he holds that “the inspiration Smith received involved general concepts rather than literal information. Smith had to express in his own words and phrases the concepts which passed through his mind” (p. 108), though none of the witnesses describes such a vague “inspiration.” Instead they describe a “seeing” that produced a dictation of the text of the Book of Mormon. Lancaster justifies his opinion on the grounds that Joseph Smith later changed or authorized changes in the Book of Mormon (and Doctrine and Covenants), but he neglects to explain why that fact somehow yields his conclusions. One wonders why an early and perhaps inferior essay by Lancaster was included in *Essays on Mormon Scripture* when more complete and accurate, and much less tendentious and speculative accounts are available. See Stephen Ricks, “Joseph Smith’s Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1986 and John W. Welch and Tim Rathbone, “The Translation of the Book of Mormon: Basic Historical Information,” F.A.R.M.S. paper, 1986. Edward H. Ashment has also covered essentially the same ground as Lancaster. See his “The Book of Mormon—A Literal Translation?” *Sunstone* 5/2 (March-April 1980): 10-14. Perhaps Vogel declined to include Ashment’s essay because, when it was first published, he found it objectionable. See Vogel’s criticism in “Is the Book of Mormon a Translation? A Response to Edward H. Ashment,” *Journal of Pastoral Practice* 5/3 (1982): 75-91; and his remarks in *Indian Origins*, 75 n. 5.

\(^7\) Instead of including Negaard’s essay, Vogel reprinted one by George D. Smith, owner and publisher of Signature Books, that presents, among other things, a somewhat similar argument against the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. See Smith’s “Isaiah Update” (pp. 113-30), which originally appeared in *Dialogue* 16/2 (Summer 1983): 37-51.
minister for the United Methodist Church at least partly because of what he sees as a lessening of commitment to Christian fundamentals among the RLDS, including the growing tendency for their liberal leaders to see the scriptures as merely human in origin and authority.8

(4) Wayne Ham, “Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History,” Courage 1/1 (September 1970): 15-22. Ham argues that the Book of Mormon is a “nonhistorical treatise in much the same manner as modern critics view the books of Jonah, Ruth, Job, and Daniel in the Old Testament. Freed from some of the traditional hangups involved with having to accept unquestioningly the historicity of the Book of Mormon, these [liberal RLDS] members could then read the book as a product of the American frontier and honor it as an interesting artifact of the Restoration movement in the nineteenth century” (p. 21). This essay, written by a prominent RLDS appointee, is an indication that a reordering of RLDS beliefs had taken place in the RLDS bureaucracy.9

(5) The essay by Susan Curtis (pp. 81-96), originally written in 1977. Notably, the average age of these five essays is twenty years old.

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8 Conrad now scolds RLDS “liberals” for either not seeing clearly or not confronting honestly the implications of the modifications they have made in their understanding of the Bible and Book of Mormon (and also of Joseph Smith), and hence also for not taking seriously their own scriptures, founding narratives, and traditions. See Conrad’s insightful essay entitled “Scripture in the Reorganization: Exegesis, Authority, and the ‘Prophetic Mantle’,” Dialogue, forthcoming.

9 In 1968 the RLDS faithful discovered how far changes had gone with the public disclosure of so-called “Position Papers,” written by RLDS “appointees” with the approval of the hierarchy, and then read to a group of lay people in over 96 hours of discussion by ten members of the RLDS Curriculum Consultation Committee. These papers were leaked by someone to RLDS conservatives, who published them without authorization, much to the annoyance of the “liberals.” Wayne Ham’s essay on the Book of Mormon formed part of these papers. See Position Papers (Independence, MO: Cumorah Books, 1968), 103-12. For a brief account of this episode, see Russell’s “Defenders of the Faith,” 14-16. Russell notes that “in the position paper on the Book of Mormon, the author [Wayne Ham] viewed the book as fiction and Joseph Smith as its author” (p. 15), and for a more detailed account, see William J. Knapp, “Professionalizing Religious Education in the Church: The ‘New Curriculum’ Controversy,” John Whitmer Historical Association Journal 2 (1982): 47-56.
The Book of Mormon as Fiction and Joseph Smith as Its Author

In his "Editor's Introduction" to Essays on Mormon Scripture, Dan Vogel declares that

all but one of the following fifteen essays . . . were written by Mormons from either the LDS or RLDS tradition. (The exception is Susan Curtis.) However, rather than being guided by institutional imperatives, each author has attempted to understand Mormon scripture on its own terms (p. viii).

His book examines what he calls the "human" element in the Mormon canon. What that seems to mean is that, among other things, he wants to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is not what the faithful have always thought it to be—the word of God, and certainly not the restoration of a knowledge of ancient peoples with whom God had previously communicated. Hence we find in Essays on Mormon Scripture arguments to the effect that the Book of Mormon is not the word of God in the sense that it contains a genuine record of divine revelation, but that it is a human contrivance in which one might conceivably

10 In an earlier book, Vogel relied upon RLDS "liberals" as well as some in the Latter-day Saint intellectual community who deny that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history. He opined "that it may be possible to question the Book of Mormon's historicity and yet maintain a belief in its sacred and inspired nature," citing essays by Wayne Ham and William D. Russell to support this claim, as well as the opinions of Sterling M. McMurrin and George D. Smith. Vogel also complained that I have criticized those on the fringes of the Mormon community who "view the Book of Mormon as 'inspired fiction' and . . . [who] offer 'naturalistic explanations' for foundational events." He is correct in saying that I find such explanations coming from those with roots in the Mormon traditions merely a somewhat " 'more sophisticated,' 'more subtle,' and 'more dangerous' threat to the faith than any previous attack by outsiders." Vogel charges that I have "failed to consider seriously the challenges facing the historicity of the Book of Mormon or the strengths of a less literalistic approach." It is not at all clear what "strengths" there might be in holding that the Book of Mormon is fiction fashioned by Joseph Smith. See Vogel, Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986), 71 and 101 n. 1. For a detailed criticism of this book, see Kevin Christensen's review of it in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 2 (1990): 214-57.
find, if one were so disposed, some subjectively inspiring language.\(^{11}\)

I will now examine the essays specifically on the Book of Mormon that Vogel included in *Essays on Mormon Scripture*:

1. Susan Curtis, the one author with no direct connection to what Vogel calls the “LDS or RLDS tradition” (p. viii), came from a Methodist background and was introduced to Mormon matters by her RLDS teachers at Graceland College. She is the only holder of a Ph.D. among the authors whose essays appear in *Essays on Mormon Scripture*. Her degree from Missouri is in history and she currently teaches at Purdue. While she was at Graceland, her most enthusiastic supporter was Russell, who seems to have been responsible for initially promoting her essay, which was originally circulated in 1977 while she was an undergraduate student.\(^{12}\)

“The Book of Mormon,” according to the concluding remark in Curtis’s essay, “gives modern-day readers a glimpse at one aspect of the socio-intellectual context of the United States in the 1820s and 1830s” (p. 93). How does she arrive at that conclusion? Curtis begins with the assumption that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text, but merely nineteenth-century literature produced by Joseph Smith. She opines that “rather than an attempt to write the faithful history of an ancient

\(^{11}\) In order to accomplish that overall goal, Vogel has drawn upon essays by some writers with roots in the Latter-day Saint tradition, including George D. Smith, wealthy owner of Signature Books; Mark D. Thomas, who is employed in the banking industry; Anthony A. Hutchinson, an American foreign services officer who worked on a degree in New Testament at Catholic University; Lester E. Bush, a physician; Kevin L. Barney, an attorney; Melodie Moench Charles, a Denver resident with a degree from the Harvard Divinity School; Brent Metcalfe, who has not attended college; and Edward H. Ashment, who once studied Egyptology at Chicago.

\(^{12}\) Curtis’s paper was originally a lecture given May 10, 1977, the year she graduated from Graceland College, in the Annual Restoration History Lecture Series sponsored by the John Whitmer Historical Association and Graceland. It was then circulated in manuscript as “Palmyra Revisited: A Look at Early 19th Century American Thought and the Book of Mormon” (Emerson, IA: by author, 1977), and published as “Palmyra Revisited: A Look at Early Nineteenth-Century America and the Book of Mormon,” *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 2 (1982): 30-37; it is now called “Early Nineteenth-Century America and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 81-96).
community” (p. 87), Joseph Smith simply mirrored concerns found in his own environment.

Because the Book of Mormon is considered scripture by members of the Latter Day Saint faith and on the whole ignored by the rest of American society, it is seldom scrutinized as a piece of nineteenth century literature. Such an examination of the Book of Mormon within the literary, intellectual, and social context of the 1820s and 1830s helps illuminate Joseph Smith’s ‘jeremiad’ as a cultural artifact and adds a new dimension to our understanding of some Americans’ response to an emerging liberal order (p. 82).

According to Curtis, “the Book of Mormon reflected many of the concerns of the American society out of which it first emerged. For historians of the early national period it is evidence of the social, economic, political, and intellectual transformation of the early years of the republic. It is literature of and for its time” (p. 83). She feels that “the Book of Mormon offers modern-day readers one view of the values and ideas that prevailed in the early nineteenth century” (p. 82). Given that assumption, she then concluded in the 1982 version of her article that “the Book of Mormon is an affirmation of the liberal consensus and offers a warning of destruction to the faithless who abandon the American triad of democracy, capitalism, and Protestantism.” Her position in this regard has now been edited to read:

The Book of Mormon was one of many early nineteenth-century texts that addressed the anxiety arising from this dramatic reordering of American life. It offered advice and opinions on the proper American and Christian relationships to democratic practice, capitalist exchange, and Protestant ideology.14

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14 In support of her view, Curtis now cites Hill’s Quest for Refuge: The Mormon Flight from American Pluralism (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), and Kenneth Winn, Exiles in a Land of Liberty (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 6-17. In the previously published version, she argued that the Book of Mormon defends the “individualism, democracy, and competitive market capitalism” that came on
Curtis sees the Book of Mormon as Smith's endorsement of "evangelical Protestantism with its mass gatherings and individualist conversions" (p. 87). Thus, for Curtis, "the Book of Mormon is Protestant in its orientation" (p. 89).

"Likewise, Smith wrote enthusiastically about market exchange in a society that theoretically predated the emergence of a capitalist ethos in the western world. Exemplary characters in Smith's Book of Mormon were fundamentally market capitalists engaged in commerce and seeking profits" (p. 87). Curtis reads the Book of Mormon as an endorsement of industrious, individualistic pursuit of gain and concludes that one can find implicit in it assumptions about hard work, regularity, commerce, and accumulation sustained by a Victorian sensibility. Getting individual 'gain' through industry and commodification drew Smith's praise. And like capitalists in the nineteenth-century, Smith's ancient Nephites found it necessary to establish a system of transportation, cities, and machines to support capitalism as it developed. The Nephites' industrial revolution, urban expansion, and improved transportation undergird their economic system that promised individual reward (pp. 87-88).

In the original version of her paper, Curtis set forth her approach: "although the Book of Mormon is believed to be of divine origin by some members of the Latter Day Saint faith [the RLDS; she ignores the LDS], it will be treated only as a piece of literature in this paper."

the scene "in the last decades of the eighteenth century and early years of the nineteenth century." See "Palmyra Revisited" (1982 version), 30. The other instances in which someone has added references in her essay to "authorities" involve the citation of Vogel's work. To buttress Curtis's opinion that, "as a piece of literature, the Book of Mormon [is] a creative attempt to uncover the origins of Indians on the North American continent" (p. 82), there is a citation to Vogel's Indian Origins, 93 n. 6, compare 96 n. 36, where it is claimed that Vogel's book provides "a good discussion of the Book of Mormon and the American Indians." Perhaps as a gesture of mutual admiration, in 1986 Vogel included the Curtis essay in the category of "other, less stilted, works" that have attempted to understand the Book of Mormon. See Indian Origins, 4, 75 n. 4, and compare 76 nn. 7-8 (all Curtis citations are found therein under the name Mernitz).
It is possible to see exactly how Curtis reads passages in the Book of Mormon, or how she proof-texts to prove conclusions obviously reached independently of a careful reading of the text. For example, the claim that the Book of Mormon advocates Victorian mercantilism and profiteering overlooks its numerous condemnations of those who strive "to get gain" and its constant attribution of prosperity to the righteous blessing of God.

Curtis began a portion of her paper with the observation that initially it would seem that parties were the biggest problem [for Americans], but a new generation was maturing that could see worth in opposing views. The popularization of this generation's ideas would eventually lead to a legitimate permanent political opposition.  

After mentioning that George Washington worried about "irregular opposition" to "acknowledged authority," and "that Hamilton, Jefferson and other first generation political leaders never fully accepted the opposition party as a legitimate opposition," eventually some began to see that "the opposition of two ideas would enhance the quality of the compromise which the struggle would undoubtedly produce." Eventually, she claims, "fear that political strife might jeopardize the national existence was replaced by the mid-1820s by a feeling that open opposition could lead to better understanding of the issues and to growth from the subsequent give-and-take."  

With those remarks about political opposition in place, Curtis switched back to her reading of the Book of Mormon as a bit of frontier literature reflecting a nineteenth-century cultural ethos. Hence, she found in the Book of Mormon an endorsement of opposition political parties. "Nephi, one of the characters whose story is told in the Book of Mormon, declared early in his record that 'it must needs be that there is an opposition in all things.' The Book of Mormon, emerging in 1830, found an audience receptive to this concept, the first such  

16 Ibid.  
17 Ibid.
audience in American history.”  

There is, of course, not a single word in the Book of Mormon that suggests that “opposition in all things” has anything to do with Joseph Smith’s alleged attempt to express a growing nineteenth-century American fondness for factions or political parties. Curtis’s speculation about the meaning of “opposition in all things” is a rather fanciful reading of this passage of scripture. By treating the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction, she leaves little place for the divine in it and is unable to find a coherent meaning in the book other than what she supposes was in Joseph Smith’s environment.

If one wonders why an editor would choose to republish a partially refurbished paper written by a young student from a Methodist background who seems to know little about the text upon which she comments, it could well be that Curtis, equipped with a revisionist ideology by her teachers at Graceland College, advances something close to Vogel’s own understanding of the Book of Mormon. The essays in Vogel’s book that deal directly with the Book of Mormon have been around for some time, and hence the ideology they advance is not new and has long failed to explain the Book of Mormon or to gain many adherents.

2. A. Bruce Lindgren, an employee of the RLDS Temple School, distinguishes between seeing the Book of Mormon either as a sign (or symbol) that God revealed himself to Joseph Smith and seeing it as scripture, that is, as an authoritative source of beliefs about divine things. As a sign of the restoration, the Saints “use it to demonstrate the divine origin of

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18 Ibid., 25. Incidentally, it was Lehi, and not Nephi, who made the statement Curtis quotes.

19 The Book of Mormon has played a less important role among the RLDS than among the LDS. For an amusing account of the last time the Book of Mormon was taught at Graceland College, which illustrates the degree of indifference to the Book of Mormon among liberal RLDS elements, see Russell, “History and Mormon Scriptures,” 59-61. When Russell attempted to revive the teaching of the Book of Mormon, he readily admitted to his students that to that point he had not read it (p. 60).

20 Curtis’s paper began circulation in 1977; Thomas’s “Scholarship and the Book of Mormon” (pp. 63-79) was originally published in Sunstone 5/3 (May-June 1980): 24-29; Lindgren’s “Sign or Scripture: Approaches to the Book of Mormon” (pp. 55-62), was originally published in Dialogue 19/1 (Spring 1986): 69-75; for earlier versions of Lancaster’s “The Translation of the Book of Mormon” (pp. 97-112), see n. 1, above.
the RLDS/LDS movement or to demonstrate that Joseph Smith, Jr., was a prophet. It is not necessarily inappropriate,” according to Lindgren, “to use the Book of Mormon in this way, provided the claims can be substantiated” (p. 55). But can this be done? From Lindgren’s perspective, it is unfortunate that most discussions of the Book of Mormon typically “tend to focus on the question of its ancient historicity and authorship” (p. 55). He prefers to concentrate on the use of the Book of Mormon as scripture—as the source for what is believed—on the assumption that the book was “the creation of Joseph Smith” (p. 57). His reasons are negative; he does not, for example, believe that anyone has yet been able to develop an ancient American context with enough persuasiveness and richness of detail to contribute to our understanding of what the Book of Mormon is saying. To my knowledge, no one has ever been able to identify a significant correlation between Book of Mormon place names and personal names with ancient American place names and personal names. Similarly, I am unaware of a widely accepted chronology of an ancient American civilization which correlates with the chronology of the Book of Mormon. In themselves, these factors do not ‘disprove’ the Book of Mormon; they simply make it difficult to interpret it from an ancient American context.” (pp. 56-57)

Earlier, with Peter A. Judd, Lindgren argued that the Book of Mormon has always been “the subject of much speculation, attack, and subsequent defense. It was presented by the early Saints as a history of people living on the American continent . . . [and] was affirmed as a translation from gold plates.”21 Lindgren notes that “very little is known about the precise way in which Joseph Smith produced the book. He did not possess language skills that would have enabled him to translate an ancient language into modern English. It is known that he dictated the manuscript to scribes.”22 Lindgren holds that the Saints have “pursued two courses” in response to criticisms of the Book of Mormon. First, they “have attempted to authenticate

21 Peter A. Judd and A. Bruce Lindgren, An Introduction to the Saints Church (Independence, MO: Herald House, 1976), 83.
22 Ibid., 84.
the book by proving, through archaeological research, that the people described in the Book of Mormon did, indeed, inhabit the American continent.” Second, they have “let the book speak for itself.”23 This formulation seems close to the distinction that Lindgren now makes between seeing the book as either a sign or as scripture. The first approach leads to focusing on what he calls “questions of . . . historicity and authorship,” which he rejects because he finds that approach unproductive.

In 1976, Lindgren acknowledged that “the Book of Mormon was the primary missionary tool of the infant church,”24 but then claims that “from the early years of the [RLDS] church up to the present day there have been a number of different ways in which Latter Day Saints view the Book of Mormon.” The Book of Mormon has been viewed by the RLDS either (1) “as evidence that God reveals himself in all ages and that the written response to that revelation is important enough to be given the status of Scripture,” or (2) “as an additional witness to Jesus Christ,” or (3) “as supplementing the Bible’s collection of testimony relating to God’s acting in the lives of his people,” or (4) “as an authentic ancient history.”25 “Individual [RLDS] members,” according to Lindgren, “may consider all, some or none of these views to reflect their personal understanding of the Book of Mormon.”26 Lindgren sees these as possible alternative approaches that may be considered, presumably along with rejecting the book, as individual RLDS members “form their own opinions about its value.”27 The RLDS seem to have a somewhat less well-developed sense of the role and importance of the Book of Mormon, which may help explain the recent efforts of the “liberal” establishment to find ways of downplaying or rejecting it as history (and also as a source for the content of faith), while perhaps retaining it as scripture, in part because it is an artifact of the restoration.

23 Ibid.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 86-87.
26 Ibid., 87. This view is rather unlike that held by Latter-day Saints, who typically understand the Book of Mormon as an authentic ancient history, which is also at the same time an additional witness to Jesus Christ that supplements the biblical witness as it provides evidence that God has moved to restore his covenant with his people. Each of these aspects is seen as logically dependent on the other, with no one of them somehow able to stand alone.
27 Ibid., 88.
Lindgren claims that "any responsible study of scripture should first establish the text, preferably in the original language, and the political, social and cultural context out of which the scripture arose. Even so basic an issue," he affirms, "is unresolved with respect to the Book of Mormon. Is it an actual account of the peoples whose story it tells?" (p. 56). Or "is the Book of Mormon the creation of Joseph Smith? If so we can establish the text in its original language, and we can know a great deal about the conditions which prevailed when it was written, but," asks Lindgren, "why then should it be accepted as scripture?" (p. 57). He does not answer that question, granting instead that such an approach has the disadvantage "that most church members do not believe that Joseph Smith composed the Book of Mormon" (p. 57). This leads to a dilemma. He grants that a solution to it must be found. He simply ignores all of the vast literature in which the Book of Mormon is read as an ancient text while still probing for reasons to support this belief.

From Lindgren's perspective, the Book of Mormon has become "more an object of faith rather than a source of faith" (p. 59), and hence the Saints "have tended to use the Book of Mormon as a sign and not as a scripture" (p. 59). He insists that its "scriptural status does not rest upon questions of historicity" (p. 60). For him, "writings are scriptural because the church holds them as normative or authoritative" (p. 60), but he also asks, if the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient text, "why then should it be accepted as scripture?" (p. 57). To put the question another way, why should the Book of Mormon be held by the church as "normative and authoritative," if there never was a Lehi colony and if Joseph Smith simply made up both the book and the story of its coming forth? Lindgren does not answer this question, and yet he senses that it is crucial, for "the story of its coming forth," he grants, "cannot be separated from the story of the restoration of the church." He correctly holds that "the most significant threat to the Book of Mormon is not questions of its historicity. The most significant threat is that it will be ignored by the faithful" as a source of the content of faith (p. 61), for "questions concerning its origin and authorship, although important in the process of interpretation, are secondary" (p. 60). The question he neglects to confront is why one ought to turn to the Book of Mormon for the content of faith, for prophetic teachings, if it is not what it claims to be, including among other things an authentic ancient history.
Hence, instead of dealing with the crucial issues which he has raised, Lindgren insists that his "concern is with interpreting the Book of Mormon" (p. 57), that is, with figuring out what it actually teaches. He thinks that such an enterprise will have to go on "regardless of our sympathies" on the question of the historicity of the book (p. 57). But he does not sense that the interpretive enterprise will be fundamentally different depending on how one judges the question of historicity. After attempting to describe portions of the message contained in the Book of Mormon, Lindgren confesses that he expects that "we will find ourselves arguing with the book's answers much of the time" (p. 61) because what is taught in it runs directly counter to what many of the Saints would like to to believe. For Lindgren, the Book of Mormon teaches that "Godhood is hardly within our reach. We are depraved, and our depravity does not result from our willfulness alone. It comes from the structure of human existence itself. We are, through no fault of our own, in the midst of a cycle in which our righteousness will lead to prosperity and pride, and eventually to sin. What then," he asks, "do we do with eternal progression?" (p. 58).

Lindgren is disturbed because he finds that "the Book of Mormon is pessimistic about human nature" (p. 57). He finds that, "according to the Book of Mormon, we are not on a progressive journey to righteousness and perfection" (p. 57). Because of or in spite of the constant emphasis on the atonement of Jesus Christ in the Book of Mormon, he finds its message "pessimistic," for there is no necessary historical progress taught in the book. "The golden age of the Nephites, for example, leads not to glory but to destruction. If the Book of Mormon is a story of the conflict between good and evil, it is disturbing to note that

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28 Lindgren cites, as evidence for this assertion, his essay entitled "Sin and Redemption in the Book of Mormon," in Maurice L. Draper and A. Bruce Lindgren, eds., Restoration Studies II, 201-6. In this essay Lindgren correctly notes that the Book of Mormon links prosperity with righteousness, with keeping the commandments. He is perplexed by such a teaching. He holds that "this understanding . . . is at odds with the view of human nature so widely held in the Latter Day Saint churches. Saints are," he claims, "generally optimistic about human nature. They like to believe that human beings are essentially good and that they have great potential if they will merely apply themselves" (ibid., 202). It does not appear to occur to Lindgren that part of the importance of the Book of Mormon may lie in its teaching the Saints things that they do not necessarily want to hear.
evil wins twice” (p. 57). A better story would be of an inevitable moral progress grounded in confidence in human goodness that would render unnecessary a redemption through the atonement of Jesus Christ. But Lindgren ignores many optimistic passages regarding the glorious salvation of the righteous, and he is not entirely consistent, for he also believes that faith is not assent to a set of dogmas—which, it seems, would include notions of historical progress or essential goodness of man—but “is [optimistically] grounded in the experience of being saved or redeemed by God through Jesus Christ” (p. 60).

29 Lindgren feels that what he calls “the moral pessimism of the Book of Mormon is in keeping with the puritan Calvinism of New England, but it stands in sharp contrast to the religion of moral progress which was sweeping the American frontier in the early nineteenth century.” Hence it runs counter to the “pioneer spirit” of Mormon Americans, who are busy “perfecting themselves in the world,” and hence “they failed to see that prosperity might also bring pride and sin” (ibid., 203). Lindgren is concerned because “the view of human nature in the Book of Mormon is not progressive; it is cyclical. Righteousness in the present does not imply greater righteousness in the future.” Instead, the teachings of the Book of Mormon are “pessimistic” (ibid.). Thus, Lindgren finds it “disturbing to consider that people may continue to do evil after” having a knowledge of divine things through special revelations (ibid., 203). Running counter to the moral optimism of American liberal religiosity, the Book of Mormon contains offensive teachings—that “we stand in need of redemption. It is at this point where we must ask serious questions about the Book of Mormon. How does Jesus Christ redeem us from sin? Is the Jesus Christ of the Book of Mormon able to rescue us from the drastic predicament in which we are placed?” Lindgren thinks that “the answer is, finally, no. Good and evil wage war on each other [in the Book of Mormon]. In the end, evil wins twice” (ibid., 204). The reason that he gives for this opinion is that there is no account of historical progress in the Book of Mormon, hence “the atonement is strikingly limited,” the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is, for Lindgren, limited because he is only able to rescue us from death and, on condition of faith and repentance, from sin, thereby making it possible for us to return to the presence of God. But that presumably is not the kind of optimistic teaching we desire. What the Saints should and do often want, from Lindgren’s perspective, is a moral optimism that sees no need for a redemption from sin by the atonement of Jesus Christ; they want to believe, instead, that they are essentially good and also necessarily moving inexorably forward on their own moral worth, powers, and merits.

30 After suggesting the possibility that language in the Book of Mormon concerning the unity of Jesus and God may not be trinitarian, that such language may merely be a “way of saying that Jesus Christ is divine”
In order to get an indication of how an outspoken and highly influential RLDS "liberal" understands the Book of Mormon, one rather less moderate than Lindgren, it is useful to examine what an English journalist by the name of Malise Ruthven, who has had a look at what he considered the exotic manifestations of religion in America, describes as an interview with "Paul Edwards, principal [actually president] of the Temple School, [who] is widely regarded as the RLDS Church's leading intellectual."31 Ruthven claims to have asked Edwards about the "part the Book of Mormon played in the teachings of the Reorganized Church." Edwards is reported to have said that his "guess would be that it constitutes less than ten per cent of our scriptural readings. We don't teach it in our schools. Our people believe in it, but they don't believe it. It's important as a symbol." For Edwards, the Book of Mormon is something the RLDS are simply forced to live with, since it is part of the tradition. "It's a story, a myth, who knows what? For most people I know it's got nothing to do with anything," according to Edwards. "It's the way we explain ourselves. But whenever possible, I avoid bringing it up. If somebody else brings it up I squirm. If somebody wants to know what I think I usually lie."

At this point Ruthven wanted to know why, given his view of the Book of Mormon and the traditional foundations of Mormon faith, Edwards remains RLDS. "The Church," Edwards said, "has some social and I think, in a very small sense, some religious meaning, and I don't want to see it destroyed. I'm a

(p. 58), Lindgren finds it "most striking" that such language "is so much in conflict with the trinitarianism of the RLDS church and with the pluralism of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Somehow the two churches have developed separate and opposing views of God, both of which apparently conflict with the idea of God presented in the Book of Mormon" (p. 59). Apparently without sensing that the radically conflicting views concerning God that are currently held by the LDS and RLDS have much to do with the background assumptions brought to the interpretive task, Lindgren, following a recent fad among Mormon historians, insists that the Book of Mormon contains a "rather classical" version of the "doctrine of the trinity" (p. 58), which turns out to be "a type of modalistic Monarchianism" or "Sabellianism," citing Vogel's "The Earliest Mormon Concept of God," in Gary James Bergera, ed., Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 17-33.

member of the Church despite the Book of Mormon, not because of it. I don’t think that’s an unusual position for people in the RLDS [Church], but it’s totally unacceptable to announce it.  

Edwards, it should be noted, has elsewhere argued that the Book of Mormon is simply “Joseph Smith’s speculative work that gives the story of his experience,” which Edwards understands as essentially mystical. He therefore pictures Joseph Smith as both “mystic and technician. . . . He sought to present his teachings within the bounds of ancient scripture, often reworking the old text to fit his new conceptions. He also gathered his own teaching into the Book of Mormon, a speculative work that gives the story of his experience, and the truths he arrived at from considering the experience.”  

Lindgren certainly echoes these views.

3. Mark D. Thomas (pp. 63-79), a banker in Washington State, covers somewhat the same ground as Lindgren. “Certainly the Book of Mormon,” according to Thomas, “does not appear on the surface to be in the tradition of nineteenth century literature” (p. 67). Instead, it presents itself as an authentic ancient history. Why reject that view? Thomas distinguishes three (or perhaps four) approaches to understanding the Book of Mormon. The first he calls “historical.” “Once we establish the text to be interpreted, the next step is to reach a historical understanding of the text.” The reason why such an understanding is necessary, is that “every

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32 Ibid., 96-97.
34 Thomas begins with some extravagant remarks about the necessity of textual criticism, claiming that “before we can ever think of interpreting a work, we must first establish the best possible text” (p. 64). On this issue, he is wrong, for in the absence of textual criticism it is still possible to begin to read and understand whatever text we have before us. For the most part textual criticism merely fine-tunes the text and is useful in the clarification of small points of interpretation. And it is not clear what would constitute the “best possible text” when dealing with the Book of Mormon.
text can to a greater or lesser degree be better understood with a knowledge of the original historical language, setting, and author” (p. 66). This may be true, but, as Thomas recognizes, when we turn to the Book of Mormon we are faced with a serious problem, for “there is no consensus as to when the Book of Mormon was actually written” (p. 66). The book claims to be a translation of an ancient text, while critics of the book insist that it must be read as purely nineteenth-century literature composed by Joseph Smith. If it is the case, as Thomas seems to indicate, that one cannot really begin to understand the Book of Mormon without taking sides on the question of by whom and when it was originally composed, which alternative does he favor? The reader is forced to make a choice between those alternatives, and certainly that choice will determine how the book is interpreted and understood.

Much like Lindgren, Thomas notes that “almost all historical investigations into the book have been apologetic—that is, defending either the ancient or modern origins of the book” (p. 66). He interprets the Book of Mormon on the assumption that it is a modern and not an authentically ancient text, and he thereby becomes an apologist for such a stance. Hence, for him, as for Curtis and Lindgren, the Book of Mormon is nineteenth-century fiction and Joseph Smith was its original author, and not merely a “translator.” Like Lindgren, Thomas indicates that he does “not believe that the approach from American archaeology will provide significant results for two reasons: first, because of lack of material.” He therefore asserts that “no archaeologist has been able to locate a single Nephite text or city.”35 The second

35 Though the essay was originally published in 1980 and, hence, Thomas can be excused for not knowing of John L. Sorenson’s work—which, however, was already widely available in unofficial circulation—in this version of his essay no attempt has been made by either the author or editor to update the essay, other than to insert in the notes a reference to Vogel’s essay entitled “The Earliest Mormon Concept of God,” in Bergera, ed., Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine, 17-33 (see p. 77 n. 5); a reference to Vogel’s Indian Origins, 60-61 (see p. 77 n. 8); and a reference to Vogel’s Religious Seekers and the Advent of Mormonism (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988); and to Hill’s Quest for Refuge (see p. 78 n. 14). Though Thomas makes a big fuss about the necessity for critical texts and for textual criticism, no effort is made to direct the reader’s attention to the attempt by Robert F. Smith to fashion the beginnings of a critical text of the Book of Mormon (which is currently available through F.A.R.M.S.), or to Sorenson’s An American Setting for the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake
reason is that “much of the material used to show Nephite or Lamanite influence in ancient America was available to Joseph Smith,” hence what Thomas calls “this geographical approach to the Book of Mormon provides no interpretive aids and only weak apologetic material.”

Unlike Lindgren, Thomas identifies what he calls “the Near Eastern approach,” which is also broadly historical. This approach, he thinks, “recognizes the difficulty with Nephite archaeology and attempts to place the Nephite scripture in its old world setting. It has been used for both interpretive and apologetic purposes” (p. 67), though he does not examine the literature in which this approach has been developed. Instead, he claims that Mormons have liked the so-called “Near Eastern approach” because they wanted a book that would both support and interpret the Bible.36 Hence, “many of those who believe that the Book of Mormon is modern will want to reduce the Near Eastern approach to a biblical approach.” To counter such a move, “Mormon scholars have sought Near Eastern elements in the Book of Mormon which cannot be traced to the Bible in order to prove that the Book of Mormon is ancient. But I believe,” Thomas then opines, that “the important interpretive aids must be sought through the Bible itself” (p. 69). He discounts without argument the various efforts to set out elements in the Book of Mormon that appear to be genuinely ancient and that could not have been drawn from Joseph Smith’s environment by a master forger.

“Non-Mormons have been exploring the nineteenth-century roots of the Book of Mormon since its publication,” but, according to Thomas, they have done little to advance the interpretation of the text. He claims that by seeing the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century fiction that draws upon biblical

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36 From Thomas’s perspective a Near Eastern approach is flawed because it turns out that the Book of Mormon may look like an ancient Near Eastern text simply because that is the way it was made to look by Joseph Smith as he worked with materials available in his immediate environment.

City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1985), or to any of the vast array of literature available through F.A.R.M.S. on the Book of Mormon, including Hugh Nibley’s work, or to studies like Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship* (Provo: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1982). Whatever else Thomas’s essay may be, in its present form it is not a balanced or competent assessment of Book of Mormon scholarship.
materials and attempts to confront theological issues in Joseph Smith's immediate environment, it will be possible to make a significant advance in understanding it. "We are," he claims, "entering the beginning of an era of interpretative historical criticism in Book of Mormon research. This approach will examine all of these inherited [nineteenth-century] sources and demonstrate how the Book of Mormon shapes them for its own purpose" (p. 74). He neglects to consider the possibility that the best interpretative historical criticism may take seriously both the possibility that the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient text and will also draw upon Near Eastern sources as well as American archaeology where appropriate. Thomas strives to show how seeing the book as Joseph Smith's attempt to confront pressing theological issues (pp. 70-74), coupled with something he calls literary criticism, will facilitate reading the Book of Mormon as nineteenth-century theology. What he eventually labels "literary-historical interpretation . . . will lay the foundation for the broad theological approach" (p. 76) he has described. He hopes that the old apologetic approach defending the Book of Mormon as authentic history will be replaced by what he calls an interpretative approach, which turns out to be a new apologetic bent on finding the meaning of the Book of Mormon in such things as nineteenth-century revival language. Such an approach, he feels, will have the "power to mold and modify faith" and thereby supposedly produce "a purer faith and a nobler Mormonism" in which "the scholar's word will be one of those guiding the church's future" (p. 76). Thomas's predictions and ambitions seem quite unlikely and unreal.

37 In 1983, in an essay entitled "Revival Language in the Book of Mormon," Sunstone 8/3 May-June 1983): 19-25, at 19, Thomas ventured his own full-scale "literary-historical interpretation" of the Book of Mormon grounded on the assumption that it is nineteenth-century fiction. "While magical traditions had some influence on Joseph Smith, I believe," he wrote in 1983, "that a more useful and accurate explanation of the Prophet and the early Church comes from understanding his relationship to revivalism: from revivalism to revelation. This perspective can lead us to a powerful new tool for interpreting the Book of Mormon." His effort should be contrasted with the essays recently assembled in John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., Rediscovering the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1991), or in a number of other studies recently published by F.A.R.M.S.
The Negative Miracle

In reading *Essays on Mormon Scripture*, I am reminded of what Jacob Neusner calls the negative miracle of some religious studies. In 1977, Neusner, distinguished student of “the classics of the Judaic tradition,” or “Judaism in late antiquity, or Judaism in modern times, or American Judaism,” argued that some religious studies specialists “have succeeded in performing a negative miracle” by taking a “subject, rich in life,” and making it dull by turning it “into a technology.” That “negative miracle” has been accomplished in order to rid the study of religion “of the empty-headed preachers, pastors, and rabbis, and by making a place for people who could teach with a measure of detachment and objectivity.”38 The “preachers” have been “forced still further back into the backwoods, the cavemen of academia. The scholars have inherited the world,” which is at least somewhat perplexing, from Neusner’s perspective.

Neusner insists that those who study religion “are answerable to two juries, the one composed of the subjects we teach, the other, of our students. Yet we hear only the voice of the preferred judges, our colleagues. In the end, the subject will go forward, and the students will bury us, hopefully, with a kaddish, not a curse.” For Neusner, “it is time to ask whether we who have prevailed have perceived the beam in our eye, having pronounced that those of so many others bear motes.” He finds that some who study religion ignore the fact that religion is alive outside the study.

I think this is so because among our colleagues are some who do not really like religion in its living forms, but find terribly interesting religion in its dead ones. That is why an old Christian text, one from the first century, for example, is deemed a worthy subject of scholarship. But a fresh Christian expression (I think in this connection of the *Book of Mormon*) is available principally for ridicule, but never for study. Religious experience in the third century is

fascinating. Religious experience in the twentieth century is frightening or absurd.\(^39\)

Is there a parallel between what Neusner describes and some of what is taking place in Vogel’s book? The answer, in part, is yes: something like what Neusner describes is at work among both the deracinated on the fringes of the Church as also among those “liberals” who have recently gained power over the RLDS—and some of whose essays, as we have seen, are now found in *Essays on Mormon Scripture*. (One important difference between the authors included in Vogel’s book and the scholars about whom Neusner complained is that virtually none of Vogel’s associates has managed to hold permanent positions in academia, Mormon or otherwise.)

Something of both the perspective and quality of the contents of *Essays on Mormon Scripture*, especially on the Book of Mormon, has already been indicated. One of the other previously unpublished essays was written by Vogel and Brent Metcalfe (pp. 187-219). The other original essays in this volume are the work of Edward H. Ashment, known for his dispute with Hugh Nibley (see pp. 221-35). Ashment concludes his speculations about how the Saints ought to abandon the belief that the book of Abraham, book of Moses, and Book of Mormon are restorations of ancient texts, and thereby avoid making those texts “an object of ridicule by unnecessarily archaizing” them (p. 231), with some proof-texting of the passage quoted from Jacob Neusner.\(^40\) Ashment has Neusner hold that

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\(^39\) Ibid., for this and preceding quotations. Neusner also notes that some students of religion devote their energies to the study of religious texts “without for a moment raising their eyes to see, outside their very windows, people who study those same texts but who also believe and in life interpret them as well” (p. 119). For Neusner, “we have moved too far toward the pretense that there is a science of religions, even adopting the jargon and obfuscation of pseudo-sciences. We have forgotten the thing we study” (p. 119).

\(^40\) Ashment turns Neusner into a “biblical scholar,” which is only a part of how Neusner views himself. In addition, while Ashment is disdainful of Hugh Nibley, Neusner refers to his own “esteem and respect” for Nibley, whom he describes as “a scholar of religion who, when he receives his audience, will be seen as one of the fecund intellects of the study of religion in our century.” See Neusner’s “Why No New Judaisms in the Twentieth Century?” in John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake
an old Christian text, one from the first century, for example, is deemed a worthy subject of scholarship [by historians of religion]. But a fresh Christian expression (I think in this connection of the Book of Mormon) is available principally for ridicule, but never for study. Religious experience in the third century is fascinating. Religious experience in the twentieth century [or the nineteenth] is frightening or absurd. (p. 230)

Ashment simply misreads Neusner's statement, and in so doing he also seems to have failed to follow his own laudable rule about reading texts as far as possible in context (pp. 230-31). Why? Neusner seems to have provided the answer, which applies with equal force to the essays by Curtis, Lindgren, and Thomas (which have already been examined) when he complained about those who have a detached interest in religion. Such writers fail to take seriously the texts that fascinate them because they were "raised in religious settings, mastered the tradition but gave up the faith, and, balancing their diverse ambivalences, chose the study of religions as a satisfying way of serving as a religious authority without bearing religious responsibilities." Ashment's use of Neusner's essay turns out to be symptomatic of much of the work reprinted in Essays on Mormon Scripture, and it may be an indication of what Vogel has in mind when he describes the contents of his book as not having been "guided by institutional imperatives" (p. viii).

**Dissonance over Faith and Historicity**

Ashment's arguments against the historical authenticity of the book of Abraham are not new. Virtually all of the technical arguments advanced by Ashment in his attack on Nibley's views on the historicity of the book of Abraham appear to have been anticipated by H. Michael Marquardt, an inveterate anti-Mormon publicist. Ashment has added to the kinds of arguments...
advanced by Marquardt some speculation about dissonance management that he has taken from Robert P. Carroll's work on prophecy in the Bible. However, Carroll is simply not making the point that Ashment is attempting to make, but is, instead, concerned with figuring out how peoples, within the biblical narrative, seem to have dealt with what may have appeared to them to be failures of prophecy, and hence he is concerned with the beginnings of the interpretation of sacred texts within those texts themselves. Ashment makes Carroll's talk about dissonance and bolstering and so forth serve quite a different purpose; he adopts from Carroll the terminology of the well-known social-psychological theory of cognitive dissonance in an effort to buttress his argument against the historicity of the book of Abraham (and the Book of Mormon).

But there is an irony in Ashment's having done that, for what he may not sense is his own dissonance management in his struggle against the book of Abraham and Book of Mormon. He seems troubled by the kinds of arguments presented by Nibley, and with his own revisionist orthodoxy threatened, he seems to have fashioned his own mode of dissonance management. He seems to manage his own discomfort by scorning the arguments and evidences Nibley has assembled that show parallels in the literature of the ancient world with the contents of the book of Abraham. Ashment engages in what might be called "bolstering" as he brushes that evidence aside (see pp. 229-31, 251), alluding, instead, to the "apparent antipathy against scholarship" (p. 230) that he attributes to Nibley.

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Book of Abraham, introduction by Dee Jay Nelson (Sandy, UT: Printed and Published by the Author, 1975).

To support himself, Ashment again misreads a text. Ashment is annoyed by Nibley’s claim that “the only ‘really effective means of testing any method [is] by the results that it produces’ ” (p. 230). Nibley argues that Joseph Smith foreclosed a direct examination of how he was able to produce the book of Abraham by claiming that it was done by divine revelation. There is no way of probing directly the processes of revelation. Instead, according to Nibley, Joseph Smith places the whole thing beyond any direct examination and criticism, but leaves wide open the really effective means of testing any method, which is by the results it produces. The results in this case are a formidable corpus of purportedly ancient records which can be tested as such.

Nibley appeals to the abundance of old texts purportedly relating to Abraham that can be compared with the book of Abraham. “Yet to this day,” according to Nibley, “the critics insist on confining their efforts strictly to an expose of Joseph Smith’s method, while avoiding any discussion of the results with almost hysterical touchiness.” Ashment charges that Nibley adopts “a Machiavellian approach” (p. 230), whatever that is, by looking at the results rather than directly at method. It is not clear what Machiavelli has to do with any of this, for Nibley merely compares what Joseph Smith actually produced, however it was that he was able to do it, with what can be turned up in the ancient world about Abraham. He finds a store of ancient lore similar to the book of Abraham. And it is not easy to explain how Joseph Smith could have accomplished such a feat without divine assistance. Ashment claims that his own speculation about the so-called Kirtland Egyptian papers leads to the conclusion that Joseph Smith could not and hence did not translate Egyptian. Writers like Ashment (and Marquardt, Richard P. Howard, 45

43 Ashment is here quoting Nibley’s The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975), 53.
44 Ibid.
and Dee Jay Nelson) seem to have ignored the results—the actual contents of the book of Abraham—by not asking whether anything in that text matches what can be found in the literature from portions of the ancient world. As Ashment’s essay shows, Nibley is right about results being the proper test of a method, and he is also right about the touchiness of the critics of Joseph Smith.

Like many of the authors whose essays appear in Essays on Mormon Scripture, Ashment strives to distinguish truth from historicity in an effort to warrant the rejection of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, as well as the books of Abraham and Moses. To accomplish this feat he must assume that faith does not have historical contents—for instance, faith must not have as condition or object an unequivocal resurrection of Jesus who also really appeared to his immediate disciples or later to the Nephites and eventually to Joseph Smith—and hence ultimately faith has neither objects nor grounding.

The missing link for such an argument is provided by RLDS Church Historian Richard P. Howard’s insistence that revelation is thoroughly non-propositional.46 Borrowing

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46 A few Latter-day Saint writers influenced by strains of Protestant liberalism have also shown a fascination with the notion that revelation is non-propositional. For example, prophets, from Hutchinson’s perspective, generate “myths” out of their “imaginations,” which he also describes as “the casting of theology in story form” (see Anthony Hutchinson, “A Mormon Midrash? LDS Creation Narrative Reconsidered,” Dialogue 21/4 [Winter 1988]: 11-74, at 16). He then explains that myth so understood “is a positive, helpful term” that “biblical theologians use to better understand how stories mold our hearts and move us in ways not possible by mere propositional teaching” (p. 17). Hutchinson had earlier been attracted to the notion that prophets are merely mystics and hence that revelation is entirely non-propositional. Now he seems to have backed away somewhat from that extreme, indefensible view—a view that can be found in the version of his paper cited by Ashment (see pp. 257 n. 23, 258 nn. 20, 29-30, 32, for citations to Hutchinson’s “A Mormon Midrash: LDS Creation Narratives in Redaction-Critical Perspective,” a paper originally read at the Mormon History Association meetings in Omaha in May 1983). In the published version of this paper Hutchinson admits, though reluctantly, that there must be at least some propositional component in divine revelation which stands at the very heart of the Christian message, partly because there can be no real faith without propositional content that links faith to reality,
categories from Liberal Protestant theology, Howard claims that the idea that divine revelation to prophets involves, provides, or includes information—propositions that are simply or unequivocally true—about divine things (that there is a God who sent his son to earth to offer a last great sacrifice for sin, that Jesus of Nazareth did and said certain things, suffered for sin, was killed and then later was resurrected, and so forth) is a false notion of revelation because it implies the dreaded mistakes of holding that the Bible is inerrant and prophets infallible.47

presumably because faith needs content or it becomes mere sentimentality or emotional froth, or one has adopted a consistent mysticism in which the "knower" must remain silent because whatever is known is essentially ineffable. Hence he now holds that "the power of a myth about redemption through Christ crucified and resurrected . . . seems directly dependent on whether Jesus in fact died and then bodily reappeared to his disciples. Similarly, one may recognize a non- or supra-propositional truth in religious claims and discourse without lapsing into an irreligious positivism or some kind of sentimental theological liberalism emptied of all propositional content" (p. 17 n. 3). Vogel points out that "neither the authors nor the editor [of Essays on Mormon Scripture] necessarily agree with the views and conclusions reached in all of the essays." How ought one to understand the "sentimental theological liberalism" pushed by RLDS writers like Howard, Spencer, and Russell? When it comes to certain crucial issues, Hutchinson also seems tainted by what he identifies as theological liberalism, since he denies that Mormon faith has anything to do with whether Joseph Smith was visited by angels or whether the Book of Mormon is true; his propositional content of faith is restricted to some statements about Jesus. And yet he still advances a theory of revelation which removes a genuine propositional component from his notion of what constitutes divine revelation, at least as revelation is believed by the Saints to have a distinctive Mormon element such as might be associated with the Book of Mormon. See Hutchinson, "The Word of God Is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Fiction," transcript made and circulated by Alan Goff of Hutchinson's 1987 Washington Sunstone Symposium paper, May 15-16, 1987.

47 See 5, 7, 13, 15 for Howard's use of such labels. Lancaster advances an ideology similar to that of Howard and concludes that "the inspiration [Joseph] Smith received involved general concepts rather than literal information" (p. 108). Where that speculation leads can be seen in the essays by Spencer and Russell, who employ liberal Protestant slogans (pp. 19-22, 26, 43, 46-9, 51) which are also found in Ashment's concluding essay. For instances of the use of these slogans, see the following: inerrancy (pp. 5, 7, 13, 254, 255) or infallibility, and fundamentalism (pp. 48, 51, 188, 248, 251, 254-55). These slogans assist the effort to advance in a
Howard also argues that Joseph Smith was devoted to a "propositional revelation doctrine" (5) and that he was also deeply confused about the matter, since some theologians have preferred to describe what they understand by the word "revelation" as an "encounter" with the divine that does not yield propositions. By propositional revelation Howard says that he means the "divine revealing of certain knowledge or information about God and his church, usually in the form of propositions or Mormon context an essentially liberal Protestant reading of scripture. When such theories are applied to texts like the Book of Mormon, the historical authenticity of those texts is compromised. An additional instance of slogan-thinking found in Essays on Mormon Scripture is the constant complaint against literal interpretations of scripture (pp. 19, 20, 21, 22, 31, 43, 47, 48, 49, 52, 56, 74, 159, 188, 212). Vogel, for example, after telling his readers what the Hebrew for firmament "literally" means, asserts that such "insights, however, have been challenged by biblical literalists not because such views challenge biblical inspiration but rather because they challenge fundamentalist preconceptions about the nature of revelation. Literalists not only hold the notion of verbal inspiration but also assume that for revelation to be true, it must contain unique and new concepts which transcend time and space—any environmental dependency would be proof of human origin" (pp. 188-89). But notice that in order to make the point, Vogel has to insist on what a word (and hence a passage) "means literally." Does this mean that those whom Vogel labels "literalists" are not interested in the "literal" meaning of the language they find in the Bible? Then why call them literalists? It appears that whenever "non-literalists" want to make a point, they begin talking about the literal meaning of the scriptures. See, for example, Hutchinson (p. 159), for an illustration of the point. This suggests that there is considerable equivocation taking place in the use of the term "literal." Though revisionists sometimes like to quote James Barr when it serves their purposes (see Ashment, pp. 254-55, 256 n. 6, 262 nn. 58 and 60, 264 n. 79 and 83), they neglect his subtle treatment of the problems posed by appeals to literal and non-literal meaning. See, for example, James Barr, "Literality," Faith and Philosophy 6/4 (October 1989): 412-27. There is simply no way one can avoid the literal meaning of a text, and no way that meaning may not at times be highly symbolic or metaphorical. Sorting out such matters is very difficult, however, and much depends upon the care and skill with which it is done. Hence, what Barr shows, among other things, is the wholesale confusion among those who talk about literal and non-literal meaning. One should expect such confusion when a political debate is taking place, as is clearly the case with Russell's essay (pp. 43-54), which carries the title "Beyond Literalism," though he neglects to sort out what that label might possibly mean in a Mormon context.
doctrines” (1). It is not exactly clear what he means by “encounter,” nor is it clear why such “encounters” with the divine could not yield true propositions, unless those “encounters” are entirely mystical.

Howard’s main objection to Joseph Smith’s understanding of revelation is that he either changed or authorized changes in the texts that report those revelations. But it is not entirely clear exactly what point Howard is attempting to make by drawing attention to the well-known fact that a few (mostly grammatical) changes were made in the published editions of the Book of Mormon and Book of Commandments. Why that matter is related to the question of propositional revelation is rather opaque.

How does Ashment deal with exegetes and historians who see things differently than he does? Much like current RLDS “theologians,” he is critical of the traditional position of Latter-day Saints because he sees it as, among other things, a manifestation of “a lack of scholarship.” And “this lack of scholarship becomes especially apparent when LDS authors can appeal only to post-exilic, early Christian, or medieval stories about Adam, Enoch, Abraham, or Moses in their efforts to prove the historicity of the non-biblical portions of the ‘Selections from the Book of Moses’ or the Book of Abraham” (p. 251). In stating it this way he avoids confronting the central issue raised by the parallels between an old literature about Abraham and the book of Abraham. And he may also be begging the question in the way he manipulates the term “scholarship” by charging that the views of those with whom he

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48 Some who draw upon Howard’s essay are not always clear about his arguments, being unaware that he is talking about the mode of revelation. For example, according to Bill Russell, Howard and others suggest that “the object of Christian faith is not assent to propositions, but Christian discipleship.” See Russell, “A Further Inquiry into the Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” 26, and 27 n. 46, or “The Historicity of the Book of Mormon,” in Restoration Studies II, 198, 200 n. 24, where he cites Howard’s essay now reprinted in Essays on Mormon Scripture. Of course, if one is attempting to get clear on the meaning of faith, as that term is used in the scriptures, then it is proper to say that the word ultimately identifies trust, specifically trust in God, and not mere assent to some propositions. But it would not be possible to trust God, if there were no such being. And we would have no reason for such trust if certain propositions about God were not true, for example, that he loves us and sent his son to atone for our sins, and so forth, all of which involve propositions.
VOGEL, THE WORD OF GOD (MIDGLEY) 291

disagrees manifest a "lack of scholarship." Since it might be thought perverse to claim that the texts Nibley draws upon for parallels in his studies of the book of Abraham (and the Book of Mormon or the book of Moses) are simply not relevant to the question of their historical authenticity, Ashment's point might be that such parallels as can be shown to exist between, for example, the book of Abraham and an old literature virtually unknown in Joseph Smith's day, though they seem to provide support for the historical authenticity of the texts Joseph Smith gave us, are not sufficiently ancient to provide what might be called a final historical "proof." But hardly anyone, including Nibley, would deny such a point.

It may be true, as Ashment claims, that "LDS authors can appeal only" to this and that old text for parallels to support the historicity of texts like the book of Abraham, but such texts provide a window to the past, and what they show is not entirely insubstantial. Such historical arguments as those Ashment rejects, of course, do not constitute a final proof, since, as he recognizes, history is not an arena where absolute proofs are likely to be found. But the parallels Nibley identifies raise some interesting questions and hence would seem to require an explanation. However, Ashment declines to explain how Joseph Smith could have come up with anything that looks authentically ancient. Instead, he apparently sees in texts like the book of Abraham merely signs of Joseph Smith's imaginative reworking of the gossip floating around his own environment.

Disarray over Historical Method

In order to charter his stance, Ashment advances a view of historical method, though he does not seem to realize that there are significant differences of opinion over methodological issues in dealing with the past. His view, while still held by some, is not without criticisms, nor is it in ascendancy. His assumption about how historians both can and must let evidence (or facts) do the talking runs counter to the best recent thought about reading texts, for it is a crude and now rather widely rejected positivism that assumes that there is much of anything evident apart from theories, assumptions, or formal or informal preunderstandings. Those familiar with the discussions of historical method now tend to hold that such theories, assumptions, and preunderstandings are necessarily brought to texts by the exegete or historian, consequently making for them
something evident in those texts, and thereby opening a window to the past.

Ashment objects to what he labels "obscurantist works" that (1) provide either reasons for believing that the Book of Mormon is historically authentic or (2) attempt to explicate the meaning of that text on the assumption that it is genuine history. But it may be that what is obscurantist is a denial that something genuinely historical is at stake. Why is that so? Ashment suggests that a text like the Book of Mormon may contain what he calls a true "theology" without being historically authentic, but he has not shown either what that "truth" could possibly be or why anyone would be interested in it, if it were to turn out that the Book of Mormon is merely nineteenth-century fiction. Since he seems to want to claim that a "theology" might survive the rejection of the historical authenticity of a text like the Book of Mormon, it would seem necessary for him to set forth precisely the authority, contents, and grounds that such a "theology" might have that would presumably survive his attack on the historical authenticity of large portions of the Mormon canon.

Finally, Ashment contends that to deny his view that the book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon are Joseph Smith's fiction is to reject "modern theology," by which he seems to mean some of the presuppositions behind or conclusions of liberal Protestant speculation about the Bible, some of which implicitly or explicitly deny the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, making certain crucial portions of the biblical narrative ahistorical and in that sense mythical. Clearly, one of the functions of the Book of Mormon is to teach the Saints not to go whoring after seemingly clever theories that debunk the grounds and contents of faith. Furthermore, according to Ashment, to hold that a text like the Book of Mormon is a genuine ancient history is to adopt a crude Protestant Fundamentalist belief in the inerrancy of the scriptures, although he neglects to explain how this necessarily follows from anything he has set forth, nor what this means, especially in a Mormon context.

"While the historian," according to Ashment, "seeks to base his conclusions empirically on the evidence, the fundamentalist apologist, having already arrived at his conclusions according to his faith, presumptuously admits as relevant only those facts that support his conclusions" (p. 251). Leaving aside the question of whether there can be "evidence" without a theory that makes something evident, Ashment seems
to have done something similar to what he finds fault with by brushing aside parallels between the book of Abraham and certain older texts clearly bearing on the Abraham question. And what exactly is a "fundamentalist apologist"? There are many possibilities—more than one might expect. For example, if the historian were a Freudian or a Marxist, would we anticipate that such a one would see the past through his theoretical or ideological lens? Obviously we would. Would there be any account of the past that would not be some particular account, with a set of assumptions at work within it and with some theory being defended? Obviously not. Why then not allow a Christian or Mormon account of some portion of the past?

One might hold that such a faith necessarily corrupts historical judgment. But that would be true only if one had some independent way of knowing that a Christian or Mormon faith was simply untrue. Does not every account of the past involve theory, assumptions, categories, explanations? If a presuppositionless exegesis is impossible, and hence no account of the past possible without employing background assumptions and implicit or explicit theory, then to exclude the perspective flowing from a particular faith on the grounds that the account somehow corrupts the story to be told is to beg the important questions.

Ashment appears to see things otherwise: he asserts that the "fundamentalist apologist," that is, the believer,

views historical methodology as a threat, because from his perspective it might cause the "fundamental reconstruction of the faith." He [the fundamentalist apologist] accuses historians, whose writings do not

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49 Ashment labels those whose views he dislikes "fundamentalist apologists," using a vocabulary found in Protestant seminaries, where a battle has been going on over the control of religious communities. Of course, those Latter-day Saints he attacks with such labels do not see themselves in those terms. Instead, they see themselves as doing what historians must do in order to be faithful to the texts that provide the ground for their accounts. When a contest over the meaning of the scriptures is conducted by those who blast away at their opponents with charges of being fundamentalists, literalists, apologists, believers in infallibility and inerrancy, and so forth, the slogans of a political battle within the Protestant world are being called upon within a Mormon context. Since RLDS intellectuals tend to have been indoctrinated in Protestant seminaries and find themselves in a battle much like that going on in the Protestant world, they are ahead of their Latter-day Saint counterparts in the use of such slogans.
support his hermeneutics, of doing just that: “deconstructing and reconstructing the faith.”

But if one begins with a presupposition such as “dead bodies do not come back to life,” this will necessarily lead to the conclusion that Jesus was not resurrected; and to hold this opinion will transform the content and even the possibility of faith. Of course, faith does not need proofs, historical or otherwise, which may be impossible or at least presumptuous from the perspective of the believer. However, it is also the case that faith, which must include the resurrection of Jesus, for a genuine Latter-day Saint—on that issue there can be no equivocation—can be supported with reasons, which involve what is contained in the witness found in the Mormon canon, but not, of course, coerced with proofs. And faith, for Latter-day Saints, thus involves historical content, since, for example, the claim that Jesus is the Christ is at least partly a statement about the past—that one Jesus of Nazareth was crucified and later resurrected, and so forth. Or, to take another example, to begin with the dogma that “you don’t get books from angels and translate them by miracles” will necessarily lead to the conclusion that the Book of Mormon is neither genuine history nor contains an authentic prophetic message. And to either begin with or eventually reach that conclusion clearly alters the content of faith, if it does not destroy its possibility, by simply removing its grounds. The Saints have always seen clearly that Joseph Smith’s prophetic claims necessarily involve claims about what really happened in the past, such as the belief that there actually was a Lehi colony and that a resurrected Jesus actually visited the remnants of that colony. That history is not the arena of final proofs does not mean that faith can have no historical grounding or contents, as Mormon revisionists wrongly assume, since it is

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50 Ashment is quoting language from a talk I gave in 1984 to the Religious Education faculty at BYU. See Louis Midgley, “Faith and History,” in Robert L. Millet, ed., “To Be Learned Is Good, If . . .” (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 219-26, for the published version of the lecture Ashment cites. Previously I had been labelled a “traditionalist.” See Thomas G. Alexander, “Historiography and the New Mormon History: A Historian’s Perspective,” Dialogue 19/3 (Fall 1986): 26, 44-45 n. 5. I am not entirely displeased by such primitive labelling, since I enjoy being a pariah among revisionists bent on altering the Mormon past in order to reconstitute the Church in their own image.
both presumptuous and unnecessary to hold that the object of faith can be demonstrated or proven to be true by historical inquiry alone in the absence of a charism from God.\footnote{51}

Ashment presents a number of details about this and that issue in the interpretation of the Bible, but he neglects to set forth and then defend an argument in anything like a satisfactory manner. He is meticulous about some matters—for example, when he thinks he has caught Nibley in a mistake over some detail—but when it comes to the larger issues, he does not fare very well, especially when he begins to advance his opinions on historical method and on the philosophical issues surrounding the interpretation of texts.

**The Revisionist Agenda**

In 1988, Marvin S. Hill described Dan Vogel as “a disaffected Mormon” who has striven to trace what he considers the actual historical background of the Book of Mormon. Convinced that Joseph Smith wrote the volume, he attributes some of its ideas to Joseph Smith’s money digging experiences and much of the rest to his desire to answer questions about the Indians that had been hotly debated in America since the sixteenth century.\footnote{52}

If Hill is correct, we have an explanation for the bias found in the articles Vogel has assembled in *Essays on Mormon Scripture*. Vogel was incensed by Hill’s remarks,\footnote{53} claiming

53 Dan Vogel, “Don’t Label Me,” *Dialogue* 22/1 (Spring 1989): 5-8. Hill claims that Vogel “tends to be heavily dependent upon Wesley Walters at key points.” See Hill, “The ‘New Mormon History’ Reassessed,” 124. For evidence of such dependence, see Vogel’s *Indian Origins*, 77 nn. 19 and 6., 78 nn. 8-10. Vogel is annoyed by the way Hill places him in his right-center-left classification schema: “to place various historical works into one of three categories—conservative, moderate, and liberal—tends to oversimplify and distort the real situation” (p. 5). Hill actually situates Mormon historians on a “conservative right,” in his own “middle ground,” with anti-Mormons being placed to his “left.” Those he places on the left...}
that the book that was cited as evidence of his anti-Mormon stance did “not deal with the truth claims of the Mormon religion and therefore [he] does not fit Hill’s ‘far left’ category.”

But on this issue, Hill is right about Vogel. Why is that so? The reason is that attacking the historicity of the Book of Mormon cannot be understood as defending Joseph Smith’s prophetic truth claims. But Vogel is correct in claiming that there are some who want to deny the claims upon which that faith rests and yet still appear to remain within the Church. And he finds it advantageous to appear to be setting forth opinions that fall well within the legitimate range of scholarly opinions on Mormon issues. What Vogel has not demonstrated is that his stance involves more than a murky sentimentalism or a confidence game aimed at accomplishing covertly what has not been done directly—namely, eradicating by radical transformation the faith resting on Joseph Smith’s prophetic claims.

In an effort to explain his stance, Vogel claims that “for various reasons an increasing number of faithful Mormons are suggesting that it may be possible to question the Book of Mormon’s historicity and yet maintain a belief in its sacred and inspired nature.”

No doubt some on the fringes of the include Vogel, the late Reverend Wesley P. Walters and Jerald Tanner. Vogel indicates that he generally admires Hill’s work, upon which he seems somewhat dependent. See, for example, Vogel’s Religious Seekers, x, xiii nn. 7-8, 18 n. 22-23, 40, 42 nn. 11 and 25, 43 n. 32, 44 n. 35-36, 47 nn. 68 and 70, 91 n. 14, 93 nn. 46, 49, and 71, 210 nn. 77-78, 215-16, 219 n. 6, 218 nn. 1-2. In this later work, Vogel tends to rely much more heavily upon Hill at crucial points than he does upon Walters (pp. 43 n. 32, 44 nn. 35-36). Vogel appears to yearn to be seen as close to Hill on most issues. Hence, when Hill speaks of his own “middle ground” stance on the writing of Mormon history, Vogel longs to be seen as one of those who is “perhaps just left of center, who are similarly trying to face the past with courage and with faith” (p. 7). But since Hill places some distance between his own “middle ground” Mormon history and that being done by those on his clearly anti-Mormon “left,” Vogel wonders whether “Hill has not retained the old belief that everyone to the left of himself is an enemy of Mormonism seeking to destroy the faith” (p. 7).


55 Vogel, Indian Origins, 71, quoted by Vogel in “Don’t Label Me,” 6. In 1986, in his Indian Origins, 101 n. 1, Vogel drew attention to Sterling M. McMurrin and George D. Smith as examples of authors with Latter-day Saint connections who have been questioning the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. One wonders why Vogel did not also
Mormon community deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon and yet allow portions of it to be somehow "inspiring." But can that be done coherently? Vogel merely labels as "faithful"—though he does not explain how that can be—those who deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Such a tactic seems to beg the crucial question by assuming what needs to be demonstrated. Vogel merely asserts that "to question the Book of Mormon's historicity is not necessarily an attack on the Mormon religion." Here we have the key to revisionist legerdemain in dealing with the Book of Mormon and hence with the historical foundations of Mormon faith.

Hill also drew attention to the close relationship between Vogel and the late Wesley P. Walters, whom Vogel finds it necessary to describe as "a well-known opponent of Mormonism." Vogel is incensed because, in describing the Reverend Walters, Hill has taken "advantage of the existing prejudice in many Mormon minds towards their evangelical opponents." This statement suggests that Vogel no longer has an aversion to the "evangelical opponents" of the Church. Of course the Saints have a predisposition to reject the premises of their "opponents."

There is evidence of what Hill sees as Vogel's anti-Mormon proclivities. Vogel's first literary venture was an essay entitled "Is the Book of Mormon a Translation? A Response to Edward H. Ashment," which was published in a magazine entitled Journal of Pastoral Practice. It was prefaced by the following statement by the Reverend Walters:

Dan Vogel, a former member and missionary of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, over a year ago made the difficult decision to leave the Mormon Church. He is presently considering the claims of Christianity. Meanwhile he is putting into writing some of the internal conflicts of Mormonism that helped shape his decision to leave the LDS Church. The following article is one of the best

include Fawn M. Brodie and Dale L. Morgan in this list, since their views were not entirely unlike those of the writers he cited. See Gary F. Novak, "Naturalistic Assumptions and the Book of Mormon," BYU Studies 30/3 (Summer 1990): 21-40, for a careful examination of the position of Brodie, Morgan, and some others who have advanced various naturalistic explanations of the Book of Mormon.

56 Vogel, "Don't Label Me," 6.
discussions we have seen to date on the problems involved in Joseph Smith's claim to have 'translated' the Book of Mormon. We are pleased to make this material available to readers of the Journal.58

Vogel recently claimed that his literary ventures do “not deal with the truth claims of the Mormon religion” because something he calls the “metaphysical aspects of religion” cannot be tested by historical means. With this assertion in place, Vogel insists that his Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon “does not deal with the truth claims of the Mormon religion,” though he concedes that in his conclusion he explores “the possible implications of my research on the historicity of the Book of Mormon.”59 Vogel thus insists that by attacking the historicity of the Book of Mormon he is not necessarily rejecting what he calls “the Mormon religion.” Like a number of those whose essays he included in Essays on Mormon Scripture, Vogel attempts to separate “the question of the book’s historicity from [the] truth claims of the Mormon religion.”

But Vogel is attempting to test historically the claims upon which Mormon faith rests, for that faith clearly includes and is grounded upon a complex story that is open to historical inquiry.60 Without a real Lehi colony, how could there have

57 Ibid., 7.
58 Vogel, “Is the Book of Mormon a Translation? A Response to Edward H. Ashment,” Journal of Pastoral Practice 5/3 (1982): 75-91. This note is found on the facing page to Vogel’s essay, which does not carry a page number. The Journal of Pastoral Practice commenced publication in 1977 and for six years included a section entitled “Para Christianity,” edited by the Reverend Walters, who frequently included his own anti-Mormon polemics, as well as those of H. Michael Marquardt and Rodger I. Anderson. For those unfamiliar with the Journal of Pastoral Practice, it should be noted that, in addition to such engaging features as the one provided by the Reverend Walters, the magazine regularly carries medical advice by a Dr. Robert D. Smith in a section entitled “Medicine and Health.” In the number in which Vogel published his initial attack on the Book of Mormon, Dr. Smith published an article entitled “Irritable Bowel Syndrome.” Other items in the same vein have dealt with such topics as “Chronic Diarrhea,” “Behavior and Food Coloring,” “Posture” (in children), as well as a number of articles on headaches.
60 See Midgley, “Faith and History,” 219-26 for an elaboration of this point.
been a real resurrected Nephite angel who later visited with Joseph Smith, or real plates, all of which are part of the controlling narrative of the Mormon faith? Hence, whether the Book of Mormon is authentic ancient history and also whether the story of visits of heavenly messengers is accurate are questions within the province of historical inquiry. What this means is that to compromise in a radical way one essential aspect of the founding narrative calls into question all of the other elements. Conversely, to find reasons to believe that, for example, the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history provides justification for the account of its coming forth. In any event, Mormon faith is not speculative, that is, it does not rest on Vogel’s abstruse “metaphysical aspects,” whatever that language may mean.

A disenchanted Vogel once found a patron in the late Reverend Walters. Vogel may now have discerned that association with notorious anti-Mormons, whose diatribes can be heard as part of the “Electronic Church,” is not likely to have an impact on the Mormon community. Be that as it may, he has found a new patron in George D. Smith, owner of Signature Books, who seems to have gone through a somewhat similar shift from his previous, more blatant forms of anti-Mormon polemics to a smoother, less abrasive and less direct approach attempting to mold and transform the Mormon faith. Like those Vogel calls “evangelical opponents” of the Church, whose crusades consist of open attacks on the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s prophetic claims, part of Smith’s effort involves showing that the Book of Mormon is not an authentic ancient history, that is, not simply true.

But, sensing that he is not likely to be taken seriously if his revisionist agenda were widely known, Vogel now poses as one

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61 Prior to his death, the Reverend Walters was featured attacking Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon as recently as October 1990 on D. James Kennedy’s unctuous radio program called “Truths That Transform,” merchandised through his Coral Ridge Ministries, in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

interested in making available what the cover of *Essays on Mormon Scripture* calls "timely and thought-provoking discussions of Mormon canon." The premise behind such accounts is that Joseph Smith, either knowingly or unknowingly, produced fiction, inspired or otherwise, rather than an authentic ancient history and the word of God. When the Book of Mormon is read in this way, that is, as "theology" cast in fictional-archaeomorphic form, the sources from which Joseph Smith presumably borrowed as he crafted the fictional Book of Mormon are said to be themes found in the literature of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, whenever these sources are interpreted to have religious significance, Vogel and his associates find them to be largely sectarian Protestant in one form or another.63

In putting together *Essays on Mormon Scripture*, Vogel seems to have intentionally selected papers that challenge the traditional understanding of revelation found within the Mormon canon. These writers tend to seek to replace the traditional understanding of revelation (and of the prophetic claims upon which the Church rests) with what Vogel quaintly describes as a more "refined" understanding of the "human aspects of prophets, revelations, or scriptures." He claims (without giving any proof) that to make such a shift "does not detract from religion, as some traditionalists fear. On the contrary, what cultural and environmental studies challenge are simplistic assumptions about the nature of revelation" (p. viii). What this amounts to is the claim that Mormon scripture is not in any genuine sense the word of God, but merely language generated by cultural and environmental forces.

The ideology being advanced is articulated in the essay Vogel produced with Metcalfe. They end their article by asking about the implications of their opining

for the nature of inspiration, revelation, and scripture?
It should be clear that the revelatory process is more

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complex than simplistic verbal models allow. Some Mormon scholars have therefore suggested models of revelation which account for all the aspects encountered in scripture. (p. 211)

Vogel and Metcalfe have in mind a theory of revelation currently being advanced by Anthony A. Hutchinson. Of course, they strive to put the best possible light on Hutchinson’s speculation about prophets and revelation.64

Hutchinson’s theory about what constitutes divine revelation allows him to claim that Joseph Smith, either knowingly or unknowingly, generated out of his own environment or cultural setting the story of heavenly messengers, the Book of Mormon, the book of Moses (including the Enoch materials), and the book of Abraham. He claims that doing that sort of thing can be seen as constituting “divine revelation.” Hutchinson’s premise is that what was produced by the presumably dissociative Joseph Smith must now be thought of as “inspired” and is really all there ever has been in the way of prophecy and revelation.

The essays reprinted in Essays on Mormon Scripture are neither among the best work currently available on the Mormon canon, as the paper by Curtis clearly illustrates, nor on the other topics discussed by the authors whose essays are included. For example, if Anthony A. Hutchinson’s speculation warrants reprinting, why not include one of his more substantial efforts?65

64 See n. 46, above, for an account of Hutchinson’s reduction of revelation to dissociative myth production. See Midgley, “The Challenge of Historical Consciousness,” 543-44, 549-51, for an account of Hutchinson’s efforts to reduce revelation to instances of something like medieval mysticism.
65 Vogel has reprinted Hutchinson’s “Prophetic Foreknowledge,” which originally appeared in Sunstone 11/4 (July 1987): 13-20. One wonders why Hutchinson’s “LDS Approaches to the Holy Bible,” Dialogue 15/1 (Spring 1982): 100-124, or his “A Mormon Midrash?” were not included in Essays on Mormon Scripture, since both of them fit within its ideological parameters, and both are more substantial than the essay that was reprinted. In addition, both of these essays are cited in Essays on Mormon Scripture. For “LDS Approaches,” see 158 n. 4, and for “A Mormon Midrash?” see 219 n. 89. In addition, Ashment, in his previously unpublished essay, draws upon Hutchinson’s “A Mormon Midrash?” for support five times, though oddly he cites a draft rather than the published version, which raises questions concerning the care with which Essays on
Hutchinson advances what might be seen as a version of Nehorism, for he does not, like Korihor, flatly deny that prophets could possibly know the future—that would involve a dogmatic atheism, which he rejects. Instead, he argues that the notion that prophets sometimes speak of genuine future events is an inadequate image of prophetic foreknowledge since not a single example of such a power can be found. A remarkable consensus on this point exists among biblical scholars, both those who deny the possibility of miraculously foreknowledge and those who confess the possibility of miraculously bestowed objective knowledge of the future. (p. 30)

For Hutchinson, God could reveal the future, but has simply never done so. He maintains that such a view "does not

Mormon Scripture was edited. Assuming that Ashment may not know that "A Mormon Midrash?" has been published, why would not the editor of this volume make the necessary adjustments, since wholesale changes were made in almost every essay included in Essays on Mormon Scripture? Vogel has been active in modifying the endnotes of the essays he has republished. In a number of instances he managed to insert (or have inserted) in essays by Lindgren, Thomas, and Curtis citations to his own work. See 62 n. 2, 77 nn. 4 and 6, 93 n. 36, 78 n. 14, 96 n. 36, 216 n. 53, 217 n. 66. This constitutes the most persistent (and also, as it turns out, embarrassing) updating of secondary sources cited in the Essays on Mormon Scripture. In two instances Vogel has allowed the following language to introduce the citation of his own work: "For a good discussion of ... , see," which is followed by reference to something he has published (see pp. 77 n. 4, 93 n. 6).

66 Another instance in which this volume quotes out of context appears in the "Epilogue" to Essays on Mormon Scripture, which consists of three separate passages culled from two books by Elder John A. Widtsoe, to which has been given the title "Search the Scriptures Critically" (p. 265). If Elder Widtsoe's remarks are instructive, why not include all of what he said on the subject, rather than cut and paste his words? The statement by Elder Widtsoe has been fashioned as follows: (1) language from the introductory passage to a chapter entitled "Higher Criticism," from his In Search of Truth: Comments on the Gospel and Modern Thought (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1930), 81-82; (2) a portion of his answer to the question: "Is the Bible Translated Correctly?" from his Evidences and Reconciliations: Aids to Faith in a Modern Day (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 98-99; and (3) an additional passage from In Search of Truth, 90-92. What is included is presented in such a way that the reader may not realize
impeach the inspiration of the Book of Mormon nor compromise its scriptural status" (p. 39), though he neglects to show how either of these positions follows from what he mentions. Instead, he defends his stance with the further claim that "the Book of Mormon, regardless of its reliability as historical evidence, teaches that God does reveal himself" (p. 40), though again he neglects to give an explanation of how a work of nineteenth-century fiction, filled with theological overtones woven into a narrative by a dissociative scryer, could reveal anything about divine things, even inadvertently. In order to get to something like the proper opinion on the scriptures, the Saints should now, according to Hutchinson, begin "reformulating our understanding of our faith" (p. 41). The implication is that we

that Elder Widtsoe contradicted the controlling assumptions at work in Essays on Mormon Scripture by insisting that "the attempt to ascribe to the Bible a purely human origin has not been successful." Contrary to Anthony A. Hutchinson's thesis in "Prophetic Foreknowledge" (pp. 29-42), Elder Widtsoe argued for a genuine "predictive element" in the Bible, quoting someone to the effect that "no efforts of the higher criticism have been able altogether to disguise the fact that there are predictions of events in it, and fulfillments of them at later dates" (In Search of Truth, 92-93). He also argued that the reality (and, by implication, the nature) of God are the real issues that must distinguish a Latter-day Saint approach to biblical criticism from much gentile scholarship:

Acceptance of God as our Father under whose direction we are upon earth, leads to one use of the facts of Biblical criticism; rejection of God leads to quite another. Higher criticism as an issue in modern thought is essentially concerned with the question of the existence of God. Many of those who have pursued higher criticism have done so to find support for their atheism, and the views of these have been heard more widely than those emanating from believers in God. The results of all sound scholarship are welcomed by Latter-day Saints. Higher criticism is not excluded. To us, however, the most certain fact, the best authenticated and most demonstrable, is the existence of God. This knowledge can not be laid aside in any human research.

Elder Widtsoe also affirmed that "the scriptures have been given by God and under His direction; but in the language of man." "Naturally, therefore, in outside form there may be many errors, but in inner substance the eternal truth is preserved for those who can read the language understandingly" (In Search of Truth, 82-84). These and other statements are relevant to the controlling theme of Essays on Mormon Scripture.
will then have a new, different and better faith, with Hutchinson pointing the way. But, recast in this way, the faith would no longer carry authoritative claims or make genuinely binding demands or promises.

Vogel and Metcalfe claim that there is, in addition to that provided by Hutchinson, "another term to describe Joseph Smith's methodology," as they understand such things, which they label "prophetic eclecticism," and by which they mean "an inspired use of environment. 'Prophetic eclecticism' allows for the dynamic, inspired, or creative exchange between a prophet and his cultural environment. It allows the prophet to reshape concepts from the wider cultural setting into a new whole and helps to explain the presence of both similar and unique elements encountered in prophetic utterance" (p. 211). They ask:

Where does this leave inspiration and revelation? Where they have always been: in the realm of subjective judgment. We are free to explore the historical and human aspects of scripture, but determining whether a concept is 'inspired' or the 'word of God' must always remain purely individualistic. When we realize that there is no empirical evidence either for or against scriptural inspiration, we begin to avail ourselves of a more sensitive, responsible scholarship as well as a more honest faith.67 (pp. 211-12)

What should one make of the argument "that there is no empirical evidence either for or against scriptural inspiration?" Such a claim makes sense if and only if one has already decided that revelation cannot possibly teach about reality. But the Book of Mormon clearly claims to do just that. And hence anything

that can be said either for or against that claim either supports or detracts from that claim. One only needs a novel definition of prophets and revelation when one has already decided that the Book of Mormon is not simply true, that there was no Lehi colony and hence no plates and no real angel instructing Joseph Smith. But to advance such a theory is not in any fundamental way different from the stance that has always been taken by despisers of the restored gospel. It leaves the restoration exactly where the enemies of the Church have always wanted it—repudiated.

The Signature Gift

With the publication of *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, second in a series of books on Mormon doctrine, scripture and thought,68 Signature Books again manifests a fondness for a catchy title masking the real contents of a book. It is instructive to compare *Essays on Mormon Scripture* with *Line upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*,69 a book which seems to rest on the assumption that what the Saints believe to have been revealed over time to Joseph Smith was inconsistent and discontinuous, and hence not, as the title of the


book would seem to indicate, a coherent setting forth of an essentially consistent body of teachings bit by bit. Instead, according to some of the articles in this anthology, the revelations to Joseph Smith between 1830 and 1835 were similar to Protestant teachings found in the sectarian environment, and after 1835 a reconstruction of Mormon doctrine replaced the pessimism presumably found in the Book of Mormon (and the Doctrine and Covenants) with an optimistic and progressive\(^{70}\) (or liberal)\(^{71}\) theology. *Essays on Mormon Doctrine* thus tends to challenge the received opinion that the restoration of the gospel of Jesus Christ involved a “line upon line” coherent unfolding.

Furthermore, Dan Vogel is not the only favorite of the late Wesley P. Walters to find a home with Signature Books. We might also mention Rodger I. Anderson, who was unknown in the Mormon intellectual community until his recent attempt to breathe life into the affidavits manufactured by a fellow named Doctor Philastus Hurlbut. Hurlbut was, for a short time, a Mormon, but was excommunicated in 1833 and turned against Joseph Smith.\(^{72}\) The cover to *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined*, published by Signature Books, reports that Roger I. Anderson is “a native of Salt Lake City and graduate in philosophy from the University of Utah, [and] currently resides in Oklahoma. He is a freelance writer specializing in nineteenth-century religions.”\(^{73}\) This is not the entire story, for Anderson is a “career apostate” whose publications include at least one anti-Mormon tract written from


\(^{71}\) See O. Kendall White, Jr., *Mormon Neo-Orthodoxy: A Crisis Theology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987), which was originally written as a 1967 Master’s thesis at the University of Utah, entitled “The Social Psychological Basis of Mormon New-Orthodoxy.”

\(^{72}\) Hurlbut seems to have provided E. D. Howe with a portion of the materials spread to the world in his *Mormonism Unvailed* (Painesville, OH: privately printed, 1834).

\(^{73}\) See Richard Lloyd Anderson’s review of Rodger I. Anderson’s *Joseph Smith’s New York Reputation Reexamined* on pages 52-80 of the present volume.
a Fundamentalist Protestant stance. Anderson ends this earlier denunciation against Mormonism with what he calls

a word of personal testimony. I was born and raised in the Mormon Church, and served a two year mission in the central states area. It was during this mission that I began an intensive and prayerful study of Mormon theology and history. I found their teachings to be internally inconsistent, their history greatly falsified, and their doctrines in radical disagreement with the Bible. After much opposition and internal struggle, I finally left the Mormon Church. Two years later I became a Christian. Christ lifted me from the errors and self-satisfaction of Mormonism and gave me an assurance of personal salvation.74

Unlike the authors in Essays on Mormon Scripture, Anderson is a firm believer in what he explicitly describes as the infallibility and inerrancy of the Bible.75 But like a number of those whose articles are included in Essays on Mormon Scripture, Anderson insists that "the Book of Mormon is obviously a product of its own times."76

A further indication of the agenda of Signature Books is the fact that Rodger I. Anderson's effort to resuscitate the old tales about Joseph Smith was first published in the Journal of Pastoral Practice under the sponsorship of Wesley P. Walters.77

74 Rodger I. Anderson, The Bible and Mormonism (Grand Rapids, MI: Faith, Prayer & Tract League, n.d.), 23. This item was apparently published during the 1970s.
75 Ibid., 4, 18.
76 Ibid., 6-7. He cites as evidence for that claim (p. 13) the famous passage from Alexander Campbell's Delusions: An Analysis of the Book of Mormon (Boston: Greene, 1832); and Walter Franklin Prince's "Psychological Tests for the Authorship of the Book of Mormon," American Journal of Psychology 28/3 (July 1917): 373-89. On the basis of fragments from these essays, Anderson asserts that "the cultural climate from which the Book of Mormon emerged is sufficient to account for its existence."
Like Vogel, Anderson was initially supported by Reverend Walters; their current patron is George D. Smith, who, in 1984, published an attack on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. In introducing that essay, Paul Kurtz, editor of Free Inquiry, a magazine dedicated to advancing aggressive atheism, described George D. Smith, as "a lifelong member of the church," whose essay "provides a detailed critical examination of Joseph Smith and his claim that the Book of Mormon was divinely revealed."

In their account of the Hofmann affair, Linda Sillitoe and Allen D. Roberts claim that Steven F. Christensen, killed by one of Hofmann's bombs, "recorded in his journal Hofmann's characterization of two men—Wesley Walters, a Presbyterian minister, and George Smith, a California businessman, who were both active in the Mormon intellectual community—as

subsections in the journal article have been transformed into chapters as it was made into a book. In Indian Origins (p. 78 n. 7), Vogel cites Roger I. Anderson's "Joseph Smith's Early Reputation Revisited."


‘anti-Mormons’.” They add: “What Christensen did not say was that he [Hofmann] had recently discussed with Smith the possibility of Smith underwriting some of the research projects Christensen had either inaugurated or envisioned.”

Mormon Egyptologist Ed Ashment met Hofmann and Brent Metcalfe at the LDS historical department library. Metcalfe showed him the papyrus fragment [on loan from Kenneth Rendell, a Massachusetts document dealer] and asked if he could tie it to other Joseph Smith papyri. Ashment said he couldn’t on the spur of the moment but offered to check some references. Then Ashment... pulled out a Polaroid camera and snapped a photograph of the papyrus. Neither Hofmann nor Metcalfe would tell Ashment where the fragment had come from. When Hofmann, through Metcalfe, then offered to sell the fragment to George Smith for $30,000, Smith declined. In early July [1985] Smith had acceded to Hofmann’s repeated requests to invest in the Charles Dickens ‘Haunted Man’ manuscript [one of Hofmann’s spectacular forgeries], hoping to gain access to any papyri Hofmann had to help with a research project he had assumed from Christensen earlier that year.80

80 Sillitoe and Roberts, Salamander, 329, 340-41. They “are grateful to George D. Smith, our publisher, whose optimism, faith, and unflagging support made” their writing and publishing possible (Salamander, x). Naïfeh and Smith, in their account of the Hofmann Affair, claim that Christensen heard reports of “Wesley Walters and George Smith, both ‘notorious anti-Mormons,’ according to Hofmann.” They also claim that Hofmann “told them how Wesley Walters and George Smith had somehow found out about the [non-existent McLellin] collection and contacted the owner.” Naïfeh and Smith, The Mormon Murders, 177, 185. Robert Lindsey claims that Hofmann told his close associates that he was having trouble raising $185,000 soon enough “to prevent the McLellin Collection from being acquired by critics of the church such as Jerald and Sandra Tanner; Wesley Walters, a Presbyterian minister in Marissa, Illinois, who often wrote about Mormon history in ways the church did not like; or George Smith, the publisher of Signature Books, whom [Steven] Christensen referred to as a ‘humanist, intellectual, anti-Mormon and semi-financially independent businessman’.” Lindsey, A Gathering of Saints, 173.
If the selection and agenda of essays for this volume is problematic, the editing also leaves much to be desired. For example, no bibliography has been provided and, hence, the reader is left in the dark as to what has been published on topics covered in this book from within the Mormon community.\(^{81}\) The book contains no indexes of authors, subject matter, or scriptures cited. And one wonders why the publisher chose to leave out such standard devices as are commonly found in well-edited works, especially since the book was manufactured with seven blank pages at the end. And why rewrite and refashion the essays being reprinted without telling the reader that such editing has taken place?\(^{82}\)

Books, it should be remembered, do not just happen; they are intentional acts. In order to understand a text, it is sometimes useful to understand the context in which it was written and compiled. This point is constantly being made in *Essays on Mormon Scripture*, which was itself the product of intentions and has its own purpose and context.\(^{83}\) *Essays on Mormon Scripture* has generated debate, Vogel neglects to mention that fact. For example, George D. Smith’s “Isaiah Updated” (pp. 113-30) was criticized by William Hamblin, “‘Isaiah Update’ Challenged,” *Dialogue* 17/1 (Spring 1984): 4-7, but this criticism is not mentioned in Vogel’s volume, which does not contain a full or balanced survey of either the range of opinion or the existing literature on the issues discussed in *Essays on Mormon Scripture*.\(^{81}\)

In his “Editor’s Introduction,” Vogel mentions that authors and publications have given their “permission to reproduce, sometimes in a different format and/or under a different title, many of the essays appearing here” (p. ix). The word “format” seems to suggest the sometimes substantial modifications that have been made in what was previously published, but Vogel does not indicate whether the authors themselves made the changes or whether these changes were made by others.\(^{82}\)

\(^{83}\) To whom does Vogel turn for assistance? For his first book, in 1986, Vogel called upon Brigham Madsen, Marvin S. Hill, Mario DePillis, Sterling M. McMurrin, Wesley P. Walters, and H. Michael Marquardt, among others, in addition to George D. Smith, Ronald L. Priddis, and Gary J. Bergera of Signature Books. See *Indian Origins*, 1-2. More recently he credits Thomas G. Alexander, Lavina Fielding Anderson, D. Michael Quinn, Marquardt, and Walters for having provided advice and suggestions. He also indicated that he is indebted to Grant Underwood and Marvin S. Hill for criticizing an earlier draft of his book, and that he has “benefitted from numerous conversations with Brent Lee Metcalfe” and George D. Smith, as well as Bergera and Priddis and the rest of the staff at Signature Books. Vogel, *Religious Seekers*, vii-viii. Of course, while many of these people
Scripture turns out to be a rather seriously flawed book partly because it is dedicated to showing that “the Mormon canon” does not contain what the faithful have always believed, namely the word of God, and hence at least in part, records of divine special revelations, but is, instead, merely a human contrivance. And, in addition, the essays included in his book are neither the most mature nor the most competently reasoned scholarship available on the Mormon canon. What distinguishes them is a distinct bias. Given the commitments of Signature Books and Dan Vogel it should come as no surprise that there is no competent, careful textual exegesis of the Mormon canon found in Essays on Mormon Scripture. Instead, most of these essays attempt to set in place a novel notion of what constitutes revelation based on some problematic background assumptions about the sacred texts. These then are used to charter the idea that the Saints should now begin to read their scriptures as mere fiction rather than fact. The Mormon faith, according to this view, should be seen as an essentially human fabrication, if not an entirely overt prevarication, rather than as a record of what really happened and as divine revelation, as these notions have traditionally been understood from the perspective of the restored gospel.

may endorse Vogel’s endeavors, some do not. For example, Grant Underwood has not been taken in by Vogel. See Underwood's insightful review of Vogel’s Religious Seekers, in BYU Studies 30/1 (Winter 1990): 120-26.

Reviewed by Stephen E. Robinson

Korihor's back, and this time he's got a printing press. Korihor, the infamous "alternate voice" in the Book of Mormon, insisted that "no man can know of anything which is to come," that "ye cannot know of things which ye do not see," and that faithful Nephites "were in bondage" to "the foolish traditions of [their] fathers" (Alma 30:13, 15, 27). In its continuing assault upon traditional Mormonism, Signature Books promotes with its recent and dubiously titled work, The Word of God, precisely these same naturalistic assumptions of the Korihor agenda in dealing with current Latter-day Saint beliefs. The editor of The Word of God explicitly states his intent to challenge "simplistic [i.e., mainline Latter-day Saint] assumptions about the nature of revelation" (p. viii), and almost every chapter of the work is an indictment of the traditional beliefs of the Saints. The work is not in fact an examination of contemporary Mormon views; the actual views of mainline Latter-day Saints are never discussed. Rather, this is a propaganda piece arguing for what in the view of the authors Mormonism ought to become. In many instances the authors should have done a better job of understanding Latter-day Saint doctrine before undertaking to criticize it or press for changes (e.g., p. 238 n. 6).

Variations on a single theme recur, offered like a Trojan horse, in most of the essays in The Word of God: since many of the current beliefs of the Latter-day Saint Church are untenable ("the foolish traditions of your fathers"), we need the help of scholars and theologians using the naturalistic method to "correct" them. Practically every essay calls for a "re-interpretation" of traditional Mormon beliefs along the lines of contemporary scholarship or of liberal Protestant theology. Vogel and his associates present these proposed modifications as necessary to the continued viability and health of Mormonism (p. 41), and he enlists the aid of at least five RLDS scholars and clerics who have already helped to "correct" the views of that denomination.

Several of the essays in this book also share other common assumptions: (1) that prophets do not receive objective, propositional revelations from God or objective knowledge of
future events—even though they claim otherwise (p. 31) ["no man can know of anything which is to come," Alma 30:13]; (2) that the authority of scripture is therefore subjective and individual at best (pp. 211-12), and the scriptures can never be normative in a literal and objective way as sources of doctrine (p. 22); (3) that the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price are not really ancient documents, but products of Joseph Smith’s “inspired” nineteenth-century imagination (pp. 39-40, 70, 231); (4) and that traditional Mormon belief keeps the Latter-day Saints ignorant and intellectually stifled ("I say they are in bondage," Alma 30:24). William D. Russell of Graceland College criticizes pedagogy at Brigham Young University for its failure to embrace biblical scholarship, and Geoffrey F. Spencer, an RLDS apostle, asserts that the traditional Latter-day Saint concept of scripture is responsible for “many if not most Mormons” being culturally illiterate (p. 22). Spencer would deny the distinction between “inspired” and “other” literature altogether, and further maintains that it might be “more consistently true to the nature and locus of revelation and more appropriate for the church” to affirm that “there are, then strictly speaking, no revealed truths” (p. 23). William Russell adds that "there simply is no sure way to distinguish between the word of God and the words of men—or to distinguish between what is inspired and what is not” (p. 51). Mainline Latter-day Saints can only assume from such statements that, like Korihor, Russell would dismiss the Holy Ghost as a reliable indicator. In fact, the role of the Holy Ghost, intuition, spiritual discernment, belief in the absence of empirical data, the burning within, or whatever one wishes to call the genuinely religious experience behind the convictions of the Saints is never mentioned between the covers of this book ("ye have put off the Spirit of God," Alma 30:42). The two interpretive issues that all the essays have assiduously avoided, like Dracula avoiding sunlight, are the only two that are determinative for the Latter-day Saint view of scripture: the guidance of living prophets and the witness of the Holy Spirit. And for Latter-day Saints the witness of the Holy Spirit is a witness to certain objective propositions—precisely what The Word of God denies is possible. Vogel’s desire to separate the scriptural texts from the interpretation of the apostles and prophets is from a Latter-day Saint perspective a crippled view of scripture. It is Protestant, not Mormon. His desire to eliminate the role of the Spirit in interpretation and confirmation
of propositions suggests an approach, like Korihor’s, that is mono-dimensional—there is only the empirical.

For years anti-Mormons have hammered the Church from the outside, insisting that Joseph Smith and the Latter-day Saint scriptures he produced were not what they claimed to be. By and large the Latter-day Saints simply ignored these attacks. Whether Signature Books and its authors will convince the Saints of the same hostile propositions by attacking from the inside remains to be seen.

Joseph Smith established a religion that was unique in making specific objective and literal claims. For years anti-Mormons have insisted that those claims were false and demanded without success that we repudiate them. Now Vogel and his associates tell the Latter-day Saints in essence, “scholars have proven the traditional claims of the faith to be false, so we must now abandon them. However we can salvage the old vocabulary, the mere words, as long as we surrender their content, the ideas themselves, and redefine them to mean things that Joseph and Brigham never intended.”

For example, chapters one through five propose that we keep the word “revelation” while denying that objective propositions, historical information, or normative doctrines are revealed by God to prophets. Such doublespeak reminds me of the worker who was assured he wasn’t being fired, he was merely being disrecruited. But whether one is fired or disrecruited, the bottom line is the same, and whether one rejects a doctrine outright or merely “redefines” it in a way that contradicts the old definition, the bottom line is also the same. The old objectionable faith of Joseph and Brigham, of objective reality and literal affirmation, is replaced by a “new, improved” faith which is approved by scholars and theologians and which has the good manners not to intrude its propositions into the real, literal, and objective world. What the anti-Mormons couldn’t do with a frontal assault of contradiction, Signature and Vogel would now accomplish with a flanking maneuver of redefinition. By the way, this same tactic has already succeeded in liberal Protestantism and is approaching success in contemporary Catholicism. Since these essays use the right buzz-words and quote the trendy gurus of liberal Protestantism, it would appear they are merely attempting to do for the Latter-day Saints what has already been done in other religious worlds.

But before one can reinterpret and redefine with a free hand, one must first get rid of the normative authority of
revelation and scripture. Thus Richard P. Howard challenges the very idea of propositional revelation and hopes his approach will "lead to rethinking our historic images of Joseph Smith as prophet, seer and revelator" (pp.2-3). Anthony Hutchinson attacks the idea of "prophetic television," that prophets actually see and predict future events. Howard, Spencer, Russell, and Lindgren then redefine revelation as essentially a warm fuzzy, the subjective impression that one is having a religious experience. But such subjective fuzzies should not, according to these authors, be translated into objective data—certainly not into normative doctrines, nor, heaven forbid, into an entire Plan of Salvation. Rather, all that can be known through revelation is that one is having a revelation. Hutchinson, for example, first impugns the historical value of the Book of Mormon, and then consoles us with the sop that it nevertheless "teaches us that God does reveal himself." Reveals himself how and as what, may I ask, if he reveals no propositions about himself? From such a divine pat on the head one may perhaps receive comfort—but not objective information or historical facts, nothing crassly literal or tyrannously normative. I can be comforted that God reveals himself, I just can't ever know what that revelation means, let alone explain its content to others.

Such a redefinition of revelation accomplishes two things. First, it destroys the objective authority of scripture while still giving lip-service to the inspiration of scripture. These authors wouldn't dispute at all that Joseph received revelation or that what he wrote was "inspired." What they object to is taking Joseph's revelations literally or normatively (p. 19-22), as factual information about the real world or as doctrinal propositions to be accepted and believed by the faithful. Second, this redefinition frees one from "the Brethren." For if the inspiration of scripture can only be perceived subjectively and individually, then no one but me can decide what that inspiration means for me (p. 212). This approach denies the normative category altogether, and there can be no "general authorities" to interpret the objective or literal meaning of scripture to the Church. The approach would reduce Mormonism to a loose association of persons sharing a common cultural heritage and a common set of individually and subjectively interpreted texts—but without an ecclesiastical hierarchy. Except for the scholars, of course; after all, the whole point of this book is that Latter-day Saints must bow to the authority of scholars. For the Church of the Scholars is no
less authoritarian than the traditional faith. It merely seeks to sub-ject its believers to a more rational authority—to replace the “tyranny” of the Brethren with the tyranny of the intellectuals.

But such a faith would not be faith at all. The problem with scholarly religion, religion that has been carefully trimmed so that it conflicts with no empirical data, is that it inevitably makes scholarship the religion. And that is what is proposed here. Indeed, what if anything will we be able to keep of religious belief once we agree to be led by the scholars instead of the prophets? In the Church of the Scholars religion can make no claim unsupported by or contradicted by empirical evidence (“ye cannot know of things which ye do not see,” Alma 30:15). But in what sense can this be called religion at all? As both the scriptures and the philosophers know, genuine faith is belief in the absence of evidence or even belief that contradicts the evidence. The Church of the Scholars is not a faith at all, but merely intellectual acquiescence to the prevailing scholarly winds. The Word of God proposes the ultimate oxymoron—empirical religion, a faith-less faith. Come all ye who no longer believe, but who still want religion, and enter ye in!

But what's the point of keeping Joseph Smith's vocabulary, having thrown out his ideas? Why not throw out the vocabulary too, and be honest Protestants without all this bait and switch, without the pretense of "reinterpreting" Mormonism, without the sophistry and the charade? For what Vogel offers here is simply liberal Protestant thought (the vague conviction that there is a God out there, without the courage to predicate anything of him) dressed up in Mormon costume.

This is especially clear in those chapters that caricature Latter-day Saints as fundamentalist inerrantists or naive literalists with a doctrine of scriptural infallibility (e.g., pp. 5, 21, 48, 254). What has happened is that the authors have stumbled across the modernist controversy in Protestantism and would like to re-create the same battle on Mormon turf, casting themselves in the role of the victorious liberals and the Mormons in the fundamentalist Hodge/Warfield role (see pp. 46-47, 255). This creation of a straw man—a tactic Korihor employs in Alma 30:25—does make it easier for Vogel et al. to claim victory, but it can't be done without seriously distorting the actual Latter-day Saint position.

Another straw man frequently encountered in the book is the assertion that the Latter-day Saints don't believe Joseph Smith was influenced by his nineteenth century environment
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(pp. 47, 188-89). I don’t know any conservative Latter-day Saints who would dispute such influence. However, it’s one thing to say that Joseph was influenced by his nineteenth century environment, and quite another thing to say that that influence contaminated the revelations to the point that they are robbed of their normative power.

The uniformity of perspective among the essays, the pervasive use of the straw man, and the absence of any opposing viewpoint identify *The Word of God* as a work of propaganda. It is designed not to investigate Latter-day Saint thought, but to change it. It certainly would have been more honest to entitle this work *The Words of the Disaffected: A Criticism of the LDS Concept of Scripture*, but Signature has lately developed a habit of disguising the critical stance of its works with misleading titles. However, three exceptions to this criticism would be the essays by Lancaster and Bush, who have done good historical work apparently without the Korihor agenda, and the essay of Curtis, who, though she takes the naturalistic approach, does not appear to have an interest in attacking or modifying the religion of the Saints.

On the other hand, the most rabid fulminations are those of Ashment, whose hostility to the Church and its leaders can scarcely be concealed (see pp. 254-55 with notes). Ashment is much exercised over “cognitive dissonance,” yet the Latter-day Saint God has never had a particular concern with lessening cognitive dissonance—quite the opposite. The Latter-day Saint God most often causes such dissonance on purpose “to prove them herewith,” as the book of Abraham would say, and as Abraham himself learned on Mount Moriah.

Several of the authors in *The Word of God* cannot seem to tolerate the suggestion that religious claims should be taken literally or objectively. Like hellenistic philosophy and orthodox Christian theology they insist that religious propositions cannot describe the empirical world and invite the Latter-day Saints to move their propositions to some other world, the world of make believe, over the rainbow, never-never land, the realm of ideal forms. Yes, Virginia there is a Santa Claus—but not in the real, empirical world! Only as a set of propositions about an entirely separate and purely hypothetical reality, a fantasy land invented by poets and dreamers, can religion be tolerated by empiricism and the naturalistic method. Religion must never say things about *this* world. Religious claims must never be literal, they must always be “spiritual,” i.e., without theoretical verifiability.
And while many other denominations, having adopted the neoplatonic dualism long ago, are perfectly happy to settle for such pie in the sky and to abandon this world to Korihor and the empiricists, Mormonism has consistently refused to do so.

Several of the essays criticize mainstream Latter-day Saint views of scripture on the grounds of contemporary biblical scholarship. But it's no good to test the traditional Latter-day Saint view by appealing to Old and New Testament evidence as interpreted by higher critical scholars. This simply begs the question, since it is a fundamental belief of the Church that the Old and New Testament evidence has already been tainted and that biblical criticism is impotent to reconstruct the real beliefs of those periods. Moreover, the history of modern biblical criticism continually reaffirms that the prevailing views in any half century will in the next half century be proven to be inadequate or incomplete, interpolations and extrapolations being based on insufficient data. Biblical scholarship, or any scholarship for that matter, has quite frequently insisted on things that later turned out not to be so. This is only one reason why one's genuine religious convictions ought not to be too slavishly subordinated to the most recent scholarship.

I suppose by now it is clear that I did not like this book. I did not like it primarily because it is dishonest. It is dishonest to pass off the religion of the scholars as the Church of Jesus Christ. It is dishonest to pass off Protestantism in Mormon dress as the religion restored through Joseph Smith. It is dishonest to pass off a rejection and a denial of that religion as merely a "reinterpretation." It is dishonest to pass off ex-Latter-day Saints, non-Latter-day Saints, Reorganized Latter-day Saints, disaffected Latter-day Saints, and hard-core anti-Latter-day Saints as "Mormon" essayists. Give me a Walter Martin anytime, a good stout wolf with his own fur on, instead of those more timid or sly parading around in their ridiculous fleeces with their teeth and tails hanging out. Give me "Ex-Mormons for Jesus" or the Moody Bible Tract Society, who are at least honest about their anti-Mormon agenda, instead of Signature Books camouflaged as a "Latter-day Saint" press. I prefer my anti-Mormons straight up.
This book is an extended treatment of 3 Nephi 11-18 and, as the title suggests, a comparison with Matthew 5-7. In chapters 2-3, Welch views the Nephite sermon in a temple context; in chapter 4, he does the same for the Sermon on the Mount. In chapter 5, he analyzes differences between the 3 Nephi and Matthew accounts. In chapter 6, he examines the Israelite background of much of the Sermon on the Mount to show that this background would be the common heritage of both the Jews in Palestine and the Nephites (or, rather, the Lehites) in America. Chapters 7-9 deal with textual matters, including a discussion of Stanley Larson’s examination of the text of the Sermon at the Temple, in which Larson claims that Joseph Smith took the King James Sermon on the Mount whole cloth, copying many textual mistakes reflected in the King James translation of Matthew.

Welch brings impressive tools to bear on this study. He handles Greek, he controls the New Testament secondary literature, and his command of the secondary literature on the Book of Mormon is superb. He knows ancient law intimately and has published important, original research on chiasmus both in the Book of Mormon and in antiquity generally. Therefore, it is not surprising that the book he has written here is a consistently interesting and valuable one. Though I sometimes disagreed with it, it often supplied insights that rang true. Aside from its apologetic value in dealing with attacks on the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi, it serves as an excellent commentary on these important chapters in 3 Nephi.

A chapter-by-chapter analysis of the book follows:

Chapters 2-3 (which follow the introduction in chapter 1) are, to me, the most tentative part of the book. Here, Welch seems to be applying a “pan-temple” interpretation to our text, in which he sees endowment ceremony imagery in much of the text. Such “pan-anything” interpretations are useful in that they take a certain new perspective to its logical limits, often revealing
new insights; however, not all readers will find his examples equally convincing. In certain of his interpretations, Welch seems to me to be stretching the point somewhat. An example of this occurs on page 66, when Welch takes 3 Nephi 13:17 as a reference to ritual washing and anointing. But in context, the washing and anointing refer only to avoiding any unusual appearance while fasting, such as disfiguring the face, perhaps with ashes (see Isaiah 58:5). But he rightly acknowledges that not all of his forty-eight points of possible temple significance are of equal strength (p. 34) and that his interpretation is neither exclusive nor conclusive (pp. 84-85).

Welch also strikes me as forcing the Book of Mormon context somewhat in his suggested interpretation of Christ ministering to the children in 3 Nephi 17. In context this passage presents a beautiful outpouring of love for children by Christ; Welch, however, reads it ritually, and hints that it might have constituted some kind of sealing ceremony, which to me takes away some of its dramatic effect. Welch emphasizes that the Nephites both saw and heard Christ’s prayer at 3 Nephi 17:15-17 and suggests that he did things during the prayer; however, the text emphasizes the content of the prayer uttered by Jesus, not acts performed by him. Then he blesses the little children of the congregation, one by one, and prays for them. He instructs the congregation to observe their children, after which angels descend and “minister” to them. The parents do not seem to receive blessings with the children, although as a group they stood behind the children, who surrounded Jesus who stood in the midst (3 Nephi 17:12-13). If there had been a sealing, Christ logically would have received child and parent together. The narrative in 3 Nephi, however, focuses on the love Christ had for the children and on their receiving ministrations of angels. In 3 Nephi 17:23 (“Behold your little ones”), Christ is not “just inviting the parents to look at their children and admire them”: he is preparing the parents for the imminent appearance of angels among the children.

In addition, it seems to me that Welch sometimes comes dangerously close to subordinating the moral aspects of the Sermon to its ritual aspects (it is, according to Welch, a “ritual text,” p. 86), when the whole point of Christ’s ministry is to show that ritual must be guided by inward conversion and morality (3 Nephi 9:19-22, and much of the gospels). See also pp. 58-61, in which Welch interprets teleios mostly as a ritual term (which he does with great insight), without emphasizing
sufficiently its important ethical shades of meaning. But generally he does not ignore the ethical aspects of the Sermon, and his excellent section on the importance of giving to the poor in a temple context (pp. 62-63, cf. p. 150) shows that he knows the relative importance of the moral and the ritual, which can sometimes seem opposed (see Isaiah 58; cf. p. 101). As Welch points out, "many elements in the Sermon are basic to the first principles of the gospel and thus are certainly also relevant to general ethical exhortation" (p. 84). Indeed, Christ taught that morality does not preclude ritual and ecclesiastical practice, as in Matthew 23:23, though "justice, mercy and faith" are "weightier" than outward practice.

I found chapter 5, on the differences between Matthew and 3 Nephi, very insightful, an important addition to Book of Mormon scholarship. Chapter 6 is also excellent; it includes an entirely successful response to a critique by Krister Stendahl of 3 Nephi 12:6 (pp. 114-15). The chapter as a whole reminds us of an important truth that is generally forgotten, that the New Testament is thoroughly grounded in the Old Testament. Some of those who criticize the Book of Mormon for plagiarism from the King James Bible would be surprised to find how many phrases from the New Testament echo the Old.

Chapters 7-9 are also full of valuable discoveries. Here, Larson's somewhat weak work critiquing 3 Nephi's text is solidly countered. One sees how Larson, aside from committing methodological missteps, has overemphasized the importance of some supposed problems and has ignored textual issues that did not support his thesis. Welch points out that in 3 Nephi 12:22/ Matthew 5:22, the Book of Mormon drops eikē, "without a cause," and that many of the best Greek manuscripts do the same (p. 162). Other impressive points are his analysis of the Semitic word behind dikaiosunē, "righteousness," as an explanation for 3 Nephi 13:1 (pp. 150-51) and his analysis of a Semitic perfect, translated by an English present (as in KJV and 3 Nephi 13:11), behind Matthew 6:12 (p. 153).

Welch's earlier treatment of the doxology of the Lord's prayer, found in 3 Nephi but not in the earliest New Testament manuscripts, is similarly convincing (p. 65), showing that such doxologies were common ritual practice at the end of prayers, whether they were written down or not.

I close with a short list of methodological objections and minor problems. Often in Welch's footnoting I would prefer a primary source instead of a secondary source, or at least a
primary source preceding a secondary source, especially when the secondary source itself is controversial. For instance, on p. 63 Welch writes, “several early Christian texts document the use of sacred group prayers, with the participants standing in a circle around Jesus,” and cites Nibley’s “The Early Christian Prayer Circle” article. Yet some of the examples cited by Nibley are not really group prayers, or are not really circles, and so on, though there are some similarities to prayer circles. It would be better for Welch to select an example from a primary source that he thinks is absolutely foolproof and use Nibley as a second reference (likewise on p. 36 n. 2).

Nibley, quoted by Welch, seems to be pushing things a bit in translating “hallowed be thy name” as “to which our present tie and password is the name” (p. 64).

The transliteration of the Greek words is not entirely consistent. Macrons are often left off of words (pp. 59, 69, 75, 97, 156). Iota subscripts are left off a Greek phrase on p. 97, but are used on p. 148.

What is the basis for “[priesthood]” in the Clement quotation on p. 59? Is this Welch’s suggested gloss? If so, hierophantikos means “of a hierophant,” and the hierophant at Eleusis was the special “initiating priest,” “he who shows sacred things”; thus “priesthood” seems too simple an explanation of the word. A more complex translation would seem to fit well with Welch’s purposes “[initiatory priesthood]”.

On Beatitudes in the mysteries, add line numbers 480-82 to the Homeric Hymn to Demeter citation (p. 43).


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