1993

Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*.

William J. Hamblin

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<td>Review of <em>Archaeology and the Book of Mormon</em> (1972), by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.</td>
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Reviewed by William J. Hamblin

On Jan. 10, 1970 we [Jerald and Sandra Tanner] received a letter from the Mormon Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson in which the following statements appeared: "[I] sat myself down this evening and read [Archaeology and the Book of Mormon] . . . from beginning to end. I must say without qualification that I indorse [sic] your views completely as put down in this work (and you may quote me as having said so)."

We are very happy with this endorsement of our work. Dee Jay Nelson is probably the most qualified Egyptologist in the Mormon Church, and he has spent years trying to prove that the Book of Mormon is true.1

The first question that should be answered is why a book written over twenty years ago is being reviewed in a journal dedicated to reviewing books on the Book of Mormon published in 1992. Part of the answer is that the Tanners' booklet, despite its antiquity and obvious flaws, has either directly or indirectly been a fundamental source for many subsequent anti-Mormon attempts to discredit the Book of Mormon.2 Thus, understand-

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ing the background of current anti-Mormon "arguments" against the Book of Mormon is impossible without examining the Tanners. In contrast to the rapid, numerous, and fundamental developments in the analysis of the geography and archaeology of the Book of Mormon which have been made in the last twenty years by Latter-day Saint scholars, a review of the Tanners serves to demonstrate the remarkable stagnation of the fundamentalist anti-Mormon critique of the relationship between archaeology and the Book of Mormon during this same period.

There is also a second reason. The Tanners' magnum opus is Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? the fifth "edition" of which was published in 1987. Their Major Problems in Mormonism was published in 1989. In an astonishing example of chutzpah, the Tanners felt content to simply republish their basic materials on archaeology from their earlier booklet. No effort was made


3 Mormonism—Shadow or Reality? 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987); an abridged (and properly edited) version of this work can be found as The Changing World of Mormonism (Chicago: Moody, 1980), with archaeology and the Book of Mormon discussed on pages 135-47; there is no new material or analysis in the abridgment.

4 Archaeology and the Book of Mormon is dealt with on pages 97-125, and "Updated Materials" on 125A to 125G; a comparison of the
to acknowledge or understand—let alone refute—the results of
the revolution in Latter-day Saint understanding of the Book of
Mormon which has taken place in the last quarter of a century.5
They simply refuse to deal with recent serious Latter-day Saint
arguments, while proclaiming victory. For the Tanners, their ar-

5 Their materials “updated” to 1987 include six pages on the
Hofmann affair and his forged Anthon transcript, three pages on the
Kinderhook plates, and a few miscellaneous quotations on Thomas
Ferguson, wordprints, and Izapa Stela 5.

6 Anonymous Latter-day Saint Historian, “Jerald and Sandra
Tanner’s Distorted View of Mormonism: A Response to Mormonism—
Shadow or Reality?” (Salt Lake City, UT: privately published pamphlet,

7 Dante, Inferno, 3:9, “Abandon all hope, O ye who enter here,” an
inscription found over the gates of Hell.

8 Oral interview with Sandra Tanner, cited by Scott Faulring, An
58, manuscript transcription in the Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young
Tanner's opinion of the intellectual capacity of their intended audience—an insight which I find no reason to question. Sandra Tanner goes on to provide revealing examples supporting her evaluation of their readers. "I realize that the average Library Science major is appalled at that [editorial style] and finds it childish because they've been trained to go over and read a page and pick out what's important. But most people aren't; most people have not gone to school enough that, I mean, it's absolutely astounding. I get calls regularly from people wanting to know where they can find this book 'Ibid' we keep quoting from. A lady called me up the other day and she says, 'I thought I knew all the books in the Bible and I can't find that.'" The Tanner's' method reminds me very much of a student's textbook I once saw. The student was apparently unable to determine which parts of the text were truly significant, but was afraid to miss any potentially important passage. He had therefore underlined almost everything in the book. The result was, of course, the same as if he had underlined nothing.

Granted that little of what the Tanners publish can be characterized as having sterling editorial or publication values, what of the content of Archaeology? In many ways this booklet provides a perfect picture of the Tanners at the height of their ineptitude. Hard as it may be for readers of the Tanners' current publications to believe, their work of twenty years ago was substantially worse. The Tanners have matured over the years, and their writing and analysis has improved somewhat with age. They are now actually occasionally publishing some things with which I basically agree.  

University. I would like to thank Matthew Roper for providing me this reference.  

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9 Ibid. (which, by the way, is a Latin abbreviation for *ibidem*, meaning "in the same place [in the book]"), 58-59.

10 For example, I quite agree with the Tanners that they are not demonized agents of the Mormon Church; see "The Tanners: Demonized Agents of the Mormon Church?" *Salt Lake City Messenger* 76 (November 1990): 11-14, and "Serious Charges against the Tanners: Are the Tanners Demonized Agents of the Mormon Church?" (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1991). Despite their numerous profound differences with the Church, the Tanners have had the decency recently to defend Gordon B. Hinckley from the slanderous accusations of the scurrilous "Godmakers II"; see "The Godmakers II: Under Fire from Within and Without," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 84 (April 1993): 1-4. I understand they are currently
This is not to say that readers will find much of substance in their current work, only that it is superior to their previous literary efforts. An illuminating example of the current analytical capabilities of the Tanners is provided by the following anecdote. In 1991 the Tanners were the guests of Martin Tanner (no relation) on his Salt Lake City radio talk show, “Religion on the Line.” The discussion focused on their booklet *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*.11 In that booklet the Tanners claimed that Joseph Smith had anachronistically plagiarized the phrase “a rod of iron” (1 Nephi 8:19) from Revelation 12:5. Matthew Roper had pointed out that the same phrase occurs in Psalm 2:9, which would thus have been available to Nephi; no plagiarism from the New Testament need be presumed.12 Jerald Tanner defended their claim that Joseph must have plagiarized from Revelation rather than the Old Testament as follows. “Take the case of ‘a rod of iron.’ That’s a four word parallel. But actually, there’s a five word parallel, ‘a rod of iron and.’ I hadn’t marked that in the [Black Hole] book. I didn’t know that they [Ara Norwood, Matthew Roper, and John Tvedtnes] were going to be so critical [in their reviews in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3]; but I think we can well validate these matters.”13 It seems that the Tanners would have us believe that Joseph Smith translated the Book of Mormon by flipping back and forth through the Bible, randomly extracting four- or five-word phrases out of context, and somehow recombining them into a coherent narrative set in an entirely different context.14 But the Tanners are withholding evidence from us here. 1 Nephi 8:19 reads, “and I beheld a rod of iron, and it extended along the bank of the river, and led to the tree by which I stood,” whereas Revelation 12:5 reads, “and

preparing an exposé of the “ministry” of the notorious anti-Mormon charlatan Ed Decker.


14 The Tanners are also begging the question, since Revelation 12:5 is itself an allusion to Revelation 2:27 which is itself a slightly paraphrased quotation of Psalms 2:9.
she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.” This verse from Revelation could not possibly be the source for the Book of Mormon passage, because 1 Nephi 8:19 has a comma, whereas Revelation has a colon!

The most striking feature of Archaeology is how little of it the Tanners actually wrote. It consists for the most part of a confused hodgepodge of quotations from various sources, interspersed with brief transitional sentences written by the Tanners. For example, in an unscientific survey of the first twenty-five pages of their booklet I found that only 273 of 1850 lines were written by the Tanners, many of which are nothing more than brief introductions to the quotations.15 If this proportion is normative for the booklet as a whole, it means that less than 15% of it was actually written by the Tanners.16 Furthermore, the Tanners were obviously unfamiliar with technical literature on New or Old World archaeology of the late sixties. For example, they rely on an 1887 book by anti-Mormon M. T. Lamb as one of their fundamental sources on Mesoamerican archaeology.17 Since the Tanners are well known for their unwillingness to present the Latter-day Saint case in anything but the most unfavorable light, my advice to potential readers—both Mormon and non-Mormon—is to ignore the Tanners and read the original sources which they anthologize. The result will not only be a more pleasant intellectual experience, but will also provide a more accurate understanding of the issues.

The result of the Tanners’ anthologizing method is that this booklet is frequently only semicoherent. I was often at a loss to discover exactly what their point was in presenting a quotation. That I was occasionally able to deduce what the Tanners proba-

15 I estimate 74 lines per page, times 25 pages, yielding 1850 total lines.

16 One wonders at what point copyright regulations become violated by such an anthology; but then, the Tanners are notoriously unconcerned about copyright laws and the intellectual property of others. See Lawrence Foster, “Career Apostates: Reflections on the Works of Jerald and Sandra Tanner,” Dialogue 17/2 (Summer 1984): 46–49.

17 M. T. Lamb, The Golden Bible, or the Book of Mormon: Is It from God? (New York: Ward and Drummond, 1887). The Tanners cite Lamb on pages 6–7, 12, 15–16, 21–22, 52–53, and 54–55. Nearly six pages (almost 9%) of their original 64-page booklet consist of quotations or illustrations from Lamb. This is a classic example of the intellectual inbreeding of anti-Mormons.
bly intended is due only to familiarity with their basic approach and interpretation of Mormonism. For example, what is the implication of the series of quotations from Latter-day Saint scholars critiquing efforts by Latter-day Saint amateurs to "prove" the Book of Mormon true (pp. 4–6)? I suspect these quotations were included by the Tanners in an attempt to demonstrate the proposition that even Latter-day Saint scholars recognize that there is no archaeological evidence for the Book of Mormon. In fact, what they demonstrate is that Latter-day Saint scholars take the study of the Book of Mormon seriously, refusing to accept inadequate evidence, faulty methods, weak analysis, and unfounded conclusions about Book of Mormon antiquities. In other words, the Latter-day Saint intellectual community is doing an excellent job reviewing weak publications and faulty arguments on the Book of Mormon without any assistance from the Tanners. When a Latter-day Saint scholar claims that many arguments made by Latter-day Saints in attempting to support the historicity of the Book of Mormon are fallacious, it does not imply that that scholar rejects the historicity of the Book of Mormon, or that competent and defensible arguments cannot be made.18

The Tanners seem to be making two fundamental arguments in their booklet, although they do not make these explicit: (1) Latter-day Saints disagree among themselves about Book of Mormon geography and archaeology; and (2) many archaeological discoveries which some Latter-day Saints have attempted to use to authenticate the Book of Mormon are either fraudulent, or have been misinterpreted. Both of these statements are accurate. However, they seem to draw the further conclusion that these two propositions somehow imply that there is therefore no archaeological evidence for, or defensible interpretation of, the Book of Mormon. Their quotations by no means support this flawed conclusion. Even if Latter-day Saints disagree about various aspects of Book of Mormon history, archaeology, and geography, and even if all of the antiquities examined by the Tanners are not authentic, these still would not demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is unhistorical.

18 For example, they repeatedly cite John L. Sorenson (pp. 4–5, 11), and Hugh W. Nibley (pp. 9–10) as critics of Book of Mormon archaeology, while failing to inform their readers of their well-known positive belief in the historicity of the scripture.
The fundamental flaw of the Tanners’ booklet—which is clearly confirmed by their 1987 abridgment in Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? and their publication of Major Problems of Mormonism—is that it completely fails to deal with serious, up-to-date Latter-day Saint interpretations of Book of Mormon geography and archaeology, being content instead to rebut some of the wilder claims of Latter-day Saint amateur armchair antiquarians of the first half of the twentieth century. Until anti-Mormons are able to produce cogent responses to the ongoing substantive professional and analytical Latter-day Saint studies of Book of Mormon antiquities, their rehash of decades-old writings on the subject deserves to be dismissed as pointless. The following are the major topics dealt with to some extent in Archaeology and the Book of Mormon:

Major Topics

The Smithsonian Statement

The Tanners seem to enjoy pointing out the falsity of the Latter-day Saint urban legend that the Smithsonian has used the Book of Mormon as a guide to archaeological study (pp. 1–3). Informed Latter-day Saints have always known this. It is unfortunate, but somehow inevitable, that such rumors exist. The existence of false rumors, however, does not disprove the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, as John Sorenson has explained, the Smithsonian statement does not ultimately undermine the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It tells us


20 Cf. Tanner and Tanner, Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? 97–100; The Changing World of Mormonism, 133–36; Major Problems of Mormonism, 162.
that at least some of the people in the Smithsonian Institution do not accept the Book of Mormon as authentic history, but it does not provide significant evidence or analysis on the issue, nor does it engage informed Latter-day Saint thought on the matter. Fundamentalist critics of Mormonism tread on dangerous ground when they attempt to use an official pronouncement of a secular institution to disprove the historicity of the Book of Mormon. I would dare to speculate that the Smithsonian—if pressed to take a position—would also reject the fundamentalists’ claim that the Bible is historically infallible. If anti-Mormons see the Smithsonian statement as somehow conclusive in undermining the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, should they not also reject the idea of an infallible Bible?

Diversity of Opinion within the Latter-day Saint Community

The Tanners provide a miscellany of quotations from Latter-day Saint authors denouncing the extravagant claims of uninformed Latter-day Saints about the Book of Mormon’s relationship to New World archaeology and debating various interpretations of pre-Columbian evidence (pp. 4–6, 65–67). The Tanners apparently included these quotations in an attempt to somehow show that the folk Latter-day Saint position is recognized as untenable by trained Latter-day Saints. In fact, it only shows that bad arguments have been put forth to support the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, and that competent Latter-day Saint are quite willing to openly denounce such statements. If a Latter-day Saint writes a bad book filled with fallacious arguments about the Book of Mormon, it does not automatically become the normative “Mormon position” for which all Latter-day Saints are ever after responsible. Furthermore, the existence of a bad book on the Book of Mormon does not prove that good books cannot or have not been written.

Fallacious arguments can be given for true propositions. By proving that certain fallacious arguments have been presented to support the proposition that the Book of Mormon is authentic history, the Tanners have not thereby demonstrated that the basic


proposition itself is false. They have only shown that the proposition has not been proven by those fallacious arguments. What the Tanners have never done is to deal with the serious Latter-day Saint interpretations of the history, archaeology, linguistics, geography, and anthropology of the Book of Mormon which have appeared in the last quarter of a century.\textsuperscript{23} The Tanners never come to grips with the really crucial issues, squandering their efforts instead by picking at the fringes.

**Coins**

Although the Tanners themselves admit that "the text of the Book of Mormon never uses the word 'coin'" (pp. 11), they still insist on naively equating money with coins (pp. 11–12, 91).\textsuperscript{24} Only in the past half a millennium have coins universally come to replace weight as the standard medium of exchange. Even after the invention of coinage in Lydia in the seventh century B.C., most economic transactions continued to be based on weight, not on the coins themselves. Since coins were frequently clipped, shaved, or worn, stamping coins was used to establish the purity of the metal being weighed, but was not necessarily accepted as a guarantee of the weight of the coin itself. The fact that there were no coins in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica fits quite nicely with the Book of Mormon, which mentions weights rather than coins as money—a situation which would have been counter-intuitive for Joseph Smith in the early nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{25}

\textsuperscript{23} In their August 1991 *Salt Lake City Messenger*, the Tanners promised "to publish our response to the critics [Ara Norwood, Matt Roper, and John Tvedtnes in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3] within the next few months" (p. 15). It has been two years, and all that has appeared is a brief and inadequate rejoinder (*Salt Lake City Messenger* 82 [September 1992]: 12–14), on which see Matthew Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner" forthcoming in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. In light of their claim that "our theory with regard to this 'black hole' now seems to be well established by the evidence ... [because] Mormon apologists [have] remained silent in the face of the facts" (*Salt Lake City Messenger* 74 [February 1990]: 1), are we to conclude that the Tanners, by remaining silent, are tacitly agreeing with the critiques of their work found in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 and 4?

\textsuperscript{24} Cf. Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* 103–4.

Anthon Transcript

Questions surrounding the story of the Anthon transcript (pp. 12–15, 68–69)\(^{26}\) have been fully discussed by Latter-day Saint scholars; the early Latter-day Saint version of what happened has been essentially verified.\(^{27}\)

Writing

The issue of Hebrew and Egyptian inscriptions and other forms of writing in the New World (pp. 17–19)\(^{28}\) is complicated. There are several questions that the Tanners confuse which should be approached independently.

1. Have any authentic Hebrew or Egyptian inscriptions been discovered in the New World? Yes; as will be noted below, at least the Bat Creek inscription is now widely accepted as a Hebrew text.

2. Should we expect Nephite or Lamanite inscriptions to be in recognizable Hebrew or Egyptian scripts? The answer is not necessarily. The Book of Mormon clearly states that "the reformed Egyptian [was] handed down and altered by us . . . the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; . . . [so that] none other people knoweth our language . . . therefore he [the Lord] hath

World pre-Columbian coins have been found in the New World, some of which may indicate trans-Atlantic contacts. Although he does not necessarily accept pre-Columbian contacts as an explanation for the coins, Jeremiah F. Epstein provide an extensive catalog in "Pre-Columbian Old World Coins in America: An Examination of the Evidence," *Current Anthropology* 21 (February 1980): 1–20; F.A.R.M.S. reprint available.


prepared means for the interpretation thereof." (Mormon 9:32–34) If a Nephite inscription were to be found we should not necessarily expect it to be in recognizable Hebrew or Egyptian scripts.

3. What is the relationship, if any, between Mesoamerican and Egyptian hieroglyphic writing systems? The distinction needs to be drawn between a conceptual and a direct causal relationship. There appears to be no direct causal relationship between Mesoamerican writing systems and Egyptian hieroglyphics—the language, grammar, and characters are all different. Nonetheless, there are some very remarkable conceptual similarities between the two writing systems. Joyce Marcus, one of the leading specialists in this field, believes that "Mesoamerican writing is better compared with Egyptian hieroglyphic writing, both in its format and in its function," and "that Egyptian hieroglyphic writing thus constitutes a much more appropriate analogy to Mesoamerican texts than does Sumerian."

Indeed, Marcus "find[s] it more productive to mention a number of similarities shared by Egyptian and Mesoamerican writing, with Maya writing being particularly similar to Egyptian in several respects." Thus, in their social function, format, and basic logic, there are significant parallels between Egyptian hieroglyphics and Mesoamerican writing systems.

4. Does lack of recognizably Nephite insciptional evidence constitute proof of the absence of Nephite colonists in the New World? Throughout the world, early monumental inscriptions were essentially used as propaganda devices to demonstrate the authority and prestige of a monarchy or priest-

30 Ibid., 21.
31 The full implications of these similarities are unclear. They are possibly due to parallel evolution, but the possibility that the development of Mesoamerican writing systems was influenced by a knowledge of the basic ideas of Egyptian hieroglyphics cannot be altogether ruled out. See Sorenson, An Ancient American Setting, pages 78-79, and references in his notes for a further discussion.
32 I am focusing only on stone inscriptions in this section because the only writing which has thus far been discovered from pre-Classic Mesoamerica is on stone: stelae, celts, monuments, or walls. This being the case, the only possible examples of surviving Nephite writing from archaeological sources would also be on stone.
hood. Many societies were literate, but for various social, political, or religious reasons never or seldom wrote inscriptions. Obvious examples of this are the Israelite kingdoms. "The empire of David and Solomon, the powerful northern kingdom, the long-lived southern kingdom with its Davidic dynasty have left not even a single document relating to their existence; not one of the forty kings, from Saul to Zedekiah, has left a direct trace of his name; we do not have any votive inscription from the famous temple of Solomon, as we do for many other temples of antiquity. The virtually complete silence of epigraphy on Hebrew history seems all the more disconcerting when we compare it with the epigraphic evidence from neighboring peoples: Phoenicians, Aramaeans, Moabites, Philistines and now even Ammonites have left more or less numerous inscriptions."

Other examples of literate societies which left few or no monumental inscriptive remains include the Harappan civilization, the Minoans and Mycenaean, and the Shang and...


Chou (Zhou) Chinese. Literate Hindu explorers began colonizing Southeast Asia by at least the first century A.D., but the earliest surviving inscriptions in the region date from nearly four centuries later. Furthermore, in Mesoamerica the post-Classic Mixtec and Aztec likewise left few monumental inscriptions. The systematic destruction of the historical and epigraphic monuments of fallen enemy dynasties is a characteristic of Mesoamerican societies. "Mesoamerican peoples buried, sawed, moved, defaced, or covered up monuments whose messages were no longer deemed appropriate, . . . Some of the monumental destruction must be viewed within the context of the entire polity or region.” When all of these factors are considered, and when we remember that there are only a few dozen short Pre-Classic Mesoamerican inscriptions (i.e., from Book of Mormon times), many of which are difficult to interpret, the absence of Nephite monumental inscriptions is not remarkable.
5. What is “reformed Egyptian,” and does such a writing system exist? The Tanners, and most anti-Mormons, seem to be operating under the strange illusion that “reformed Egyptian” is used in the Book of Mormon as a proper name. In fact, “reformed” is used as an adjective, meaning modified or changed. This is made abundantly clear by Mormon, who tells us that “the characters which are called by us reformed [modified, changed] Egyptian, [were] handed down and altered by us,” and that “none other people knoweth our language” (Mormon 9:32, 34). Nephite “reformed Egyptian” is thus a unique script.

Besides the “reformed” nature of Egyptian hieratic and demotic scripts, there are several other examples of the use of reformed or modified Egyptian characters to write in non-Egyptian languages. Early forms of writing in Crete apparently developed from a combination of “Egyptian hieroglyphic, Mesopotamian cuneiform and Phoenician native signs into one single, new pictographic script.”

“In the case of two other scripts—Protosinaitic and Meroitic—there was the direct borrowing of Egyptian signs.” Meroitic, the script of ancient Nubia (modern Sudan), “was first recorded in writing in the second century B.C. in an ‘alphabetic’ script consisting of twenty-three symbols, most of which were borrowed or at least derived from Egyptian writing. . . . The script has two forms, hieroglyphic and cursive.” Meroitic hieroglyphic signs were “borrowed from the Egyptian . . . [and] the cursive script derived mainly from the Egyptian demotic script.”

More directly relevant to the Book of Mormon, Semitic speakers of early second millennium B.C. Syria and Palestine seem to have adopted “reformed” or modified versions of Egyptian hieroglyphs into syllabic and alphabetic systems of writing. Ultimately, this reformed Egyptian script became the basis for the Phoenician alphabet, from which nearly all subse-

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44 Ibid., 133.
quent alphabets derive.\textsuperscript{46} “The Proto-Sinaitic inscriptions were written in a Semitic language, and . . . their letters were the prototypes for the Phoenician alphabet. The letters are alphabetic, acrophonic in origin, and consonantal, and their forms are derived from Egyptian hieroglyphs.”\textsuperscript{47} In other words, our alphabet is ultimately derived from a reformed Egyptian script. “Since the Canaanite/Phoenician syllabary formed the basis of the Greek alphabet, and the Greek in turn of the Latin, it means, in the words of Gardiner, that ‘the hieroglyphs live on, though in transmuted [or could we not say reformed] form, within our own alphabet.’ ”\textsuperscript{48} In other words, in a very real sense, the Latin script is itself a type of reformed Egyptian, since the ultimate source of our characters is Egyptian hieroglyphics. The point here is that there are a number of versions of reformed or modified Egyptian script; the Book of Mormon account is entirely plausible on this point. As has been noted before, there are several examples of writing the Hebrew language in Egyptian script.\textsuperscript{49}

6. Finally, the fact that the Book of Mormon claims that writing was known among pre-Columbian inhabitants of the New World is in itself significant. This assertion would have been counterintuitive to Joseph Smith’s experience, since most Indian tribes in the early nineteenth century were either nonliterate or had only recently adopted some form of European writing.

\textsuperscript{46} Joseph Naveh, Early History of the Alphabet (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982). I. J. Gelb, A Study of Writing, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), x–xi, provides a chart illustrating the derivation of the Phoenician and all subsequent alphabets from Egyptian hieroglyphics.


\textsuperscript{48} W. V. Davies, “Egyptian Hieroglyphics,” 132. The same page provides a chart illustrating the transformation of hieroglyphs into alphabetic symbols of our Latin alphabet.

Since Joseph Smith's day it has been demonstrated that literacy was widespread among pre-Columbian Mesoamerican peoples, dating back to at least 1000 B.C.50

Quetzalcoatl

Since the early twentieth century, many Latter-day Saints have posited some type of relationship between the Mesoamerican god Quetzalcoatl ("feathered serpent;" Kukulcan in Maya) and the resurrected Savior in the Americas. The Tanners briefly deal with this issue (pp. 8–9, 69–70). If there is any relationship between Quetzalcoatl and Christ, it is clearly overlaid with numerous historical, mythical, and legendary strata, which are essentially impossible to unravel.51 Any proposed relationship must therefore remain tentative and speculative, but potentially interesting.52

A few points should be emphasized. First, the Book of Mormon makes no reference to this deity. The possible relation between Christ and Quetzalcoatl is a speculative interpretation by modern readers. It may or may not be correct. Second, there were at least two major Quetzalcoats, one being an ancient god, and another a Toltec priest named Ce Acatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl. There is confusion between the god and the mortal in Aztec, Spanish, and modern sources. Third, the idea and iconography of a "feathered serpent" god can be traced back to

50 Justeson, "The Origin of Writing Systems"; Marcus, Mesoamerican Writing Systems.
51 The two best books on Quetzalcoatl are David Carrasco, Quetzalcoatl and the Irony of Empire: Myths and Prophecies in the Aztec Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1982), which contains a complete catalog and analysis of the primary sources, and Burr Cartwright Brundage, The Phoenix of the Western World: Quetzalcoatl and the Sky Religion (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1982). See also Laurette Sejourne, Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico (Berkeley: Shamballa, 1976), 24–43, 53–78.
Olmec times (c. 1200–400 B.C.), and was widespread in Teotihuacan in the third century A.D. Thus at least some elements of the Quetzalcoatl mythology date back to Book of Mormon times. Fourth, the differences between the Quetzalcoatl myths and the depiction of Christ in the Book of Mormon are unfortunately often ignored by some Latter-day Saint writers. I personally find the Quetzalcoatl parallels interesting but not convincing; but whether they are accurate or not, it has little to do with the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The only question at issue is the validity of some modern Latter-day Saint interpretations.

Izapa Stela 5 (“Tree of Life” Stone)

The Tanners go to great length in discussing the so-called “Tree of Life” stela, more accurately known as Izapa Stela 5 (pp. 34–52). This is perhaps the best known pre-Columbian monument that has been associated with the Book of Mormon by Latter-day Saints. In dealing with this stela it must be emphasized that the interpretation of iconography is extremely difficult and complex. The same symbols or combinations of symbols can have radically different meanings in different times, places, societies, or to different groups within a single society. We will never know for certain what Izapa Stela 5 meant to its creators. To me the connection with the Book of Mormon is possible, but tenuous. But even if Izapa Stela 5 has absolutely nothing to do

53 As demonstrated by La Venta Stela 19 and other Olmec sources; see Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs: The Oldest Civilization in Mexico* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 49 for photograph, 188–89 for discussion.


with the Book of Mormon, the fact that some Latter-day Saint have misinterpreted it provides no evidence against the Book of Mormon.

**Fraudulent Artifacts**

The Tanners present a number of examples of supposedly forged antiquities which some Latter-day Saints have at various times used in an attempt to bolster the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Several general observations need to be made here. First, the forgery of antiquities is an ancient and "venerable" occupation; it is not particularly linked to the Book of Mormon. Forged coins and pottery are the most notorious examples, as any visitor to the Near East can testify. Forging Viking antiquities has been a favorite pastime of North Americans, but none of these forgeries has ever been taken as evidence that real Norsemen never did discover America. Second, none of the supposed forgeries used to authenticate the Book of Mormon were the work of Latter-day Saints. Latter-day Saint writers who accepted the authenticity of these forgeries were sincere victims, rather than perpetrators of the fraud. Third, these forgeries are usually accepted only by zealous but uninformed Latter-day Saints. For the most part, trained professional Latter-day Saint scholars have rejected such materials. Fourth, almost none of the forgeries mentioned by the Tanners are at all relevant to current

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57 For a brief survey of some Viking forgeries in North America, see Erik Wahlgren, *The Vikings and America* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1986), 98–120.

58 As was the case in the recent Hofmann affair; see Richard E. Turley, *Victims: The LDS Church and the Mark Hofmann Case* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).
professional Latter-day Saint studies of Book of Mormon antiquities. These studies for the most part do not attempt to authenticate the Book of Mormon by reference to the items discussed by the Tanners. Finally, as I have emphasized before, even if all of the items discussed by the Tanners should in fact be forgeries, it would not disprove the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

**Parahyba (Paraiba) Text**

The Parahyba text is a transcription of a purported sixth century B.C. Phoenician inscription supposedly found in Brazil in 1872.59 The Tanners seem noncommittal in their denunciation of this text (pp. 22–25, 65, 80–84). The jury is still out on this particular inscription, although most authorities reject it. Since the original (if there ever was one) is lost, the issue will probably never be conclusively decided. If the text is authentic, it would demonstrate that trans-Atlantic crossings at approximately the time of the Mulekites were feasible. This would not prove that Book of Mormon peoples are historical. However, it would demonstrate that one of the major arguments against the Book of Mormon—that all native Americans are descended only from the Bering Straits immigrants and that there were no pre-Columbian contacts with the Old World—is inaccurate. If the Parahyba text is a forgery the Book of Mormon remains unaffected.

**The Kinderhook Plates**

The Tanners relish linking Joseph Smith with this early nineteenth-century forgery (pp. 25–31, 78–80).60 This topic has been analyzed in detail, and it has been demonstrated that Joseph Smith was only mildly interested in the Kinderhook plates.61 Whatever the significance of this forgery for early Latter-day

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59 For a positive view, see Stephen C. Jett, “Precolumbian Trans-oceanic Contacts,” in Jesse D. Jennings ed., Ancient South Americans (San Francisco: Freeman, 1983), 369–70, and his references. For a negative discussion, see Nigel Davies, Voyagers to the New World (New York: Morrow, 1979), 156–58.

60 Cf. Tanner and Tanner, Mormonism: Shadow or Reality? 111–
15, 125G–125f.

Saint history, it has absolutely no relevance for the modern study of Book of Mormon antiquities.

The Newark Stones

The Tanners discuss two discourses given by Orson Pratt in 1870 in which he claimed that the Newark Stones were “external proof” of the Book of Mormon (pp. 31–34).62 The Tanners then indicate that nearly forty years later, in 1908, it was determined that the Newark Stones were non-Latter-day Saint forgeries. Although some Latter-day Saints continued to mention the Newark Stones in the early twentieth century, today no one takes them seriously. Indeed, so irrelevant are the Newark Stones to the current study of Book of Mormon antiquities that I have to admit that I had never heard of them before reading the Tanners.

Geography

Book of Mormon geography and the location of the Hill Cumorah are extensively discussed by the Tanners (pp. 52–74).63 They have consistently (and wisely) ignored the considerable attention these issues have received in the twenty years since their publication.64 Their treatment of the topic is so outdated as to be fundamentally worthless.

The Bat Creek Inscription

Since the Tanners’ publication the Bat Creek inscription (pp. 84–92)65 has become widely accepted as Hebrew of the

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63 Ibid., 118–24, 125J. Although it has nothing to do with the Book of Mormon, for some reason, they also include a discussion of Adam-ondi-Ahman in this section (pp. 74–78). Until someone is able to provide a clear and authentic date, location, and archaeological context for Adam, it is pointless to attempt to prove or disprove the authenticity of the Adam-ondi-Ahman site.
64 For some of the current scholarly Latter-day Saint thought on Book of Mormon geography, see bibliography in n. 19 above.
first or second century A.D. Although this is a stunning discovery, it does not “prove” the Book of Mormon is true. It does, however, demonstrate that the basic story of the Book of Mormon—that Jewish immigrants came to the New World—is perfectly plausible.

Implications

On almost all of the issues raised by the Tanners, the Latter-day Saints are in a “no lose” situation. If the antiquities in question are in fact forgeries, or have been misinterpreted by Latter-day Saints, it does not demonstrate that the Book of Mormon is nonhistorical, only that some Latter-day Saints have been mistaken in their interpretations of these antiquities. However, even if some Latter-day Saint interpretations of these matters prove to be accurate, we will still not be able to say that the Book of Mormon has been proven to be historical.

What, then, would provide conclusive proof of the historicity of the Book of Mormon? Perhaps the only type of discovery which would be conclusive would be a dated inscription, discovered and interpreted by a non-Mormon archaeologist in an undisturbed archaeological context, which makes explicit mention of people, places, or events unique to the Book of Mormon. Unless such an inscription should be discovered, the best we will be able to establish is plausibility.

Conclusion

The fundamental point that a reading of the Tanners’ material demonstrates is that they are incapable of seriously dealing with academic studies and issues surrounding questions of ar-

chaeology and geography of either the New or Old World. Their failure in recent years to significantly respond to the work of what could be called the New Book of Mormon Archaeology has clearly demonstrated the bankrupt nature of their enterprise. My advice to the Tanners—which I really don’t expect them to follow—is to stick to their search for foibles of Latter-day Saint leaders, and their facile, *ad nauseam* demonstrations that Latter-day Saint doctrine bears little relationship to fundamentalist Protestant doctrine. By moving beyond these subjects they will only embarrass themselves further.