A Listing of Points and Counterpoints

John Wm. Maddox

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<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>John Wm. Maddox</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ISSN</strong></td>
<td>1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)</td>
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  The claims of Metcalfe’s *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* appear to have been adequately responded to in the *Review*. |

John Wm. Maddox

**A Listing of Points and Counterpoints**

Shortly after the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6, no. 1, was published, containing over 566 pages of responses to arguments raised in Brent L. Metcalfe’s *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), a few people were heard to say that the FARMS publication had failed to address any substantive issues head on. That assessment did not seem to me to describe the contents of the *Review* that I had read. So I began going through both books to see how many substantive issues had been raised and addressed. Since neither book had an index at the time (vol. 7, no. 1 of the *Review* now contains a cumulative index, although it only lists page numbers and is unannotated), it was not easy to figure out where each argument and its respective counterpoints could be found.

Without wanting to revisit old issues that may have already been more than adequately covered, I list below my findings, for what they may be worth. I identified about 170 arguments raised in *New Approaches* that find responses in vol. 6, no. 1, or in subsequent issues of the *Review*. In my personal opinion, most of the arguments are not new (*New Approaches* presents less than meets the eye), and the vast majority of them are answered substantively and satisfactorily. The few arguments that were not addressed

I express appreciation to John W. Welch for his suggestions and to Alison Coutts for her assistance in preparing this review.
struck me as being either immaterial to the issue of Book of Mormon authorship (such as efforts to discredit the work of scholars like Hugh Nibley) or vaguely alleged parallels or observations. Accordingly, I found the responses of the reviewers to be cogent and sufficiently persuasive.

All page references to the Review (RBBM) are to vol. 6, no. 1, unless otherwise noted with different volume and issue numbers. New Approaches to the Book of Mormon is abbreviated NABM.¹

**Question 1:**

Is the Book of Mormon a product of Joseph Smith’s world?

**Alleged Anachronisms: Out of time sequence?**

Claim: The Book of Mormon is wrong to claim that the brass plates were a complete Old Testament up to 600 B.C. Ashment, *NABM*, 332 n. 8. Response: Besides the fact that the Book of Mormon does not necessarily make such a claim, some biblical scholars date all or much of Leviticus and Deuteronomy before 600 B.C. when Lehi left Jerusalem. Gee, *RBBM*, 108–10.


Claim: Malachi’s words are found in Ether and 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi before they were given in 3 Nephi. Metcalfe, *NABM*, 426–27. Response: Close similarity does not necessarily mean dependence. Roper, *RBBM*, 375–77.

¹ Authors cited from *New Approaches* include Edward H. Ashment, Melodie Moench Charles, Anthony A. Hutchinson, John C. Kunich, Stan Larson, Deanne G. Matheny, Brent Lee Metcalfe, Mark D. Thomas, Dan Vogel, and David P. Wright. Reviewers cited from the *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* include Richard Lloyd Anderson, Ross David Baron, Davis Bitton, Kevin Christensen, John Gee, Alan Goffi, Louis Midgley, Robert L. Millet, Matthew Roper, Royal Skousen, James E. Smith, John L. Sorenson, Martin Tanner, John A. Tvedtnes, and John W. Welch.
Claim: Christ is a Greek word and the Nephites could not have known Greek. Ashment, NABM, 346 n. 24; 427–29. Response: Christ is an English translation of whatever word was revealed by the angel and recorded on the plates. Tvedtnes and Gee, RBBM, 49–50, 78.

Claim: The word Christ was changed to messiah to prevent an anachronism. Metcalfe, NABM, 427–32. Response: Other things may account for the change, and Jacob does not necessarily claim that the angel revealed unique information. Roper, RBBM, 366.

**Do the covenants in the Book of Mormon reflect modern theology?**


Claim: The personal covenant in the Book of Mormon prayers reflects 1830 Protestant thought. Thomas, NABM, 74–75. Response: This point overlooks some significant differences: the sacrament was not a covenant in mainstream Protestantism. Anderson, RBBM, 408–11.

Claim: Unlike the Book of Mormon’s group covenants, the sacrament is a weaker individual covenant. Thomas, NABM, 74–76. Response: This argument reduces Christ’s teachings to primitive social worship. Anderson, RBBM, 389–90, 410–11.

Was the Book of Mormon meant for a nineteenth-century audience?


Does the portrayal of the sacrament ordinance in the Book of Mormon betray nineteenth-century origins?


Claim: In 3 Nephi 18, the term *disputations* refers to questions about the sacrament in Joseph Smith’s day. Thomas, *NABM*, 55. Response: *Disputations* has a much broader context than just the sacrament. Anderson, *RBBM*, 381–82.


Claim: Like nineteenth-century Protestantism, the Book of Mormon appears to reject transubstantiation while viewing the sacrament as more than mere symbols. Thomas, *NABM*, 65–69. Response: The history of Israel had a more prominent place in the minds of early Mormons, and so rhetorical analysis should focus on other factors. Anderson, *RBBM*, 393–94.


Response: The two prayers go together, precluding the need to make them identical. Anderson, *RBBM*, 399–401.


**Is the Universalism in the Book of Mormon a product of the nineteenth century?**


Did Joseph Smith put his own theology into the Book of Mormon, or was the Book of Mormon a part of Joseph Smith’s own development?


Claim: Several things contributed to doctrinal confusion on the part of some Church members. Charles, *NABM*, 106–7.
Response: Such confusion should not be equated with confusion on the part of the prophets. Millet, \textit{RBBM}, 195–96.


Claim: Sabellianism would explain Nephite belief in Jesus and the Father as two different manifestations of the same being. Charles, \textit{NABM}, 100. Response: Sabellianism is only found by citing a few verses and ignoring the rest of the Book of Mormon. Baron, \textit{RBBM} 7/1:105–7.

Claim: The Nephites believed that Jesus would have a mortal body, but not necessarily that he would actually be mortal. Charles, \textit{NABM}, 84. Response: Abinadi, quoting and interpreting Isaiah, taught that Jesus would die. Millet, \textit{RBBM}, 190; Baron, 7/1:97–98; Tanner, 7/2:12–14.


Claim: The Church projects current beliefs back to earlier times. Charles, \textit{NABM}, 103. Response: The doctrine of Christ has always been understood by the prophets. Millet, \textit{RBBM}, 199;
Tanner, 7/2:21–22. All history adjusts to accommodate new understanding. Christensen, RBBM 7/2:188–92.

Is the Book of Mormon historical?

Claim: "Whether the Book of Mormon is ancient really does not matter." Hutchinson, NABM, 16. Response: It does matter. What we see and how we define ourselves relies on the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Christensen, RBBM 7/2:212–18.


Claim: Rhetorical criticism allows one to discuss the Book of Mormon without conclusions about historicity. Vogel, NABM, 21.
Response: Rhetorical criticism depends entirely on a historical context. Tanner, RBBM, 418–19.

Claim: The Book of Mormon title page acknowledges flaws in the record. Charles, NABM, 82. Response: This is an inaccurate reading of Moroni’s words. Millet, RBBM, 189.

Claim: King Benjamin’s address follows the pattern of a nineteenth-century revival. Metcalfe, NABM, 421 n. 31. Response: Benjamin’s address follows an ancient and complex pattern. Christensen, RBBM 7/2:174–76.

**Is the Book of Mormon myth?**

Claim: The prophecies about witnesses to the Book of Mormon evolve, allowing Joseph Smith to expand the number of witnesses. Metcalfe, NABM, 423–25. Response: This assertion ignores key wording in the prophecies. Roper, RBBM, 373–75.

Claim: Joseph Smith’s description of the angel changed with his theology. Hutchinson, NABM, 6–7. Response: This is an effort to eliminate a historical Moroni. Midgley, RBBM, 241.

Claim: The gold plates were not literal. Hutchinson, NABM, 6–7. Response: This effort to eliminate historical Nephites and artifacts ignores the testimony of witnesses. Midgley, RBBM, 241.

Claim: The Book of Mormon, like the Old and New Testaments, need not be historically accurate to teach God’s word. Hutchinson, NABM, 4–5. Response: The Bible is not myth, neither is the Book of Mormon. Midgley, RBBM, 242–52.

**Question 2:** Is the Book of Mormon a product of Joseph Smith’s language?

**Are the language claims of the Book of Mormon credible?**

Claim: Mayan glyphs for and it came to pass are not related to Book of Mormon language. Ashment, NABM, 371–72.
Response: However, the translation of those glyphs is intriguing. Gee, *RBBM*, 82 n. 102.


Claim: Altering Egyptian characters to accommodate Nephite language is unheard of. Ashment, *NABM*, 331. Response: Egyptian, Sumerian, and Demotic scripts were all altered to accommodate other languages. Gee, *RBBM*, 81–82.


Claim: If Stubbs were correct, the syntax in Genesis 1:1 and Words of Mormon would be similar. Ashment, *NABM*, 365–66. Response: This argument avoids the question. Gee, *RBBM*, 93.


Claim: Joseph Smith viewed characters from the plates with their English equivalent in the seer stone. Ashment, *NABM*, 332–33. Response: This posture relies on the testimony of people who were not there. Gee, *RBBM*, 83–84.


Where did the names in the Book of Mormon originate?


Claim: Nibley’s claim that the names Pahoran, Mormon, and Deseret have Egyptian roots is faulty. Ashment, *NABM*, 344–45. Response: When first published thirty years ago, Nibley’s theories were based on then-current scholarship. Gee, *RBBM*, 110–11.

Does the Book of Mormon plagiarize the King James Bible?


Claim: B. H. Roberts affirmed that Joseph Smith compared the KJV when translating. Larson, *NABM*, 116. Response: Roberts said that when the KJV and the plates agreed in substance, the KJV was used. Welch, *RBBM*, 156.

Claim: If the Book of Mormon repeats the mistakes of the KJV, we can rule out coincidence. Larson, *NABM*, 117. Response: One cannot prove that the so-called mistakes are actual mistakes. Welch, *RBBM*, 157.

Claim: Comparing 3 Nephi and Matthew can help determine the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Larson, *NABM*, 117. Response: Nobody knows what was and was not in the original Greek. Welch, *RBBM*, 153.


Claim: Joseph Smith’s use of therefore and wherefore depends on whether he was copying or embellishing the KJV. Metcalfe, *NABM*, 411. Response: He might have used those words according to his preference. Tvedtnes, *RBBM*, 42.

Claim: Sperry said that if the Book of Mormon copied the errors of the KJV, then it should be rejected. Larson, *NABM*, 116. Response: Sperry viewed the Book of Mormon as an independent ancient text. Welch, *RBBM*, 156.

**Does the book of Alma depend on the Epistle to the Hebrews?**


Claim: If Joseph Smith wrote Alma 12–13, then he wrote the entire Book of Mormon. Wright, *NABM*, 165–66. Response: The evidence for plagiarizing Hebrews is weak, and so is this conclusion. Welch, *RBBM*, 180–81.
Claim: Six motifs found in the same order in Hebrews and Alma show copying of the KJV. Wright, NABM, 171–73. Response: This ignores Genesis 14 and other details found between the six selected motifs in Alma. Welch, RBBM, 171–75.

Claim: In Alma 13, Joseph Smith is practicing “text conservation,” elucidating Hebrews by explaining that the priesthood is without beginning or end. Wright, NABM, 172–73. Response: The phrase end of years is common to the Bible and does not prove that Alma is dependent on Hebrews. Welch, RBBM, 173.

Claim: Alma 12–13 reflects and parallels the two great themes of Hebrews, faith and priesthood. Wright, NABM, 195–96. Response: The differences between the two texts are all but ignored. Welch, RBBM, 170.

Claim: Both Alma and Hebrews speak of Abraham, not Abram; therefore, the text of Alma derives from Hebrews. Wright, NABM, 178 n. 30. Response: Joseph Smith would have translated Abram as Abraham. Welch, RBBM, 175.


Claim: Hebrews and Alma both have similar introductions to similar quotes. Wright, NABM, 178–80. Response: The significant differences between the two weaken this point, as does the fact that the preexilic psalms share this similarity. Welch, RBBM, 177.

Claim: Alma 12 and Hebrews 3 quote material with four identical elements. Wright, NABM, 180–81. Response: These elements also appear anciently in Psalms, but Alma’s phraseology is his own. Welch, RBBM, 178.

Claim: The four key elements common to Hebrews 3 and Alma 12 prove plagiarism. Wright, NABM, 180–82. Response: Alma could have had access to, and been influenced by, Psalm 95 and Numbers 14, but his phraseology is consistent and peculiar to his book. Welch, RBBM, 177–79.

Claim: The occurrences of the four motifs are numerically similar between Alma and Hebrews. Wright, NABM, 181.


Claim: The hypothesis of a parent text for both Hebrews and Alma is very weak. Wright, *NABM*, 204–7. Response: Because Christian doctrine has been the same since Adam, there could be a parent text. Millet, *RBBM*, 189–90. The existence of the Book of Mormon itself is more problematic than the existence of a parent text. Christensen, *RBBM* 7/2:187.


**How does Matthew 5–7 compare with the report of Christ’s visit to America?**


Claim: No evidence has been shown that the Book of Mormon substantiates a visit of Christ to America. Larson, *NABM*, 133. Response: Those who make this claim simply choose to ignore the evidence. Welch, *RBBM*, 164–68; Christensen, 7/2:156.

Claim: The word again in 3 Nephi 14:2 is not supported by ancient “Matthew” documents. Larson, *NABM*, 123. Response:
Even if true, this issue is peripheral, not fundamental. Christensen, *RBBM* 7/2:170–71.

**Is there evidence of an underlying ancient Hebrew text?**

Claim: The so-called Hebraism, “I and my brethren,” is also found in Doctrine and Covenants 132. Ashment, *NABM*, 354–55. Response: Doctrine and Covenants 132 was written fourteen years after the publication of the Book of Mormon; this example proves nothing. Gee, *RBBM*, 94–95.


Claim: Hebrew in the Book of Mormon is problematic because it is not mentioned until near the end. Ashment, *NABM*, 331. Response: This is a diversion. Gee, *RBBM*, 83–84.


Claim: Wordprint analysis is useless because no known documents by the disputed authors exist outside of the Book of Mormon. Ashment, *NABM*, 372–74. Response: Joseph Smith is one of the disputed authors. Christensen, *RBBM* 7/2:194.
Question 3:
Does the Book of Mormon make internal errors that betray its lack of antiquity or contain features inconsistent with Joseph Smith's account of its origins?

Are there internal inconsistencies in the Book of Mormon?

Claim: Joseph Smith's inconsistency is shown in the use of the words Christ and messiah. Metcalfe, NABM, 430 n. 44. Response: This is a misreading of the text. Roper, RBBM, 367.

Does the Book of Mormon contradict the Bible?


Claim: Detailed prophecies of Christ not present in the Bible were fabricated by Joseph Smith. Charles, NABM, 90–94. Response: Doctrine is known by revelation. Millet, RBBM, 198–99. This assertion is a function of the claimant’s world view. Baron, RBBM 7/1:95–96. Many detailed prophecies of Christ are found in the Old Testament and Dead Sea Scrolls. Tanner, RBBM 7/2:14–16.
Can the text be analyzed objectively?


Does the “Mosiah First” theory show that Joseph Smith wrote the Book of Mormon?


Claim: The lost manuscript and the replacement text were both 116 pages. This was not coincidental. Metcalfe, NABM, 395 n. 1. Response: Joseph Smith could not have known that they would be similar. Skousen, RBBM, 137.

Claim: Changes in chapter numbering prove that Joseph Smith began writing again at Mosiah. Metcalfe, NABM, 405–8. Response: Part of the premise behind this claim is wrong, and its conclusion is speculative. Skousen, RBBM, 137–38.

Claim: The use of wherefore and therefore confirms Mosian priority. Metcalfe, NABM, 408–14. Response: This assertion relies on intuition and the assumption that the words are interchangeable. Skousen, RBBM, 140–43.


**Question 4:**
Can a coherent explanation be given for the Book of Mormon in terms of American antiquities and hard science?

Archaeology


Claim: Tents have been found in Mexico but not Mesoamerica. Matheny, NABM, 300. Response: War technology would have spread rapidly from Mexico to Mesoamerica. Sorenson, RBBM, 334.

Claim: Aztec tents do not prove the Nephites had tents a thousand years earlier. Matheny, NABM, 300. Response: The evidence of Aztec tents is literary and helpful. Sorenson, RBBM, 335.

Claim: Evidence showing Old World origins for Mesoamerican human skulls is rejected by mainstream biological anthropologists. Matheny, NABM, 310 n. 25. Response: Wiercinski’s conclusions are unorthodox, but his work is not poorly done. The conclusions regarding cranial morphology remain largely undemonstrated. Sorenson, RBBM, 348.

Claim: Proposed locations of Zarahemla and Sidom do not fit the Book of Mormon description. Matheny, NABM, 316. Response: We cannot make conclusions about the size and importance of the two suggested sites. Sorenson, RBBM, 353-54.

Claim: The Olmecs were too late to be the Jaredites. Matheny, NABM, 318. Response: It is reasonable that the Jaredites could have been one element among many in the Olmec civilization. Sorenson, RBBM, 355-57.


Metallurgy


Claim: There is no evidence that metallurgy was practiced before 900 B.C. Matheny, NABM, 287-88. Response: Linguists find the word for “metal” as far back as 1500 B.C. Sorenson, RBBM, 320.

Claim: No metal-working sites have been found in Mesoamerica, but they do exist in the Old World. Matheny, NABM, 284-88. Response: Mesoamerican archaeology is fifty years behind Old World archaeology. Sorenson, RBBM, 320.
Claim: Metal working typically leaves archaeological evidence, but none has been found. Matheny, *NABM*, 284. Response: Archaeological evidence of known metallurgy is incomplete. Sorenson, *RBBM*, 322.


**Flora and Fauna**


Claim: There are no Old World olives, corn, or barley in Mesoamerica. Matheny, *NABM*, 300–302. Response: There is no reason to believe that the plants Nephi brought survived up to the present. Sorenson, *RBBM*, 337–39.


Claim: None of the horse remains found in Maya strata were contemporaneous with the Maya. Matheny, *NABM*, 305–10.
Response: Evidence of horse bones dating to Mesoamerican times has been ignored. Sorenson, *RBBM*, 344.


**Is a Book of Mormon geography possible?**

Claim: Speculations about Book of Mormon geography are faulty because the geographers accept the Book of Mormon as true before they examine the evidence they write about. Hutchinson, *NABM*, 10–11. Response: This is a straw man argument. Midgley, *RBBM*, 224 n. 55. What this criticism means is that the geographers’ paradigms are different from the claimant’s own. Christensen, *RBBM* 7/2:172. Assuming historicity allows one to more easily see historically consistent phenomena. Christensen, *RBBM* 7/2:176–77.


**Demographics**

Claim: The traditional Latter-day Saint view is that all people in the Book of Mormon descended from Mulek or Lehi. Kunich, *NABM*, 231–32. Response: The traditional view is not held officially by the Church. Smith, *RBBM*, 261–70.
Claim: The traditional view is supported by the Book of Mormon text itself. Kunich, _NABM_, 256–59. Response: This is not a careful reading of the text. Smith, _RBBM_, 261–63. Some passages from the Book of Mormon discredit this claim. Christensen, _RBBM_ 7/2:165–68.

Claim: The plain meaning of the Book of Mormon text precludes mixing of Jaredites and Nephites. Kunich, _NABM_, 264. Response: This is an assumed “plain meaning.” Smith, _RBBM_, 261.

Claim: Other large cultures would have been noted in the Book of Mormon. Kunich, _NABM_, 262. Response: This claim is based on what the Book of Mormon does not say. Smith, _RBBM_, 261.

Claim: The Book of Mormon would presumably mention any native cultures. Kunich, _NABM_, 262. Response: This interpretation is based on presumption. Smith, _RBBM_, 261.


Claim: The Book of Mormon makes clear that the Jaredites had a complex civilization. Matheny, _NABM_, 317. Response: This is an assumption, not a plain rendering of the text. Sorenson, _RBBM_, 354–55.

Claim: B. H. Roberts believed there were no other people in America other than Lehites, Mulekites, and Jaredites. Kunich, _NABM_, 261. Response: This may be a misreading of Roberts. Smith, _RBBM_, 267. There is no consideration of the basis of Roberts’s belief. Christensen, _RBBM_ 7/2:164.

Claim: Up to A.D. 1650, world population growth was a steady .04%. Kunich, _NABM_, 241. Response: Other sources show great
fluctuations over the past several millennia. Smith, RBBM, 272–74.


Claim: At a growth rate of .04%, Lehi’s posterity would have totaled 54 after 980 years in America. Kunich, NABM, 246–51. Response: A .01% growth rate would have produced that many people after 60 years. Smith, RBBM, 287–88.

Claim: The high number of war fatalities in Alma 2 would have required a 2% growth rate in the Nephite population. Kunich, NABM, 250. Response: The growth rate could have been 1.25% and still have been within the realm of plausibility. Smith, RBBM, 289–91.

Claim: Warfare among the Lehités would have caused an even slower growth rate. Kunich, NABM, 256. Response: Constant warfare did not slow the growth rate among the Greeks. Smith, RBBM, 276–77.

Claim: It is impossible to have had 230,000 warriors in Mormon’s army. Kunich, NABM, 258–89. Response: Published population tables allow for estimates of 1.6 million people. Smith, RBBM, 292–94.


Question 5: Are the Book of Mormon Witnesses credible?

Are the Three and Eight Witnesses credible?