More Installments in a Ficto-Tract Series about Book of Mormon Scholarship

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Reviewed by Robert E. Lewis

**More Installments in a “Ficto-Tract” Series about Book of Mormon Scholarship**

In a 1992 review in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, Richard Cracroft\(^1\) gave mild praise for the story but questioned the underlying premise and value of a novel by Keith C. Terry (with Maurice R. Tanner), *Out of Darkness.*\(^2\) Cracroft termed this publication a “ficto-tract” for its attempt to present in the framework of a novel—“a form which is palatable to a larger reading public”—“the recent and remarkable textual discoveries about the Book of Mormon, findings which point up the authenticity of the book’s antiquity and its divine origin and message.”\(^3\) Cracroft suggested that Terry’s approach was less than helpful in that readers might tend to find this “juxtaposition of fact and fiction”\(^4\)—this fictional conversion of a fictional protagonist based on literal facts—confusing and less compelling than might be desired.

Since that review was published, the original book has been repackaged and republished\(^5\) and two additional volumes, *Into the Light* and *The Remnant*, have appeared in what is now becoming a


\(^{3}\) Cracroft, “Out of Darkness into Light,” 216.

\(^{4}\) Ibid., 218.

ficto-tract saga built on a foundation of the progressive conversions to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of members of the (fictitious) Stephen Thorn family. *Into the Light*, the second book in the series, continues in the same vein as the original, appearing to have the intent of entertaining and holding—even inspiring—the reader, along with highlighting the power of the Book of Mormon as a conversion tool and stimulating interest in (and informing readers about) recent physical evidences for the historicity of the Book of Mormon. The story brings some closure to the initial volume by detailing the struggles of Anney Thorn to come to terms with her husband’s conversion to the church. It also continues to provide a showcase for introducing additional scholarly findings about the origins of the Book of Mormon. The third volume is another matter, which I will address later.

**Overall Reactions to the Series**

While this is not heavyweight literature, I liked reading the first two books. In both cases, the story line held my attention, with enough twists and turns to keep me reading through most of a night.

Also, the lead characters are given some depth and dimension. Though fictional, the Book of Mormon conversions of Stephen Thorn in the first book and his wife Anney in the second seemed valid to me. Descriptions of these processes squared with my own experience with the Book of Mormon and seemed consistent in content and feeling with real-life Book of Mormon conversion stories recorded in such anthologies as those by Eugene England and Hartman and Connie Rector. A personal highlight for me in *Into the Light* was the point at which Stephen Thorn took the high road and forgave his tele-evangelist father-in-law for a long litany of offenses. This first step to a family healing was portrayed sensitively and evenly. It gave the positive message that even persons with feet of clay can have some redeeming features and that a Latter-day Saint who is

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striving to be Christlike must rise above detractors, acknowledge values where they exist, and seek to enhance personal and family relationships when allowed.

I was also intrigued by the way in which the author wove in a side reference to the real-life work of Richard and Barbara Winder in the opening of missionary work in eastern Europe. (They are something of folk heroes in the area of Mormondom in which I live).

Copies of these books have recently circulated among members of my family and friends. One complaint made by several persons in my family is that the first two books in the series contained some PG-level marital intimacy that seemed gratuitous and inconsistent with the apparent purposes and audience for the book. Like me, however, these readers seemed to enjoy the story lines. But most significant, and consistent with Cracroft’s earlier intimation, is that those who had little earlier experience reading FARMS publications and the like often found the sections describing scholarly evidences of Book of Mormon historicity to be confusing or disturbing. They simply did not know what to believe. This seemed to be at least partly the result of the indistinguishable line drawn by the authors between fact and fiction.

One of the ways this troublesome issue manifests itself is when the books fail to credit, or even obfuscate, the bases for the scholarly works that are being described and promoted. Sources are seldom documented—and then only in passing—by characters in the narrative. And one notes numerous oddities in attribution. Here are some examples. The (real) Warren and Michaela Aston are praised for their efforts to delineate Book of Mormon geography in the Arabian peninsula (Into the Light, pp. 19–20). As a BYU law professor whose name could not be remembered by the (fictitious) Stephen Thorn, John Welch (the real person) is acknowledged in The Remnant for his discovery of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon (see p. 144). However, in the chapter in Out of Darkness where chiasmus is highlighted, a fictional Dr. Saul from Hebrew University is Welch’s alter ego, who voices Welch’s findings. Richard Hauck (the real person) is credited with an archaeological discovery supporting the Mesoamerican model for

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8 Terry, Out of Darkness, 148–57.
Book of Mormon American geography, but credit for developing the model itself is not given to (the real) John Sorenson but to a team of (fictional) researchers under the hire of (the fictional) Dr. Polk (see p. 220). The pioneering work of (the real) Larsen, Rencher, and their associates, in their statistical studies of Book of Mormon wordprints, is attributed to (fictional) professors from Virginia Polytechnic Institute (although both Larsen and Rencher earned their Ph.D.s there) and the University of Southern California. In fact, in the chapter on wordprints,9 direct quotations are lifted word-for-word from a Larsen and Rencher publication on this subject10 and put into the mouths of the fictional professors, with no mention of the real source. A figure is even reproduced exactly from the published article without attribution.11

While I have no personal reading on the reactions of the LDS scholars whose works are quoted and copied without attribution and even assigned to fictitious authors, I felt some pain and embarrassment on their behalf. I assume they may experience some level of dismay, perhaps less from the lack of credit and more from having internalized the scholar's canon that responsible writers always leave a trail of verification that can be followed by others and from their work being made a part of something that falls so short of this ideal.

One further example illustrates my frustration. The Remnant features a statement that Sorenson supposedly has written about blood group evidence that ties Japanese, Polynesians, and Native Americans together and distinguishes these three groups from other Asians (see pp. 7–8). No source is provided. I assumed a real-life, factual source for the information, based on the apparent pattern in the earlier volumes. Because the concept was new and interesting to me and because the statement in the text seemed to present some ambiguities, I tried to find the original writings to

9 Ibid., 249–60.
clarify for myself what had been said. After all, four paragraphs in quote marks are attributed to Sorenson. I own several of John Sorenson's works and assumed he might be the Sorenson in question. I searched the indexes of these books and reread chapters that might in some manner have related to the topic of Native American origins. I then did an Infobases LDS Collectors Library search for anything (any) Sorenson had published in an LDS-related volume. None of these yielded any writings of any Sorenson on this subject. Then I did further Infobases word searches on variations of the words "blood group" and "blood type," and found five references about American Indian blood types, none by Sorenson and none of which included Japanese or Polynesians in the comparison. I was left with only questions and frustrations: Is this particular evidence documented in some obscure or discredited place? Or is the report fictitious? How much can I trust the legitimacy of any description of physical evidences for Book of Mormon historicity provided in these novels?

For these books to have responsibly and accurately informed readers of findings and conclusions of recent Book of Mormon scholarship, extensive explanatory notes, at a minimum, would have been required. These books cry out for a hefty endnote section (at the end of the book or each chapter) or copious footnotes that accomplish two things: (1) clearly distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction in every instance where some scholarly work is introduced, and (2) make accurate attribution to each of these scholarly works. The latter seems especially critical in order to allow second-mile or skeptical readers to validate the assertions and to know where to go to deepen their understanding of the various topics. Without these aids, these books do not well serve the cause of faith and truth. At a meager best, readers might be motivated to try to inform themselves from more careful sources. At worst, good scholarship is tarnished by association with this less-than-exacting approach, and less-informed readers may become discouraged or cynical about the findings of legitimate Book of Mormon scholarship.12

12 *The Remnant* introduces a sketchy notes chapter, but still largely fails to provide needed references and explanations.
The Remnant

The story line of the third volume in the series, *The Remnant*, seemed weaker and the characterizations flatter. What is presented as Book of Mormon research, rather than the exacting if uncredited scholarship reported in the two earlier volumes, has a flavor of religious hobbying. Proof texts and leaps of faith are mixed in with a few snatches of facts and inferences. The thrust of this book seems to change from its predecessors to that of revealing some little-known meanings in the Book of Mormon, which most members, even General Authorities of the church, do not understand. At least a hint is evident of rebellious frustration and condescension toward church authorities and members failing to understand and give importance to these special truths (see pp. 145, 188).

The story line involves more of the Thorn family as a part of a small, select group of Latter-day Saints invited to join a yacht trip across the Pacific, to be exposed to a theory about the current existence of a nation of latter-day Nephites. Basic premises and conclusions underlying this theory appeared to be:

1. The major Book of Mormon promises to latter-day descendants of Lehi were reserved for the Nephite group (see p. 84), that is, descendants of his three righteous sons, Nephi, Jacob, and Joseph, along with Zoram’s posterity. These promises include:
   • being a righteous and powerful nation in the day of the gentiles,
   • returning to America to claim their rightful inheritance, and
   • spearheading the creation of the New Jerusalem (see pp. 19, 84).

   These promises were not made to the descendants of the Lamanites. However, like any gentile, they might become heirs of these promises through adoption (baptism).

2. All the Nephites in America were destroyed by the Lamanites in the great battles in the fourth century A.D. Any not killed chose to become Lamanites. Thus Nephites no longer exist in America to fulfill the Book of Mormon prophecies for this lineage in the latter days (see pp. 86, 89).

3. Before the destruction of the Nephite nation, the Lord led away a Nephite remnant (see pp. 89–90) to provide a distinct
people and nation to fulfill these latter-day prophecies. The migrations undertaken under the leadership of Hagoth as recorded in Alma 63 are probably the basis for the establishment of this Nephite remnant.

4. Evidence exists that the Japanese nation (see p. 85, 223–27) was established by the people of Hagoth and represents the modern-day Nephites of prophecy.

Premise 1: Book of Mormon Promises Were Exclusive to the Nephites

Terry and Jarvis employ scriptural interpretations as a basis for argument on their first three premises. The first premise is founded on an interpretation of a Book of Mormon prophecy by Jacob, the brother of Nephi. The context is the lengthy oration of Jacob to his fellow Nephites recorded in 2 Nephi 6–10. In these discourses, Jacob focuses on the mission and atonement of Christ, the requirement for a righteous life, the history and future promises to the house of Israel, and the application of these promises to Jacob’s listeners. Jacob speaks of the last in this verse:

And behold how great the covenants of the Lord, and how great his condescensions unto the children of men; and because of his greatness, and his grace and mercy, he has promised unto us that our seed shall not utterly be destroyed, according to the flesh, but that he would preserve them; and in future generations they shall become a righteous branch unto the house of Israel. (2 Nephi 9:53)

Terry and Jarvis use this verse to argue that the term our seed applies strictly to descendants of Nephi and his righteous brothers Jacob, Joseph, and Sam; that the Lamanites are not the people of promise in the Book of Mormon. I believe that many Book of Mormon students would consider this to be too restrictive an interpretation. Although Jacob was speaking to a group that did not include Lamanites, the language in this section is remarkably similar to promises made to Lehi’s descendants as a whole and to all the descendants of Israel. In the latter-days, persons of this lineage would be scattered and afflicted by the gentiles, but the
gentiles would also bring to them the Book of Mormon and the fulness of the gospel. As a part of the larger latter-day gathering of Israel, this activity was likened to the gentiles carrying them in their arms, with kings being the nursing fathers and queens their nursing mothers (see Jacob 10:8–9, compare Isaiah 49:22–23). Prior to the separation of the Nephites and Lamanites, Nephi had applied these concepts to all the descendants of Lehi (see 1 Nephi 22:6–9). A more credible reading of this verse would appear to be that Jacob was reminding the Nephite people (after all, they constituted his audience) of the promises they inherited as elucidated by Isaiah and Lehi. This does not necessarily mean that other descendants of the patriarchs Jacob (Israel) or Lehi did not also share in these promises.

In further support of their premise that the Nephites were the people of promise in the Book of Mormon, Terry and Jarvis interpret references to promises made to the house of Jacob as referring to Jacob the brother of Nephi, not the ancient biblical patriarch. After citing Doctrine and Covenants 52:2, which speaks of a conference to be held “in Missouri, upon the land which I will consecrate unto my people, which are a remnant of Jacob,” Terry and Jarvis have their chief protagonist say, “When you read Jacob, here again it is the remnant of Jacob, the son of Lehi, that it has reference to” (p. 122; see 46–47 and 176–78 for more allusions to this idea). Statements in 3 Nephi 20:16; 21:12; 23:1 are interpreted similarly as applying to Lehi’s son Jacob. Again, most Book of Mormon students would interpret the reference to Jacob as meaning the Israelite patriarch, not Nephi’s brother, and that the house of Jacob refers to all of the first Jacob’s (Israel’s) descendants.¹³

Even if one were to concede that these latter verses do refer to the Book of Mormon Jacob, they still hardly make a case for these prophecies to apply to the entire Nephite group. One might as readily conclude that descendants of Jacob’s brothers Nephi, Sam, and Joseph as well as the Zoramites were also excluded from the promises.

promised blessings that were retained only by the Book of Mormon Jacob.

**Premise 2: No Nephites Remained in America**

According to the second premise, no Nephites remained on the American continent after the destructive wars of the third–fourth centuries A.D. The authors admit that Nephite stragglers remained alive by “coalescing with Lamanite tribes” (p. 89), a point consistently held by a number of twentieth-century Book of Mormon scholars. Oddly, any descendants from these persons are not to be counted as Nephites in future fulfillment of prophecy, according to Terry and Jarvis. This seems a strange inconsistency: Literal descendants of Nephi in America, having lost their faith and joined the dominant Lamanite society, no longer qualify in any shape or form as Nephites, whereas literal descendants of Nephi living in some other part of the earth, such as Japan, having also acquired other belief systems and intermixed with local populations, remain Nephites. It appears that to support their point, the authors must selectively apply two differing criteria for what constitutes a Nephite—a cultural definition for those living in America and a biological criterion for Nephites elsewhere.

Since the focus of the authors’ assertion appears to be about biological lineage, I do not see the justification for excluding persons in America who are biological descendants of the Nephites from being a part of the fulfillment of whatever prophecies may pertain to Nephite descendants in the latter days.

**Premise 3: A Nephite Remnant Was Preserved in Another Land**

The third premise is that a righteous remnant of the Nephites was drawn away from the body of the Nephites to be preserved to

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fulfill the prophetic destiny of the Nephites. It is doubtful that any Book of Mormon believer would challenge the notion that some Nephites may have migrated to other locales, which could include other areas of the Americas, the Polynesian islands, or even Japan. However, the notion of a prophetically based need for the preservation of a Nephite remnant rests partially on dubious interpretations of the Book of Mormon scriptures discussed above. If all Lehi’s descendants share in the fulfillment of these Book of Mormon prophecies, or even if Nephite descendants are mixed in today in some Native American ancestry, the requirement for a separated Nephite remnant in the latter days is moot.

**Premise 4: Physical Evidence Supports the Japanese-Nephite Theory**

The fourth premise of The Remnant is that substantial physical evidence is beginning to be discovered, validating the proposed connection between the Nephites and the Japanese people of today. Terry and Jarvis summarize several findings, in the words of one of their major characters, to the effect that the evidences “strongly suggest that the Japanese people are actually descendants of the ancient Nephite civilization in the Americas” (p. 227).

I identified allusions in the book to seven possible physical evidences for this assertion:

- The timing of the establishment of the first emperor of Japan corresponds to the launching of Hagoth’s ships in 54 B.C., as recorded in the book of Alma (see Alma 58; p. 225).
- A possible correspondence may exist between early ceramic patterns found in Japan and in Ecuador (see p. 225).
- Parallels may be inferred between the Japanese emperors’ emblems of office—the mirror, the jewel, and the sword—with sacred Nephite relics—the Liahona, the Urim and Thummim, and the sword of Laban (see p. 226).
- A suggestion of correspondence of two royal names is made: The Japanese name for their country is Nippon, which may derive from the royal name of Nephi. Also, the Indochinese-Japanese Hagata/Hakate may derive from the name Hagoth (see pp. 20 and 225).
- Japanese blood types appear to be more similar to those of Polynesians and American Indians than to mainland Asians (pp. 7–9).
- The pattern of a Shinto relic seven-bladed sword is similar to a sword design in an ancient Peruvian depiction (see pp. 12, 14–15, 258–59).
- Traces of "Quiché Mayan" may appear in the Japanese language (see pp. 226–27).

Assuming the factuality and accuracy of the evidence cited (which assumption takes some stretching, given the general absence of source citations), the timing of the origination of the line of Japanese emperors to correspond with the Hagoth migrations does not really prove anything. It simply fails to rule out the proposed Nephite origin for the Japanese.

Possible correspondence between artifacts found in Japan with items from Peru (sword design) and Ecuador (ceramic pattern), does not make a good case for Japanese-Nephite origins, if one accepts a limited Mesoamerican model of Book of Mormon geography, as at least the senior author appears to do, based on evidence presented in Into the Light (see pp. 190–94). Neither Peru nor Ecuador would be even remotely a Nephite, or even Lehite, land under a limited Mesoamerican view.

The blood-typing comparisons, while presenting some interest, raise more questions than they provide answers. For example, why are Polynesian "Nephites" not given equal credence as members of the remnant of promise? And, is the sampling of American Indian blood types representative of Book of Mormon peoples as a comparison base? My inability to trace the source for these assertions hindered making a better assessment of the quality of this evidence.

Regarding evidence found in names, finding two similar name words across two languages is hardly breakthrough evidence for the common origins of two peoples.

The seven-bladed sword is held out by the major protagonists in the book as the premier evidence for the Japanese-Nephite connection. Terry and Jarvis propose that this relic is representative of the "seven tribes of Lehi," the tribes being Lamanites, Lemuelites, Ishmaelites, Nephites, Jacobites, Josephites, and Zoramites (see p. 259). The basis for the seven tribes being an icon for
Hagoth's travelers seems obscure to me. The authors elsewhere try to make the point that these émigrés are Nephites only, that is, coming from the four latter tribes. Following this logic, would it not be more reasonable for this people to memorialize the four tribes of Nephi in the sacred sword rather than include the Lamanitish tribes in their count?

For the assertion concerning possible Quiché-Mayan language bases for the Japanese language, the authors identify a specific source: “An author-scientist, James Churchward, writing in one of his books entitled *Children of Mu*, declared that the Japanese language still contained, in 1931, nearly forty percent Quiché Mayan words” (p. 226).

While on the surface this statement may appear to have some significance, at closer review the inclusion of this reference is a scholarly embarrassment. Churchward was an adventurer and mystic who wrote a number of books in the 1920s and early 1930s promoting a theory of the development of mankind from a hypothetical lost continent, Mu. According to Churchward, Mu was a large landmass covering much of the area now occupied by the Pacific Ocean. He propounded the theory that Mu sank into the sea cataclysmically about 12,000 years ago, destroying the “First Civilization” that existed there:

> On this great continent man made his advent on earth about two hundred thousand years ago. The Land of Mu and the Biblical Garden of Eden were one and the same land. . . .
>
> At the time of Mu’s destruction her people were in an exceedingly high state of civilization; as regards science she was far ahead of the present time. . . .
>
> The great civilizations of the old Oriental empires—India, Egypt, Babylonia, etc.—were the dying embers of Mu’s great civilization.16

Before the destruction of Mu, portions of the tribes occupying the Motherland began to migrate to the other continents. Ac-

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cording to Churchward, one of the major tribal groups on Mu was the Quiché Mayas. Members of this group migrated to "Central America, South America, South Sea Islands and the Malay Islands."\textsuperscript{17} The Malay group later migrated northward to become the Japanese people. Quoting from Churchward:

It is quite a popular belief, even among educated people, that the Japanese are Mongols—\textit{they are not}. They are as distinct from a Mongol as a white man is from a black. They have descended from the Quiché Mayas of the Motherland, one of the white tribes. The Japanese language today embodies fully 40 per cent of Quiché-Maya words.\textsuperscript{18}

The Quiché Mayas were a hypothetical tribe living on Churchward's speculative continent of Mu. Their connection to Mesoamerica even for Churchward was tangential—portions of the tribe went east and portions west. How he came to know their "mother" language on Mu 12,000 years ago sufficient to determine an exact ratio of the retention of the language by the Japanese today was unspecified and undocumented.

It is a great puzzle to me how this speculative statement of Churchward, contained in what is largely a nonscholarly work lacking factual substantiation, could be presented as serious evidence for the migration of Book of Mormon peoples to Japan.

Overall, factual evidence presented in \textit{The Remnant} for the Japanese having Nephite origins seems to me much less than "strongly suggestive." At best, this notion seems speculative and the factual evidence without particular substance.

But assuming for a moment the possible factuality of the premise of Nephite origins for the Japanese, this conclusion really does not require the labored interpretation of Book of Mormon passages to try to make these people the exclusive heirs of Book of Mormon promises. A less-strained interpretation would suggest that descendants of Lehi among Native Americans and Polynesians, along with possible Japanese descendants of adventurous

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 171.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 242.
Nephite mariners, plus adopted gentiles of all stripes, could share in the fulfillment of these promises.

And now, one final comment on how Terry and Jarvis model advocacy for their Japanese-Nephite theory. The chief protagonists in the story seem to suggest that through their intense study of the Book of Mormon and their search for other evidences, they have learned some special “truths” not known or accepted by most members of the church, including its General Authorities. They pay considerable attention to justifying their extra efforts to find these “truths,” for, after all, they have simply been exceptionally obedient to President Benson’s command to all church members to make the Book of Mormon a special object of study.

A conspiratorial flavor in their discussions gave me some discomfort and increased my skepticism regarding the conclusions drawn by the protagonists. They were holding a “close to top-secret meeting.” It was “too sensitive for open sharing.” They believed that “Church policy demanded that it not be discussed in open forum” and requested “everything discussed in this gathering to be private and confidential” (pp. 78–79). The perception of special truths possessed by a small set of persons who have gained their understandings through unusually diligent efforts and whose discussion of these insights must be carefully managed, especially in relation to church authorities, represents an attitude that has led more than one group of persons into dissident status and out of the church. I was not impressed that the approach to truth seeking modeled in this book was constructive for persons seeking either temporal or spiritual enlightenment.

The strident advocacy in The Remnant for what seems to me to be a tangential interpretation of the Book of Mormon makes this volume the weakest and least enjoyable of this series. In my view, this book detracts from whatever credibility the first two volumes may possess and further demeans the quality Book of Mormon scholarship that is referenced there.