

Draft: June 1991

MORE BOOK OF MORMON DIFFICULTIES

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Recent writers such as H. Michael Marquardt<sup>1</sup>, George D. Smith<sup>2</sup>, Michael Coe<sup>3</sup>, and the present authors<sup>4</sup>, have detailed difficulties in viewing the Book of Mormon as a document reflecting actual Mesoamerican history. Further examination of the Book of Mormon from a critical standpoint suggests a number of other difficulties which, to the best of our knowledge, have not been discussed at any significant length in other research. They include such difficulties as the Book of Mormon's tendency to refer to historically future events in the past tense, pre-vs. post-1830 prophetic accuracy, internal inconsistencies and improbabilities, dating inconsistencies, literalistic acceptance of the Joshua account, the Flood and Moses' division of the Red Sea, the ages of the patriarchs, questionably rapid social change, rapid change in Lamanite skin color, limited plates and the English transition, compositional analysis and the manner of the Book of Mormon's translation, parallels in phraseology suggesting a single author, nineteenth-century American phraseology, and recent efforts to harmonize the Book of Mormon with Mesoamerican archaeology and, indeed, to allow a place for Joseph Smith's theological augmentation of the Book of Mormon record. These will be considered in turn.

## Section 1

Future Events in the Past Tense

The Book of Mormon often refers to future events in the past tense. For example, 1 Nephi 14:23 (about 600 B.C.) refers to the writing of the Bible as if it had already happened: "and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, the things which were written were plain and pure"; several verses later (verse 27) the Apostle John is referred to in the past tense: "I, Nephi, heard and bear record, that the name of the apostle of the Lamb was John, according to the word of the angel". In 1 Nephi 22:21 Nephi refers to Jesus' mission: "this prophet of whom Moses spake was the Holy One of Israel; wherefore, he shall execute judgment in righteousness". In 2 Nephi 25:18 Nephi refers to "the true Messiah, who was rejected by them". Between 559 and 545 B.C. Nephi asks "wherein the Lamb of God did fulfil all righteousness in being baptized by water? Know ye not that he was holy? ... Wherefore, after he was baptized with water the Holy Ghost descended upon him in the form of a dove ... he having set the example before them. And he said unto the children of men: Follow thou me" (2 Nephi 31:6-10). In 2 Nephi 1:15 Lehi states "the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell", and his son Nephi in 2 Nephi 33:6 states "I glory in my Jesus, for he hath redeemed my soul from hell". In Mosiah 15:12 (about 148 B.C.) Abinadi states that "these are they whose sins he (i.e. Jesus) has borne; these are they for whom he has died, to redeem them from their transgressions ... yea, even the Lord, who has redeemed his people; yea, him who has granted salvation unto his people (Verse 18) ... For were it not for the redemption which he hath made for his people (Verse 19) ... these are they that have died before Christ came, in their ignorance, not having salvation declared

unto them (Verse 24) ... for the Lord hath redeemed none such" (verse 27). In chapter 16 Abinadi continues his prophecy: "God redeemed his people from their lost and fallen state" (verse 4), and in verse 6 "now if Christ had not come into the world, speaking of things to come as though they have already come"; further, in verse 7, Abinadi indicates that "if Christ had not risen from the dead ... there could have been no resurrection". About 147 B.C. Alma commands his followers to "preach nothing save it were repentance and faith on the Lord, who had redeemed his people" (Mosiah 18:20). In 91 B.C. his son testifies that the Lord "had also redeemed all men" (Alma 1:4) and eight years later he reminds his audience that "he has delivered their souls from hell" (Alma 5:6). In 90 B.C. one of Ammon's converts, a queen, is portrayed as saying "O blessed Jesus, who has saved me from an awful hell!" (Alma 19:29) and in 72 B.C. those who had died did so "firmly believing that their souls were redeemed by the Lord Jesus Christ" (Alma 46:39). Between 23 and 20 B.C. Nephi states: "he is God, and he is with them, and he did manifest himself unto them, that they were redeemed by him; and they gave unto him glory, because of that which is to come" (Helaman 8:23). Alma 13:1 even seems unsure about its tense: "my brethren, I would cite your minds forward to the time when the Lord God gave these commandments."

Not only are there a number of past-tense references to events presumably in the future, but there are also scriptural references for scriptures yet to be written in the Old World. For example, between 600 and 592 B.C. 1 Nephi 15:11 asks "Do ye not remember the things which the Lord hath said? - If ye will not harden your hearts, and ask me in faith, believing that ye shall receive, with diligence in keeping my commandments, surely these things shall be made known unto you". This, as well as Enos verse 15,

refers to Matthew 21:22. 2 Nephi 26:30 anticipates Paul's statement in I Corinthians 13:2 by approximately 600 years: "the Lord God hath given a commandment that all men should have charity, which charity is love. And except they should have charity they were nothing". John 5:29 is anticipated in Helaman 12:25-26: "we read that in the great and last day ... they that have done good shall have everlasting life; and they that have done evil shall have everlasting damnation". About 62 B.C. Alma 60:23 suggests that "God has said that the inward vessel shall be cleansed first, and then shall the outer vessel be cleansed also" anticipating Matthew 23:26. In 2 Nephi 2:30 Lehi suggests "I have chosen the good part, according to the words of the prophet", referring to Luke 10:42. In Ether 13:12 Ether anticipates Matthew 19:30 by centuries: "when these things come, bringeth to pass the scripture which saith, there are they who were first, who shall be last; and there are they who were last, who shall be first". 1 Nephi 22:15 and 2 Nephi 26:4 both anticipate Malachi 4:1. 1 Nephi 22:17 anticipates I Corinthians 3:15 by six centuries: "for thus saith the prophet, they shall be saved, even if it so be as by fire". Mormon (Mormon chapter 9) assumes his congregation has access to New Testament scripture. In verse 9 he asks "do we not read that God is the same yesterday, today and forever, and in him there is no variableness neither shadow of changing?", referring to Hebrews 13:8 and James 1:17. Similarly 2 Nephi 9:16 refers to Revelation 22:11: "for the Lord God hath spoken it ... they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still". In Alma 11:37 Amulek suggests that: "he hath said that no unclean thing can inherit the kingdom of heaven" anticipating Paul's statement in Ephesians 5:5, and in 2 Nephi 2:17 Lehi states that: "I have read ... that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven; wherefore, he became a devil

having sought that which was evil before God", anticipating Revelation 12:7-9 and 20:2. Of particular interest is Nephi's statement in 1 Nephi 22:20 that: "the Lord will surely prepare a way for his people, unto the fulfilling of the words of Moses, which he spake". Nephi is supposedly referring to Deuteronomy 18:18-19. Textual comparison, however, shows that Nephi's statement parallels Peter's statement in Acts 3:22-23, not Moses' in Deuteronomy.

## Section 2

Pre- vs. Post-1830 Prophetic Accuracy

In the early part of the Book of Mormon Nephi makes a number of predictions concerning events 600 to 2400 years in the future, e.g. Columbus' discovery of the New World, early American history, the coming forth of the Book of Mormon and its relationship to the Bible, and a seer named Joseph whose father's name shall also be Joseph, to name a few. Jesus' life, in particular, is prophesied in remarkable clarity, including his mother's name, his date of birth, his baptism by John the Baptist, his crucifixion and resurrection. By contrast, the Book of Mormon makes only vague predictions regarding the post-1830 period, none of which has been historically realized, and neglects altogether historically germane events such as the U.S. Civil War, World Wars I and II, the Holocaust and the division of the restored church. This significant disparity in prophetic accuracy pre-vs. post-1830 points to a drafting of the Book of Mormon in the decade prior to 1830.

Predictions that the Lamanites will scourge the Gentiles for not receiving the Book of Mormon, while plausible during Joseph Smith's day, are implausible at present. 3 Nephi 20:15-16 suggests, for example: "if the Gentiles do not repent after the blessing which they shall receive, after they have scattered my people -- Then shall ye, who are a remnant of the house of Jacob, go forth among them ... as a lion among the beasts of the forests, and as a young lion among the flocks of sheep, who, if he goeth through both treadeth down and teareth in pieces, and none can deliver". The "blessing" referred to is the Book of Mormon. 3 Nephi 21:9-14 similarly reads: "For in that day, for my sake shall the Father work a



work, which shall be a great and a marvelous work among them ... whosoever will not believe in my words, who am Jesus Christ ... shall be cut off from among my people who are of the covenant. And my people who are a remnant of Jacob shall be among the Gentiles, yea, in the midst of them as a lion among the beasts of the forest". See also Mormon 5:22-24.

Another difficulty concerns the prediction in 2 Nephi 10:7-9 that "when ... they (the Jews) shall believe in me, that I am Christ, then have I covenanted with their fathers that they shall be restored in the flesh, upon the earth, unto the lands of their inheritance". Similar references to the Jews' acceptance of Jesus prior to their return to Israel are found in 1 Nephi 19:15-16, 2 Nephi 6:11, 25:16-17, and 30:7-8, and 3 Nephi 20:31-33. Needless to say, Jews have been returning to Palestine, (i.e. the lands of their inheritance) and since 1948, to the State of Israel, without conversion to Christianity in general or to the Book of Mormon in particular.

## Section 3

Internal Inconsistencies and Improbabilities

- (a) In Alma 13:25 Alma declares "and now we only wait to hear the joyful news declared unto us by the mouth of angels, of his (i.e. Christ's) coming; for the time cometh, we know not how soon". Why not? Mosiah 28:20 reports that "after king Mosiah had done these things, he took the plates of brass, and all the things which he had kept, and conferred them upon Alma, who was the son of Alma; yea, all the records, and also the interpreters ... even as they had been handed down from the time that Lehi left Jerusalem." 1 Nephi 10:4 predicts that the "Savior of the world" would be born "even six hundred years from the time that my father left Jerusalem". Nephi was certainly aware of this in 1 Nephi 19:8 and again in 2 Nephi 25:19. Alma's ignorance of this prediction does appear to be problematic.
- (b) Ether 9:23 suggests that "Coriantum ... did build many mighty cities". The record, however, brings this statement into considerable doubt. Verse 12 of the same chapter suggests that "nearly all the people of the kingdom (were destroyed) save it were thirty souls and they who fled with the house of Omer". In verse 3 of the same chapter we find that Omer had taken his sons and his daughters and all his household with him, save it were Jared and his family. In verse 9 it also appears that "Nimrah gathered together a small number of men and fled out of the land, and came over and dwelt with Omer". The total number of people in this group would be something on the order of several hundred at best. The record also shows that Omer begat Emer (verse 14) and that Emer begat Coriantum (verse 21). The thesis would appear

to be that these several hundred people could accumulate sufficient numbers within two generations to build "many mighty cities". There would appear to be some difficulties with this interpretation.

- (c) Jesus gives his New World followers the same message (3 Nephi Chapters 13-14) he provided his followers in the Old World (Matthew Chapters 6-7). Since there are few changes in the wording, Jesus presents a message with Old World cultural and material references which may or may not fit the New World setting. Did ancient Mesoamericans, for example, have trumpets, doors, moths, cubits, lilies, pearls, sheep, dogs, swine, wolves, grapes, or figs? Expert comment is invited.
- (d) Ether 6:5-11 suggests that a "furious" wind pushed the barges to the Promised Land for "three hundred and forty and four days upon the water". Even if the "furious" wind pushed the barges at two miles per hour on average they would have passed their target destination. Therefore, how "furious" was the wind and how reasonable is the narrative?
- (e) 3 Nephi 2:8 indicates that "the Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ". The "sign" is that "day and that night and that day which should be as one day as if there were no night" referred to in 3 Nephi 1:8. Curiously, however, 3 Nephi 2:1-3 states that within three to five years of the "sign" "the people began to forget those signs and wonders which they had heard ... they began to be hard in their hearts, and blind in their minds, and began to disbelieve all which

they had heard and seen". Notwithstanding their disbelief we find them defining their calendar in terms of the "sign".

- (f) Following Jesus' appearance in the New World "the multitude went forth, and thrust their hands into his side, and did feel the prints of the nails in his hands and in his feet ... going forth one by one until they had all gone forth" (3 Nephi 11:15). 3 Nephi 17:25 indicates that the multitude numbered approximately 2,500 individuals. Even if each of these individuals took ten seconds to thrust his/her hand into Jesus' body at least seven hours would be required. What is the point of that exercise and is it reasonable?
- (g) 3 Nephi 26:2 has Jesus referring to Malachi Chapters 3 and 4 as "these scriptures, which ye had not had with you". 1 Nephi 22:15 and 2 Nephi 26:4-9, however, unquestionably refer to Malachi.
- (h) Mosiah 22:11-16 describes an incident in which the people of king Limhi "depart by night into the wilderness with their flocks and their herds ... all their gold, and silver, and their precious things ... and also their provisions". Verse 15 indicates that "the Lamanites had found that the people of Limhi had departed out of the land by night, that they sent an army into the wilderness to pursue them; And after they had pursued them two days, they could no longer follow their tracks". What is the probability of an entire community with presumably hundreds of animals being "untrackable" in Central American terrain less than 24 hours after their departure?
- (i) About 90 B.C. Alma 17:26 suggests that "all the Lamanites drive their flocks hither" (to the water of Sebus). By then the Lamanites

presumably numbered in the hundreds of thousands. We are asked to believe that literally all of this great nation, which occupied a substantial part of Central America (going by recent interpretations of Book of Mormon geography) travelled great distances to water their flocks all in one place. Is this probable?

- (j) The Book of Mormon frequently refers to the plates upon and the language in which the history of the Nephites and Lamanites was recorded, i.e. the use of reformed Egyptian rather than Hebrew since reformed Egyptian was supposedly smaller, the difficulty of making marks on the plates, the priority of faithful history over secular history, etc. Certainly one is entitled, therefore, to ask why so much of the Book of Mormon is devoted to war after war. Moreover, how does one account for such verbose or repetitive passages as are found in 1 Nephi 13:29-30, 2 Nephi 2:17 and 25:4-7, Mosiah 11:20, Alma 3:1, 7:16, 16:1 and 19:6, 3 Nephi 2:4, 5:7, 8:19, 10:1-2, 10:5 and 16:4-10, and 4 Nephi 6? Are these really the writings of people who are painfully inscribing character after character on a limited number of plates?
- (k) In A.D. 401 Moroni states: "my father hath made this record ... I would write it also if I had room upon the plates, but I have not; and ore I have none, for I am alone" (Mormon 8:5). That being the case, how does Moroni then go on to "proceed to give an account of those ancient inhabitants" as found in the Book of Ether, or the Book of Moroni which total, depending on the edition, another 45 pages or so of printed English?

- (l) According to 2 Nephi 3:9-16 Joseph, who was carried captive into Egypt in the eighteenth-century before Christ, anticipated Moses' name and function by four centuries. Joseph's prophetic clarity is not documented in the Old Testament, however.
- (m) Alma 52:12 has Ammoron, brother of the deceased Amalickiah and a Nephite enemy, departing from the land of Zarahemla. Ammoron, however, could only have been in Mulek (Alma 52:2) as Zarahemla, at that time, was under Nephite control (Alma 51:11; Alma 53:12).
- (n) In Helaman 9:15 five men accused of the murder of the chief judge, Seezoram, seem ignorant of the actual murderer, notwithstanding the fact that they and others were told by Nephi the day before (Helaman 8:27). Further, Helaman 9:39, suggests that these same five men were converted while in prison, while verses 4-9 of the same chapter suggest they believed Nephi's words prior to being imprisoned.
- (o) Moroni 8:1 suggests that Mormon wrote his son, Moroni, shortly after Moroni's calling to the ministry, about the evils of infant baptism. Mormon 1:13-14 indicates, however, that even by the time of Mormon's youth (i.e. A.D. 326) "there were no gifts from the Lord, and the Holy Ghost did not come upon any" and Mormon 2:15 suggests that by A.D. 344 "the day of grace was passed with them, both temporally and spiritually". Mormon was born in A.D. 311 (Mormon 1:15). Even had his son been born by A.D. 331 and started ministering as a teen-ager, he would have faced an empty spiritual landscape, not one with disputations regarding infant baptism.

- (p) Alma 17:26-39 describes a situation in which Ammon defends the flocks and servants of King Lamoni against Lamanite marauders by casting stones and smiting off "as many of their arms as were lifted against him, and they were not a few" and slaying the leader with his sword. Ancient swords, however, lost their edges quickly and the likelihood of any ancient sword, ~~or modern for that matter~~, parting "not a few" hapless warriors from their arms is small.
- (q) Alma 53:6 places the city of Mulek in the land of Nephi; it is actually in the land of Zarahemla.

## Section 4

Dating Inconsistencies

- (a) Alma 6:4 states that "they began to establish the order of the church in the city of Zarahemla" in the year 83 B.C.. In 81 B.C., however, Alma refers to the passage of "a certain number of years" (Alma 16:1). Since only two years had passed why is Alma only able to estimate that "a certain number of years" had passed?
- (b) Helaman 3:18, 21 and 23 report that between the 46th and 49th year of the reign of the judges Helaman produced two infants: "and it came to pass that he had two sons. He gave unto the eldest the name of Nephi, and unto the youngest, the name of Lehi. And they began to grow up unto the Lord". In verse 37, however, it is suggested that "in the fifty and third year of the reign of the judges, Helaman died, and his eldest son Nephi began to reign in his stead". If these dates are correct, it would place Nephi in the judgment-seat somewhere between his fourth and seventh birthdays.
- (c) More remarkably, 3 Nephi 7:8 indicates that "six years had not passed away since the more part of the people had turned from their righteousness". 3 Nephi 6:14 indicates that this happened in the thirtieth year. The next dating after 3 Nephi 7:8 is found in 3 Nephi 7:13 which states "thus ended the thirtieth year". This suggests that one year at best had elapsed since the people had turned from their righteousness not the six indicated in 3 Nephi 7:8.
- (d) Alma 53:22-23 indicates that Helaman first marched at the head of his 2,000 stripling warriors in the "twenty and eighth year of the reign of the judges". In Helaman's account of the same event he dates his march two years earlier.



## Section 5

Literalistic Acceptance of the Joshua Account, the Flood, and Moses' Division of the Red Sea

Helaman 12:13-15 refers to Joshua's asking the Lord to keep the sun still until the people had avenged themselves upon their enemies. The Book of Mormon appears to have no quarrel with this incident: "if he say unto the earth - Thou shalt go back, that it lengthen out the day for many hours - it is done; And thus, ... the earth goeth back, and it appeareth unto man that the sun standeth still". Astronomer Carl Sagan suggests that the likelihood of this incident is "tiny squared"<sup>5</sup>. Ether 13:2 refers to the universal flood, i.e. "after the waters had receded from off the face of this land it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord". This statement appears to support a literal interpretation of the Noachian flood. Evidence drawing such an interpretation into doubt may be found (not exclusively by any means) in Chris McGowan's In the Beginning chapter 5<sup>6</sup>. 1 Nephi 17:26-27 and Helaman 8:11 refer to Moses' dividing the Red Sea, the Israelites passing through on dry ground and the Egyptians drowning. Even conservative interpreters of this event suggest that the KJV translators didn't know their geography. The Israelites likely crossed, not the Red Sea, but the Reed or Marsh Sea.

## Section 6

The Ages of the Patriarchs

In the manner of the Book of Genesis, the ages of some of the Book of Mormon patriarchs are beyond expected life spans. Coriantum lived until he was 142 years old (Ether 9:24). Amos was another person who lived beyond the norm. According to 4 Nephi 21 Amos received records from his father in A.D. 194, while verse 47 reports that he died in A.D. 305. On the assumption that Amos was at least 20 years of age when he received the records from his father, he would have lived approximately 131 years. Ammaron, Amos' brother also lived on the order of 130 years.<sup>7</sup> Jacob, Lehi's son, was born in about 590 B.C. (1 Nephi 18:7). Enos 25 indicates that Enos, the son of Jacob, "began to be old" and that "an hundred and seventy and nine years had passed away from the time that our father Lehi left Jerusalem". Even if Jacob conceived Enos in his 90th year, we are led to believe that at 80 years of age Enos was only "beginning to be old". The record further suggests that Enos died about 420 B.C., making combined father and son life spans about 170 years.

## Section 7

Questionably Rapid Social Change

- (a) Alma 4:1 indicates that in the "sixth year of the reign of the judges ... there were no contentions nor wars in the land of Zarahemla". The people were "awakened to a remembrance of their duty" and were establishing the church more fully. In the seventh year about 3,500 souls united themselves to the church of God and were baptised. By the end of the eighth year, however, "the wickedness of the church was a great stumbling-block to those who did not belong to the church" (verse 10).
- (b) Alma 30:2 states that (in the sixteenth year) "there began to be continual peace". Alma 35:13, however, says of the eighteenth year, "thus commenced a war betwixt the Lamanites and the Nephites".
- (c) Helaman 3:25 - 26 indicates that in the 49th year of the reign of the judges "so great was the prosperity of the church, and so many the blessings which were poured out upon the people, that even the high priests and the teachers were themselves astonished beyond measure ... the work of the Lord did prosper unto the baptizing and uniting to the church of God, many souls, yea, even tens of thousands". Barely five years later, however, "there were many dissensions in the church, and there was also a contention among the people, insomuch that there was much bloodshed. And the rebellious part were slain and driven out of the land, and they did go unto the king of the Lamanites" (Helaman 4:1-2).
- (d) Helaman 5:1-4 indicates that in the 62nd year of the judges, Nephi became so weary of his people's iniquity that he gave up the judgment-seat to preach. By the 63rd year, the peoples' behaviour had improved

(Helaman 6:7) and by the 65th year "they did also have great joy and peace, yea, much preaching and many prophecies concerning that which was to come" (verse 14). Barely two years later, however, "the people began to grow exceedingly wicked again" (verse 16) and Satan "had got great hold upon the hearts of the Nephites ... the more part of them had turned out of the way of righteousness, and did trample under their feet the commandments of God" (verse 31). This is a significant turnabout in only two years.

- (e) 3 Nephi 6:9 indicates that in the 28th year after Jesus' birth "the people had continual peace". Within two years, however, "the church was broken up in all the land save it were among a few of the Lamanites" (verse 14).

## Section 8

Rapid Change in Lamanite Skin Color

2 Nephi 5:21-23 suggests that the rebellious Lamanites were given a "sore cursing, because of their iniquity ... wherefore, as they were white ... the Lord God did cause a skin of blackness to come upon them". In 3 Nephi 2:13-17 reference is made to those Lamanites who joined with the Nephites: "before this thirteenth year had passed away ... those Lamanites who had united with the Nephites were numbered among the Nephites; And their curse was taken from them, and their skin became white like unto the Nephites;

... And it came to pass in the commencement of the fourteenth year ..."

This passage suggests that an entire group of people had their skin color change in less than a year from a "skin of blackness" to skin "white like unto the Nephites". Can this rapid change possibly be squared with the evidence that change in skin color requires long evolutionary periods? Not only are we asked to believe that rapid shifts in skin color are possible but that reception of the Christian gospel may produce a lightening of skin color, i.e. "and the gospel of Jesus Christ shall be declared among them ... many generations shall not pass away among them, save they shall be a white and delightsome people" (2 Nephi 30:5-6, 1830 Edition). Certainly, there are now tens of thousands of natives in North and South America who have accepted the Book of Mormon and, more broadly the Christian faith, without any documented change in skin color.

## Section 9

Limited Plates and the English Translation

The whole issue of the Book of Mormon plates and how much information can logically be encoded within any given space has received relatively little attention. M.T. Lamb<sup>8</sup>, for example, argued that there were too few plates for the amount of information contained in over 500 pages of English text. In an article in the The Improvement Era Reed Putnam<sup>9</sup> noted that Joseph Smith had described the plates as being six inches x eight inches x six inches in dimension. Putnam speculated that each plate may have been .02 of an inch thick with each plate occupying up to .05 of an inch due to unevenness left by the hammering and air spaces between the separate plates. There would, therefore, be an estimated 20 plates to the inch; the two inches reflecting the unsealed third of the plates constituting the present Book of Mormon would consist of about 40 plates. Assuming a rough equivalence between one page of English text and one plate of Egyptian Demotic of the fifth-century B.C., over 500 plates would be needed to hold the information presently constituting the English text of the Book of Mormon. It also seems likely that inscribing gold sheets from both sides would result in an unintelligible mess. This would leave, therefore, a need for over 500 Book of Mormon plates. Putnam's estimate of the Book of Mormon's being based on about 40 plates would appear to account for less than ten percent of the number of plates needed. This continues to be an interesting line of research.

## Section 10

Compositional Analysis and the Manner of the Book of Mormon's Translation

In the past decade Richard Van Wagoner, Steven Walker, Edward H. Ashment, James Lancaster and Dan Vogel<sup>10</sup> have examined early accounts of the Book of Mormon's translation in an effort to determine whether the translation was literal and mechanical in nature or more conceptual, permitting a greater role for Joseph Smith's interpretive framework. Lancaster<sup>11</sup> summarizes the primary findings as follows:

- (a) Nephite Interpreters often called "Urim and Thummim" were found with the plates on Hill Cumorah;
- (b) these interpreters were used first in the translation of the plates;
- (c) the portion translated by use of the interpreters was copied onto 116 pages of foolscap and later lost by Martin Harris;
- (d) because of the indiscretion of Martin and Joseph, the Nephite interpreters were permanently removed;
- (e) the Book of Mormon that we have today was translated by use of the seer stone;
- (f) Joseph Smith translated by placing the seer stone in his hat and covering his face with his hat to darken his eyes;
- (g) the plates were not used in the translating process and often were not even in sight during the translation;
- (h) other persons were sometimes in the room while Joseph Smith dictated to his scribe;
- (i) all witnesses to the translation agree to these facts.

While the above is not in dispute, whether Joseph Smith's translation reflected a word-for-word Nephite to English transmission or a more "conceptual" one is. Ashment, for example, has concluded that: "Joseph Smith's major concern was not formal (word-for-word) accuracy but rather the intelligibility of the message."<sup>12</sup> In fact to insist upon a word-for-word transmission in the face of the nearly four thousand changes in the Book since its first edition presents difficulties, as Ashment notes: "If Joseph Smith had mechanically read a divinely-inspired English text from either the urim and thummim or the seer stone, then such errors would have originated with God. Further, if every word of the original text were inviolate, then how could the prophet even have dared to revise it twice (in 1837 and 1840) and commence a third revision (beginning in 1841) which he was unable to complete before he was murdered? Clearly, it was the message, not every word of the text, which Joseph Smith considered to be divine."<sup>13</sup> Lancaster, likewise, supports the "conceptual" method of translation: "we understand that Joseph Smith did not regard the process of translation as mechanical. The power to translate resided not in the material device used, but involved the heart and mind of the translator. It would appear that the inspiration received by the prophet in these circumstances involved general concepts rather than literal information."<sup>14</sup> Lancaster calls upon the testimony of David Whitmer, as well as others, in support of this thesis. Whitmer<sup>15</sup>, however, recalled that:

Joseph Smith would put the seer stone into a hat, and put his face in the hat, drawing it closely around his face to exclude the light; and in the darkness the spiritual light would shine. A piece of something resembling parchment would appear, and on that appeared the writing. One character at a time would appear, and under it was the interpretation in English. Brother Joseph would read off the English to Oliver Cowdery, who was his principle scribe, and when it was written down and repeated to Brother Joseph to see if it was correct, then it would disappear, and another character with the interpretation would appear.



Another witness to the translation of the Book of Mormon, Martin Harris<sup>16</sup> recollected that:

By the aid of the seer stone, sentences would appear and were read by the Prophet and written by Martin, and when finished he would say, "Written," and if correctly written that sentence would disappear and another appear in its place, but if not written correctly it remained until corrected, so that the translation was just as it was engraved on the plates, precisely in the language then used.

Vogel, who takes issue with the "conceptual" notion of the Book of Mormon translation, cites both the Harris and Whitmer testimony as well as a number of other witnesses to advance his position that the early Church understood the Book of Mormon to have been translated in a literal-mechanical fashion. Vogel points out, nonetheless, that the "mechanical" notion of translation, while supportable by the historical data, may "cause trouble for Joseph Smith and his claims about the Book of Mormon."<sup>17</sup>

Compositional analysis of Book of Mormon phraseology tends, on balance, to support the conceptual view. In the accompanying Table, we will cite a number of "bits" of phraseology that, upon reflection, would not very likely have been painstakingly engraved on Nephite plates. Engraving is a much slower process than speaking and its content would be predicted to be concise and tightly structured<sup>18</sup>, whereas the spoken word is more likely to be explanatory, repetitious or verbose, in other words less edited. The attached Table excerpts 34 instances of Book of Mormon passages, not exhaustive by any means, which are explanatory, unnecessarily repetitious or circumlocutory. It will be noted that the excerpted phraseology more closely follows the characteristics of the spoken word rather than the written word. It seems more probable, then, that these particular passages, if not the Book of Mormon as a whole, reflect Joseph Smith's conceptual expression rather than any one-to-one correspondence with the Nephite engravings.

TABLEExplanatory Interjections/Reversals

<u>Reference</u>	<u>Content</u>
1. 1 Nephi 14:23	and at the time they proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew, or, at the time the book proceeded out of the mouth of the Jew.
2. 1 Nephi 19:4	Wherefore, I, Nephi, did make a record upon the other plates, which gives an account, or which gives a greater account.
3. 1 Nephi 19:7	Yea, even the very God of Israel do men trample under their feet; I say, trample under their feet but I would speak in other words -- they set him at naught, and hearken not to the voice of his counsels.
4. Mosiah 7:8	And their bands were loosed: and they stood before the king, and were permitted, or rather commanded, that they should answer the questions.
5. Mosiah 11:18	king Noah sent his armies against them, and they were driven back, or they drove them back for a time.
6. Alma 1:15	And they carried him upon the top of the hill Manti, and there he was caused, or rather did acknowledge.

7. Alma 2:34                   And thus he cleared the ground, or rather the bank, which was on the west of the river Sidon.
  
8. Alma 6:3                   whosoever did belong to the church that did not repent of their wickedness and humble themselves before God -- I mean those who were lifted up in the pride of their hearts -- the same were rejected.
  
9. Alma 9:1                   I, Alma, having been commanded of God that I should take Amulek and go forth and preach again unto this people, or the people who were in the city of Ammonihah.
  
10. Alma 10:5                 I have never known much of the ways of the Lord, and his mysteries and marvelous power. I said I never had known much of these things; but behold, I mistake, for I have seen much of his mysteries and his marvelous power.
  
11. Alma 14:11                he doth suffer that they may do this thing, or that the people may do this thing unto them.
  
12. Alma 24:19                And thus we see that they buried their weapons of peace, or they buried the weapons of war, for peace.
  
13. Alma 34:13                it is expedient that there should be a great and last sacrifice; and then shall there be, or it is expedient there should be, a stop to the shedding of blood.

14. Alma 43:38 they being shielded from the more vital parts of the body, or the more vital parts of the body being shielded from the strokes of the Lamanites.
15. Alma 50:32 the people who were in the land Bountiful, or rather Moroni, feared that they would hearken to the words of Morianton.
16. Alma 54:3 there was not a woman nor a child among all the prisoners of Moroni, or the prisoners whom Moroni had taken.
17. Alma 59:3 he immediately sent an epistle to Pahoran, desiring that he should cause men to be gathered together to strengthen Helaman, or the armies of Helaman.
18. 3 Nephi 27:30-31 (Jesus' speech) the Father rejoiceth, and also all the holy angels, because of you and this generation; for none of them are lost. Behold, I would that ye should understand; for I mean them who are now alive of this generation; and none of them are lost.
19. Mormon 2:1 therefore the people of Nephi appointed me that I should be their leader, or the leader of their armies.
20. Moroni 8:27 Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction except they should repent.

Repetitions

1. 2 Nephi 2:17 I, Lehi, according to the things which I have read, must needs suppose that an angel of God, according to that which is written, had fallen from heaven.
2. Mosiah 11:20 and he went forth among them, and began to prophesy, saying: Behold, thus saith the Lord, and thus hath he commanded me, saying, Go forth, and say unto this people, thus saith the Lord.
3. Alma 7:16 And whosoever doeth this, and keepeth the commandments of God from thenceforth, the same will remember that I say unto him, yea, he will remember that I have said unto him, he shall have eternal life.
4. Alma 16:1 And it came to pass in the eleventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi, on the fifth day of the second month, there having been much peace in the land of Zarahemla, there having been no wars nor contentions for a certain number of years, even until the fifth day of the second month in the eleventh year.
5. Alma 37:23 I will prepare unto my servant Gazelem, a stone, ... that I may discover unto my people who serve me, that I may discover unto them the works of their brethren.

6. 3 Nephi 8:19-20 -- for behold, they did last for about the space of three hours; and it was said by some that the time was greater; nevertheless, all these great and terrible things were done in about the space of three hours -- and then behold, there was darkness upon the face of the land. And it came to pass that there was thick darkness upon all the face of the land.
7. 3 Nephi 10:1-2 And after these sayings there was silence in the land for the space of many hours; For so great was the astonishment of the people that they did cease lamenting and howling for the loss of their kindred which had been slain; therefore there was silence in all the land for the space of many hours.
8. 3 Nephi 10:5 And again, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, who have fallen; yea, O ye people of the house of Israel, ye that dwell at Jerusalem, as ye that have fallen; yea, how oft would I have gathered you as a hen gathereth her chickens, and ye would not.

#### Circumlocutory Passages

These passages may be found in two ways. In the first case, there is an unnecessary rendering of dates; they will be set forth herein. There are also a number of lengthy rambling passages for which we will provide the

reference but not the content. The interested reader can readily find these passages in his/her own Book of Mormon.

ReferenceContent

1. 3 Nephi 2:4-5      And thus did pass away the ninety and sixth year; and also the ninety and seventh year; and also the ninety and eighth year; and also the ninety and ninth year; And also an hundred years had passed away.
2. 3 Nephi 5:7      And thus had the twenty and second year passed away, and the twenty and third year also, and the twenty and fourth, and the twenty and fifth; and thus had twenty and five years passed away.
3. 4 Nephi 6      And thus did the thirty and eighth year pass away, and also the thirty and ninth, and the forty and first, and the forty and second, yea, even until forty and nine years had passed away, and also the fifty and first, and the fifty and second; yea, and even until fifty and nine years had passed away.
4. 1 Nephi 13:29-30      See Book of Mormon.
5. 2 Nephi 25:4-7      See Book of Mormon.
6. 3 Nephi 16:4-10      See Book of Mormon.  
(Jesus' speech)

## Section 11

Parallels in Phraseology Suggesting a Single Author

In "A Book of Mormon Study" Brigham H. Roberts pointed out parallels between the Nephite and Jaredite migrations, the various anti-Christ's in the Book of Mormon and various other details, raising the likelihood of the Book of Mormon's being the product of a single mind<sup>19</sup>. Repetitious use of the self-introductory phrase "I, Nephi" (Jacob, Mormon, etc.) across 18 Book of Mormon authors and uniformity of the way in which Nephite and Jaredite cultural artifacts are described also point to a singularity of mind. Available metals, for example, are described thus: "iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores" (2 Nephi 5:15); "we ... became exceeding rich in gold, and in silver, and in precious things ... and also in iron and copper, and brass and steel (Jarom verse 8). References to "gold, and of silver, and of precious things" may be found in 1 Nephi 2:4 and 11, and 3:16, 22 and 24, Alma 1:29, 4:6, 15:16 and 17:14, Helaman 6:9 and 12:2, 3 Nephi 6:2, Jacob 2:12, Mosiah 11:9, 19:15 and 22:12, and Ether 9:17. References to "silks and fine-twined linen" are found in Ether 10:24, Alma 1:29 and 4:6, and with a minor variation 1 Nephi 13:7. Reference to military arms is remarkably the same across authors. The phrase "our bows and our arrows and our stones and our slings" is found in 1 Nephi 16:15, and the phrase "swords, and with cimeters, and with bows, and with arrows, and with slings", with minor variations, is found in Alma 2:12, 17:7, and 43:20, Mosiah 9:16 and 10:8, and Helaman 1:14. Although separated by as much as 1,600 years, statements about the New World as "a land which is choice above all other lands" are found in 1 Nephi 2:20 and 13:30, 2 Nephi 1:5 and 10:19, and Ether 2:10, 9:20, 10:28, and 13:2.



## Section 12

Nineteenth-Century American Phraseology

The following phrases appear more consistent with early nineteenth-century American phraseology. Comments from those trained in English usage in that time period would be in order: "Comely" (Alma 1:27), "Begin to be up and doing" (Alma 60:24), "Good homely cloth" (Alma 1:29), "Mend their ways" (Helaman 11:36), and "a good old age" (Ether 11:4). Other phrases, which have come into use since the New Testament era, are used in pre-Christian Book of Mormon times. In Jacob 7:20 Sherem is described as "(giving) up the Ghost". This phrase does not appear in Christian literature until Acts 5:5. Likewise, the last words of the Jaredite prophet Ether are "whether the Lord will that I be translated ... it mattereth not". The notion of "translation" does not appear in Biblical literature until Hebrews 11:5. Further, the phrase "Brother Jacob" (Jacob 7:6) appears to be anachronistic. Is there anything in documented history to suggest that individuals referred to each other by these fraternal titles in pre-Christian times? Similarly, is not the female Portuguese or Spanish name "Isabel" (Alma 39:3) anachronistic? Alma 26:19, Alma 60:29 and Helaman 13:5 refer to the "sword of justice". The "sword of justice" is an ancient Roman phrase which initially referred to the personification of Justice wielding a sword dividing truth from falsehood. Lehi and family would not have brought this phrase with them in 600 B.C.. Alma 37:45 refers to a "vale of sorrow". The phrase "vale of sorrow" or "vale of tears" first entered English literature in the 1400's yet incongruously is used by Alma in 73 B.C.. Alma 63:8 refers to a ship as "she". Expert comment on the subject of when people began referring to ships in female terms would be in order.

## Section 13

Recent Efforts to Harmonize the Book of Mormon with Mesoamerican Archaeology

In "An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon"<sup>20</sup> John Sorenson advances the theory that the Book of Mormon peoples occupied a limited region of Mesoamerica and that other native cultures existed concurrently. As Sorenson points out "Latter-day Saints are not used to the idea that other people than Lehi's immediate descendants were on the Book of Mormon scene. Abundant evidence from archaeological and linguistic studies assures us that such people were indeed present, so we need to understand how the Book of Mormon account accommodates that fact" (page 146). On the same page Sorenson argues that "the Lamanites in the original immigrant group became dominant over a native population of folk already scattered on the land when Lehi arrived". What are we to do, therefore, with the Book of Mormon's express statement that the Book of Mormon lands had been set aside for Lehi and his descendants as a land of promise. There is not one single word in the Book of Mormon which allows for different cultures in the Book of Mormon lands, never mind mixing with them as Sorenson appears to suggest. Even if a "limited region" is allowed for (still occupying about 80,000 square miles according to Sorenson's map on page 37) the Book of Mormon clearly states that "there shall none come into this land (whether it's North and South America or Mesoamerica) save they shall be brought by the hand of the Lord" (2 Nephi 1:6). Nephi earlier testified that "we have obtained a land of promise, a land which is choice above all other lands; a land which the Lord God hath covenanted with me should be a land for the inheritance of my seed. Yea, the Lord hath covenanted this land unto me, and to my children forever, and also all those who should be

led out of other countries by the hand of the Lord" (verse 5) and "it is wisdom that this land should be kept as yet from the knowledge of other nations; for behold, many nations would overrun the land, that there would be no place for an inheritance" (verse 8). Moreover, the Book of Mormon states that all people in the land of promise shall worship God. 2 Nephi 10:19 states "for it is a choice land, saith God unto me, above all other lands, wherefore I will have all men that dwell thereon that they shall worship me, saith God" and earlier, Ether 13:2 states "it became a choice land above all other lands, a chosen land of the Lord; wherefore the Lord would have that all men should serve him who dwell upon the face thereof". It seems clear then that the Book of Mormon permits no other cultures, never mind nonbelievers, any place in the land of inheritance whether it be the totality of North and South America or a restricted region in Mesoamerica.

In pages 272 - 276 of the same book Sorenson notes that secular records allow no more than 593 years between Lehi's departure in Zedekiah's first year and Jesus' birth. The Book of Mormon allows six hundred years between these two events (1 Nephi 10:4 and 19:8, 2 Nephi 25:19 and 3 Nephi 1:1). Even after Christ's birth the Book of Mormon makes reference to six hundred years passing between the time that Lehi left Jerusalem and Christ's birth (3 Nephi 2:5-7). Sorenson argues that the inconsistency may be eliminated if one considers a "year" of 365 days to be a Mayan "tun" of 360 days. According to Sorenson "the tun was used for most calendrical calculations, apparently serving as an approximation to the Haab", which was 365 days long. If in fact a "year" may be taken as 360 days then the 600 years interval would collapse to 592 solar years and the problem would disappear. Sorenson suggests that it is not known when the calendar was crystallized

into the full form used in Classic times, but considers that it was no later than 100 B.C., with 235 B.C. probably being the actual date.

This interpretation poses several significant problems. First of all we would have to postulate Lehi's use of the "tun" system in the Old World (1 Nephi 10:4), before any possible contact with Mesoamerican cultures. Nephi makes use of the same solar year shortly after arrival in the New World (1 Nephi 19:8, 2 Nephi 25:19). Secondly it, appears that the Nephites, unlike the Mayans, used a twelve month calendar. Alma 48:2 suggests that "in the latter end of the nineteenth year of the reign of the judges" and Alma 49:1 states "in the eleventh month of the nineteenth year, on the tenth day of the month". The earlier reference suggests that they are nearly at the end of the year and the later reference suggests that it is the eleventh month. Taken together these comparisons strongly suggest that the Nephites used a twelve month calendar, whereas the Mayans used an eighteen month calendar. Thirdly, Doctrine and Covenants Section 20:1 refers to the church being established 1,830 years after Jesus' birth. This is at odds with historical evidence suggesting that Jesus was born in 4 or 5 B.C. or, as Sorenson states it "a bit earlier still" (page 272). It seems, therefore, that the problem which Sorenson has recognized remains and, as he suggests, "the Book of Mormon prophecies and its history as well would be in error" (page 274).

## Section 14

Recent Efforts to Account for 19th Century Theology in the Book of Mormon

Another recent effort to understand some of the difficulties portrayed by the Book of Mormon is Blake Ostler's "The Book of Mormon as a Modern Expansion of an Ancient Source."<sup>21</sup> Ostler's work is a novel effort which allows for Joseph Smith's presumed expansion of the ancient Book of Mormon text with early nineteenth-century theology. Ostler notes a number of presumed modernist expansions including:

- (a) "The prophecies of the discovery of America and the role of a gentile nation in the Book of Mormon can be most reasonably explained, in my opinion, as popular nineteenth-century concepts inserted in the text by Joseph Smith" (page 70);
- (b) Referring to the anti-Masonic terminology in the Book of Mormon, Ostler postulates that "they may be explained best ... as Joseph Smith's independent commentary on Masonry, sparked by his reflection on Nephite secret combinations" (page 76);
- (c) Regarding the importance of baptism, Ostler suggests "many Book of Mormon doctrines are best explained by the nineteenth-century theological milieu. For example, though there may have been ritual washings performed in the tabernacle and temple, there are no pre-exilic references to baptism ... Yet Jacob explains repentance and baptism as if his hearers were completely familiar with the concept ... it is difficult to see this passage as anything but the Christian baptism of repentance necessary for salvation" (page 80);

- (d) Regarding salvation, Ostler suggests "the Book of Mormon also addresses several problems that simply were not, and could not be, problems for Israelites. For example, the salvation of infants and those who had not heard the gospel arises only if a soteriology is adopted which excludes the unbaptised or non-Christians. In Hebrew thought non-Israelites are not thus excluded ... Nineteenth-century Methodist theology taught, however, that non-Christians and the unbaptised could not be saved. The Methodist solution resembles the Book of Mormon's" (page 80);
- (e) Concerning the atonement, Ostler suggests "the Book of Mormon doctrine of atonement and free will shows influences of a theological conflict over depravity, grace, and the role of the will in salvation, all central to the conflict between Calvinism and Arminianism in the early nineteenth century ... ideas of free will enabled by the atonement are not found in Israelite thought but are presented in (the Book of Mormon)" (page 81);
- (f) The fall of Adam is, according to Ostler, "a Christian interpretation which developed very early in Christian thought ... the same concept appears in 2 Nephi 2:17-26 and Alma 42:2-14 ... there simply is no pre-exilic interpretation of the fall of Adam. Indeed, the fall of Adam is not mentioned in the Old Testament after Genesis 2:4-3:23" (page 81);
- (g) Ostler suggests that "the doctrines of original sin and the fallen nature of humankind are also foreign to pre-exilic Israelite thought. The fall of Adam was never linked with the human condition in pre-exilic works, as it is in the Book of Mormon ... human 'nature' was

not considered inherently sinful in Israelite thought ... Teachings of original sin and depravity first appear in the Bible in Paul" (page 82);

(h) Ostler argues that the satisfaction theory of atonement as described in Alma 34:9-17 and 42:9-17 is a medieval theological development. The satisfaction theory of atonement was first suggested by Anselm of Canterbury in A.D. 1109 and was premised on medieval concepts of law and justice (page 82);

(i) Ostler suggests that the idea of a "Messiah" as one who "dies for the sins of others, then rises from the dead, was unknown in ancient Israel" (page 83);

(j) Ostler notes that pre-exilic Hebrews had no refined notion of life after death and no dualistic beliefs about corruptible bodies and eternal souls. The notion of the grave delivering up the physical body and Hell delivering up the spirit in 2 Nephi 9:10-13 is considered, therefore, "awkward" (page 84);

(k) Ostler notes that although the concept of a resurrection was not developed until the fourth century B.C., the Book of Mormon has, from its beginning, a "well-developed concept of universal resurrection brought about by the Messiah's death and resurrection" (page 85);

(l) According to Ostler pre-exilic Hebrews did not believe in a personal Devil who tempted individuals and opposed deity. The Book of Mormon, however, describes the Devil as the founder of the "abominable" Church, the personage who beguiled our first parents, the father of "secret combinations", a deceiver, the originator of evil and the

master of sin as well as the destroyer of souls and an enemy of God. Ostler suggests that 1 Nephi Chapters 13-15 "can be distinguished as Joseph Smith's expansion through motif criticism. Its denunciations of the devil's great and abominable church depend on Revelation and appears to express anti-Catholicism characteristic of nineteenth-century New York ... These chapters contain ideas foreign to pre-exilic Israelites, such as a 'church', a personal devil, and Jews and gentiles" (page 86); and,

- (m) Mosiah 15 explicates how the Son can be both fully man and fully God. Ostler notes that such theological questions were discussed only after the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 (page 97).

Ostler observes, therefore, that the most basic Christian doctrines are found anachronistically throughout the Book of Mormon and were added, at least in part, by Joseph Smith. Lest Ostler be misrepresented, he states his conclusion as follows: "The Book of Mormon reflects the influence of Joseph Smith's earliest belief structure in its synthesis of passages from the KJV and contemporary theology with nineteenth-century concerns. Joseph Smith's interpretive framework was largely derived from Christian Primitivism, a particular orientation within nineteenth-century Protestantism" (page 112).

Ostler's thesis poses several significant problems. First of all, it eviscerates the very reason for the Book of Mormon's existence, i.e. "to the convincing of the Jew and Gentile that Jesus is the Christ, the Eternal God, manifesting himself unto all nations". The Book of Mormon presents itself as the accumulation of over two thousand years



of history painstakingly engraven on a limited number of plates, carefully sealed up in the Hill Cumorah for translation by the Prophet Joseph Smith centuries later. If the most important doctrines in the Book of Mormon are influenced and perhaps fully accounted for by Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century interpretive framework, then of what use are the records maintained by Mormon, Moroni and others? Secondly, as Anthony Hutchinson pointed out at the 1987 Washington Sunstone Symposium, Ostler's position compromises the Book of Mormon's claim to historicity, i.e. it is either what it claims to be or it is not. There is no room in the Book of Mormon as it understands itself, and as Joseph Smith and the early Mormons understood it, for the type of expansion proposed by Ostler. If, as Ostler suggests, the central themes of the Book of Mormon reflect questions current to the early nineteenth century but not to the pre-Christian timeframe proclaimed by the Book itself, the parsimonious position to take is that the Book of Mormon is, in fact, a product of the early nineteenth century.

## MORE BOOK OF MORMON DIFFICULTIES

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Draft: June 1991

BOOK OF MORMON DIFFICULTIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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BOOK OF MORMON DIFFICULTIES: A LITERATURE REVIEW  
B.F. CRANSTON (penname)

Nearly two thousand years ago the Apostle Paul stated that we should "prove all things; hold fast that which is good". The Book of Mormon, revered by millions of individuals throughout the world, makes a number of claims for itself which, fortunately, are subject to evaluation.

The past two decades have seen an exponential increase in the amount of scholarship brought to bear on the Book of Mormon. This research exists in disparate journals, books and monographs, often not available in ones home town or university library. Part I of the present Book seeks to bring the findings of these pieces of research into one place where an interested party can, in a brief reading, be introduced to recognised difficulties in regarding the Book of Mormon as an historic document. Part II details other difficulties in the Book of Mormon which have had little or no consideration in the literature. Books sympathetic to the Book of Mormon are also referenced so that the reader looking for "both sides of the issue" in his/her studies of the Book of Mormon may be satisfied. The authors believe, nonetheless, that the reader familiar with all that may be said about the Book of Mormon will conclude that the weight of the evidence is against its claim to be an historic or inspired document.

From their inception the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon), and the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, as well as various splinter groups, have accepted the Book of Mormon as a literal record of the ancestors of the American Indian. Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of Mormonism, described the Book of Mormon as "the most correct of any book on earth, and the keystone of our religion"<sup>1</sup>. Ezra Taft Benson, President of the LDS Church, affirmed this view citing not

only the eighth Article of Faith, i.e. "we believe ... the Book of Mormon to be the word of God" but Doctrine and Covenants Section 20 in which the Lord stated that He gave Joseph Smith "power from on high ... to translate the Book of Mormon; which contains ... the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ"<sup>2</sup>. A number of critics, however, both in and outside the Church have raised questions about the Book of Mormon's historicity<sup>3</sup>. To date, their observations have been made in a variety of publications but have never been compiled in one place. The present article draws together data from various articles and books which point out the difficulties in accepting the Book of Mormon as a record of peoples who actually inhabited the Americas. In a second article we will detail Book of Mormon difficulties which have had little or no consideration in the literature.

In the present article we will examine those difficulties which are regularly cited in the critical literature including:

- (a) The similarity of the Book of Mormon to the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible;
- (b) Biblical narratives reworked in a Book of Mormon context;
- (c) Changes in the Book of Mormon;
- (d) Similarities between Joseph Smith's history and the Book of Mormon;
- (e) Masonic legend, nineteenth-century folklore, and anachronisms in the Book of Mormon;
- (f) Nineteenth-century religious issues and terminology in the Book of Mormon;
- (g) Similarities between the Westminster Confession and Alma Chapter 40;

- (h) Archaeological difficulties;
- (i) Inconsistencies and improbabilities in the Book of Mormon; and,
- (j) Joseph Smith's other translations and the Book of Mormon.



## Section 1

Similarity of the Book of Mormon to the King James Version of the Bible.

In a small paper entitled "The Use of the Bible in the Book of Mormon" H. Michael Marquardt<sup>4</sup> documents over three hundred direct borrowings from the KJV of the Bible in the Book of Mormon. In our own studies we have noted that the Book of Mormon has such borrowings on a majority of pages aside from those devoted to war; it is not uncommon to have three or four on any particular page. Biblical material drafted in the post-Christian era is found literally woven into the fabric of the Book of Mormon. Lengthy borrowings from Matthew Chapters 5 through 7, Malachi, and Saint Paul's letter on faith, hope and charity are evident. One estimate shows that the KJV of the Bible may account for approximately ten percent of the Book of Mormon.

When confronted by the hundreds of New Testament references in the Book of Mormon, some Latter-day Saint scholars<sup>5</sup> assert that Joseph Smith simply referred to the extant KJV to expedite his own "translation", notwithstanding the lack of evidence of his having a Bible present during the translation. This issue is highlighted in Stan Larson's paper "The Sermon on the Mount: What Its Textual Transformation Discloses Concerning the Historicity of the Book of Mormon".<sup>6</sup> At the time of his study Larson was working for the LDS Church's scriptural translation department. Noting that Joseph Smith's translation includes or revises italics that are only found in the 1769 and later editions of the KJV, Larson concluded that "The Book of Mormon text of the Sermon on the Mount is not a genuine translation from an ancient language, but rather is Joseph Smith's nineteenth-century targumic expansion of the English KJV text ... The Book of Mormon blindly

follows the KJV at the precise point where the KJV falls into error ... the term translation seems inappropriate since nowhere in the Book of Mormon version of Jesus' ... Sermon is there any indisputable evidence of being a translation from an ancient document". Larson's examination shows the Book of Mormon to follow the 1769 edition of the KJV over other renditions of the Sermon - curious, considering that the Nephites had immediately recorded the words "which Jesus had spoken - nothing varying" (3 Nephi 19:8), and that the Book of Mormon was correctly translated with Divine assistance.

Further examination of the Book of Mormon leads one to the conclusion that its author was not only familiar with but integrated New Testament scripture not available until the last half of the first century. 2 Nephi 4:17-19, for example, anticipates by six hundred years and integrates Romans 7:24, Revelations 15:3, Hebrews 12:1, and 2 Timothy 1:12. Mosiah 3:17-19 incorporates Acts 4:12, John 5:30, Matthew 18:3 and 1 Corinthians 2:14. Involved here are not lengthy passages which Joseph Smith may have expeditiously copied from the KJV but new scriptures, integrations of words and concepts unavailable until the Christian era. Similarly, 2 Nephi 9:16-19 incorporates eight New Testament scriptures: Matthew 24:35, 25:34 and 41, John 15:11, Hebrews 12:2, and Revelations 19:20, 20:10 and 22:11. Enos 27, a single verse, references Matthew 25:34, John 14:2 and 1 Corinthians 15:53. Similarly, Alma 13:28 references Matthew 26:41, 1 Corinthians 10:13 and Ephesians 4:2. 2 Nephi Chapter 9 includes twenty-two New Testament references and 2 Nephi Chapter 31 includes eleven. This type of finding makes it difficult to see the New Testament's appearance in the Book of Mormon as simply one of serving expeditious translation. Rather, this analysis strongly suggests that the author(s) of the Book of Mormon had

available to him/them and integrated a substantial range of New Testament scripture which simply did not exist at the time the Book of Mormon was purportedly drafted.

Although the Book of Mormon may be shown to draw heavily from the Bible for its ideas and theology, its writing style does not reflect the expected Egyptian and/or Hebrew syntax or style. In an article entitled "The Book of Mormon - A Literal Translation?" Edward Ashment<sup>7</sup> suggests that: "It has been instructive to compare the Book of Mormon with ancient Egyptian and Hebrew texts in an effort to ascertain if their syntax and style match the very distinctive syntax and style of the Book of Mormon: incomplete sentences, an abnormally frequent use of circumstantial gerund phrases, numerous digressions which often develop into a chain of digressions before returning to the main text, and an extensive use of adverbs and conjunctions which frequently incorrectly function to draw relationships where none are possible according to context. Ancient Egyptian or Semitic texts known to this writer do not display those characteristics. Instead, they tend to be 'tightly' structured and concise (a necessary prerequisite for a period of time in which writing materials were scarce and very expensive). Incomplete sentences are not characteristic ... nor is a high frequency of circumstantials. Numerous digressions of the type in the Book of Mormon do not occur, and the adverbs and conjunctives are used with a specific syntactic pattern intended. On the other hand, the salient characteristics of the syntax and style of the Book of Mormon also tend to be the prominent features of the other literary efforts of the prophet-viz., the 1832 history which he wrote and dictated, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price "(page 13). One particular demonstration of this point is found in Jesus' visit to the New World as

described in 3 Nephi. Where Jesus anticipates Matthew Chapters 5 through 7, his speech is brief. However, where Jesus is not quoting writings later found in the New Testament (see, for example, 3 Nephi 16:4, 9-10) his speech is tangential and digressive.

## Section 2

Biblical Narratives Reworked in a Book of Mormon Context

The Book of Mormon not only borrows extensively from New Testament scripture (as well as Old) but works into its narrative a number of Old and New Testament accounts. Examples include:

- (a) The brother of Jared, anticipating Noah, built boats to navigate the waters and was commanded by the Lord to "go to and gather together thy flocks, both male and female, of every kind; and also of the seed of the earth of every kind; and thy families" (Ether 1:41);
- (b) The Old Testament indicates that Moses saw the "back parts" of the Lord. The brother of Jared, however, saw the Lord face to face (Ether 3:12-15);
- (c) Just as Moses and the Israelites were led by a "pillar of fire" (Exodus 13:21) Lehi had a "pillar of fire" dwell upon a rock before him (1 Nephi 1:6);
- (d) Moses and Elijah died in supernatural ways either through burial by the Lord or disappearance (Deuteronomy 34:5; 2 Kings 2:1-11); in much the same fashion Alma and 3 Nephi are described as "disappearing" rather than suffering physical death (Alma 45:19; 3 Nephi 1:3);
- (e) The daughters of the Lamanites are abducted by the priests of King Noah (Mosiah 20:1-6) in much the same fashion as the daughters of Shilo in the Old Testament (Judges 21: 19-23);
- (f) David's slaying of Goliath (1 Samuel 17:4-49) finds parallels in Ammon's slaying of six men by sling (Alma 17:36-38);

- (g) The finger of God writing on the wall (Daniel 5:10-29) is repeated in Alma 10:2;
- (h) Daniel's experience in the lions' den (Daniel 6:16-22) and the three Hebrew children's experience in the fire furnace (Daniel 3:13-26) are repeated in the experience of the three Nephites (3 Nephi 28:21-22) and Nephi and Lehi (Helaman 5:23 ff);
- (i) The daughter of Herodias danced to secure John the Baptist's head (Matthew 14:3-12); two millennia earlier the daughter of Jared danced to secure the head of her own grandfather (Ether 8:9-12);
- (j) In Matthew 4:8 Jesus was taken up into an exceedingly high mountain and shown all the kingdoms of the world. The brother of Jared, however, was shown all of the inhabitants of the earth which had been and also which would be born in the future, "even unto the ends of the earth" (Ether 3:25);
- (k) In 1 Nephi 18:21 Nephi stilled the water as did Jesus six centuries later in Mark 4:39 and was caught up "into an exceeding high mountain" (1 Nephi 11:1) as was Jesus during his temptation (Matthew 4:8);
- (l) The miracle of Jesus' feeding the five thousand with five loaves and two fish in the Old World (Matthew Chapter 14) is reflected in his miraculously providing sacramental bread and wine to thousands when he appeared in the New World (3 Nephi 20:6-7);
- (m) Amulek, in Alma 10:17, anticipates Jesus' use of the phrase "wicked and perverse generation" (Matthew 17:17) by about 110 years;

- (n) Jesus' raising of Lazarus (John 11:1-44) is repeated by Nephi in 3 Nephi 7:19 and by Ammon in Alma 19;
- (o) Jesus' trial (Luke 22 and 23) finds parallels in the trial of Alma and Amulek (Alma 14);
- (p) John 21:22-23 intimates that John would not suffer death; the three Nephites are explicitly told they will not die (3 Nephi 28:6-7);
- (q) Paul's conversion (Acts 9:4-9) is duplicated in Alma's conversion (Mosiah Chapter 27, again recounted in Alma 36) in terms of the Lord's question "why persecuteth thou me" (to Paul; the Church to Alma), the hysterical response (blindness, Paul; dumbness, Alma) and being stricken for several days (3 for Paul; 2 for Alma according to Mosiah 27:23 but 3 according to Alma 36:10); and
- (r) Paul's belief that "I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains" (1 Corinthians 13:2) was actualized two millennia earlier by the brother of Jared who said "unto the mountain Zerin, Remove - and it was removed" (Ether 12:30). This extraordinary event is passed over in a single comment without any appreciation, it would appear, for the extraordinary forces that would be required nor is the purpose for such an event described.

## Section 3

Changes in the Book of Mormon

Ashment, Lancaster, Van Wagoner and Walker and others<sup>8</sup> have attempted to delineate the manner in which the Book of Mormon was translated. The tentativeness of their findings suggest that further research is likely to be conducted on this topic. Regardless of the manner of translation, however, it does appear established that the early Saints understood the Book of Mormon to have been correctly translated by the power of God. Textual comparison, however, shows that there have been a number of changes subsequent to the first edition of the Book of Mormon. While the anti-Mormon literature tends to overstate the changes in the Book of Mormon there are, nonetheless, some changes of substance. For example, the first edition of 1 Nephi 11:18 read, "Behold, the virgin whom thou seest is the mother of God". It now reads, "mother of the Son of God". The original 1 Nephi 11:21 stated, "Behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!". It now reads, "even the Son of the Eternal Father!". 1 Nephi 11:32 originally read, "the everlasting God was judged of the world"; it now reads, "the Son of the everlasting God was judged of the world". 1 Nephi 13:40 initially read, "the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father, and the Savior of the world". It now reads, "the Lamb of God is the Son of the Eternal Father". 1 Nephi 20:1 initially read the same as Isaiah 48:1. It now reads, "out of the waters of Judah or out of the waters of baptism". Mosiah 21:28 originally read: "king Benjamin had a gift from God". It now reads: "king Mosiah had a gift from God". Dr. Sidney B. Sperry suggested in The Problems of the Book of Mormon that "the reading king Benjamin is an out-and-out error, because the king had been dead for some time" (page 203). He suggests that Mormon made the mistake on the gold plates and that



Joseph Smith was glad to correct the error. This same error is also corrected in Ether 4:1.

## Section 4

Similarities Between Joseph Smith's History and the Book of Mormon

In 1 Nephi Chapter 8 Lehi has a significant dream occupying most of the chapter. In her 1853 book "Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet and his Progenitors for Many Generations"<sup>9</sup>, Joseph Smith's mother reported that her husband had a virtually identical dream in 1811. On page 85 of the same book she also indicated that Joseph would "occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of travelling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life with them". Were such recitals, made prior to receiving the plates, preparatory to the Book of Mormon?

Like Mormon (Mormon 1:15) Joseph was visited of the Lord in his mid-teens and, although endeavouring to preach, was not received. Like Mormon (Mormon 1:3-4) Joseph was instructed to go to a mountain in his early twenties to retrieve some but not all of the sacred engravings deposited therein. Lemuel, one of Nephi's brothers, was also the name of one of Joseph Smith's neighbours. Onidah, the hill upon which Alma taught (Alma 32:4) is synonymous with the Oneida Indians of New York State. Angola (Mormon 2:4) was known to Joseph as a neighbouring town in Erie County, New York.

## Section 5

Masonic Legend, Nineteenth-Century Folklore, and Anachronisms in the Book of Mormon

Speaking before the Mormon History Association in 1974 Mormon Institute of Religion Director Reed C. Durham spelled out apparent similarities between Masonic Legend and the Book of Mormon<sup>10</sup>. Masonic legend refers to such matters as gold plates and the hill Moriah. Joseph Smith reported finding not only gold plates in the hill of Cumorah, but a breast plate, the Urim and Thummim, and a round metal ball (the Liahona) which served as a guide and oracle, like the metal ball atop Enoch's brass pillar. There is also frequent reference in the Book of Mormon to "secret signs", "secret combinations" and "secret oaths" (e.g. Helaman 6:21-26). Examination of newspapers available in New York in the late 1820's relate Masonry to "secret combinations" and "secret oaths".

The Book of Mormon also makes reference to peep stones or seer stones of the same type by which Joseph Smith claimed to "translate" the Book of Mormon. In Ether 3:23-24 the Lord provided the brother of Jared with "two stones ... (which) shall magnify to the eyes of men these things which ye shall write". These same stones were passed with the 24 Jaredite gold plates to Mosiah who subsequently used the stones to translate them: "he translated them by the means of those two stones which were fastened into the two rims of a bow" (Mosiah 28:13). In Alma 37:23 the Lord says that he will prepare a stone "which shall shine forth ... that I may discover unto my people who serve me ... the works of their brethren, yea, their secret works, their works of darkness, and their wickedness and abominations". Joseph Smith claimed to translate the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon with two stones embedded in the Urim and Thummim. However, after the Lord

took the Urim and Thummim from him for giving the Book of Mormon manuscript to Martin Harris (who subsequently lost it) he was forced to continue the translation with a peep stone he apparently found in Willard Chase's well in 1822.

There has been a great deal written about early nineteenth-century New York State folklore. Brigham H. Roberts, probably the leading Mormon historian in the first half of the twentieth-century, examined the types of books and folklore available in the 1820's that may have served as source material for the Book of Mormon. In research entitled "Book of Mormon Difficulties: A Study" and "A Book of Mormon Study"<sup>11</sup> Roberts examined parallels between the Book of Mormon and, among a variety of materials, a book printed in 1823, later reprinted in 1825, entitled "View of the Hebrews". The author, unrelated to Joseph Smith, was Ethan Smith. Referring to the parallels between the two books Roberts asked "did Ethan Smith's View of the Hebrews furnish structural material for Joseph Smith's Book of Mormon? It has been pointed out in these pages that there are many things in the former book that might well have suggested many major things in the other. Not a few things merely, one or two, or a half dozen, but many; and it is this fact of many things of similarity and the cumulative force of them that makes them so serious a menace to Joseph Smith's story of the Book of Mormon's origin" (page 240). Later in his study Roberts examined the various stories of religious dissenters and other matters in the Book of Mormon. He concluded: "they are all of one breed and brand; so nearly alike that one mind is the author of them, and that a young and undeveloped, but piously inclined mind. The evidence I sorrowfully submit, points to Joseph Smith as their creator. It is difficult to believe that they are the product of history, that they come upon the scene separated by long periods

of time, and among a race which was the ancestral race of the red man of America" (page 271).

Although Roberts' work was completed over sixty years ago, more recent studies have also addressed the question of what materials may have been available to Joseph Smith or others at the time the Book of Mormon came forth. Dan Vogel, a historian, has described the common folklore of the early 1800's in "Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon"<sup>12</sup>. H. Michael Marquardt in "Early Nineteenth Century Events Reflected in the Book of Mormon" has also addressed the matter<sup>13</sup>, as has Susan Mernitz in her article "Palmyra Revisited: a Look at Early Nineteenth Century America and the Book of Mormon"<sup>14</sup>. Mernitz finds the Book of Mormon to be "a product of a dramatic transformation in America which ushered in moral free agency, market capitalism, and liberal democratic institutions" (page 35). On the other side of this issue Richard Bushman<sup>15</sup> suggests that Book of Mormon critics may have missed the point, i.e. some of what is contained in the Book of Mormon is not typical of early American thought. He points to such foreign ideas as refusal of kingship, authority vested in judges, and more passive "divine deliverance" patterns (as opposed to active revolutionary heroic resistance) to support his argument that "in the context of nineteenth century political thought, the Book of Mormon people are difficult to place" (page 17).

Just as one would question the words "computer" or "input" in a document supposedly written in the 1800s, there are a number of anachronistic words in the Book of Mormon. Mosiah 3:7, for example, refers to "pores"; pores were not known to exist until the development of the microscope in the 1600s. The concept of "millions" (Ether 15:2) was not developed until well after Book of Mormon times. It also refers to cimeters which are Persian

sabres of the 16th to 18th century. Religious and other concepts and words such as Gentiles, Jews, Christians, Lamb of God, Holy Ghost, afterlife, hell, Satan, resurrection, synagogue, church, Bible, unpardonable or unforgivable sin, baptism, priestcraft, and others were developed in Jewish theology after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. Reference to the Mosaic "law" in the Book of Mormon is anachronistic insofar as the Mosaic law was not canonized until 400 B.C.. It is also considered very improbable that people in Jerusalem in 600 B.C. would have been prepared to locate Zion outside the boundaries of Israel.<sup>16</sup> Reference to the "Great Spirit" (Alma 18:2), painted foreheads (Alma 3:13), counting by moons (Omni 21), and scalping (Alma 44:12-13) appear to reflect early nineteenth-century Indian folklore.

## Section 6

Nineteenth-Century Religious Issues and Terminology in the Book of Mormon

Less than a year after the Book of Mormon was presented to the public Alexander Campbell, a founder of the Disciples of Christ, charged that the Book of Mormon was a commentary on all the major theological questions of the time: "Infant baptism, ordination, the trinity, regeneration, repentance, justification, the fall of man, the atonement, transubstantiation, fasting, penance, church government, religious experience, the call to the ministry, the general resurrection, eternal punishment, who may baptize, and even the question of freemasonry, republican government and the rights of man"<sup>17</sup>. Much more recently Blake Ostler showed that basic Christian doctrines (such as baptism, salvation, the atonement, the Fall, original sin, the afterlife, the resurrection, the Messiah, the Devil, and the Godhead) developed after 600 B.C. are anticipated in the Book of Mormon. Although Ostler accepts the Book of Mormon as a historical document he suggests, nonetheless, that "Joseph Smith's interpretive framework was largely derived from Christian Primitivism, a particular orientation within nineteenth-century Protestantism" (page 112)<sup>18</sup>.

Nineteenth-century religious terminology, as well as religious issues, is found throughout the Book of Mormon. In a 1983 Sunstone article Mark Thomas<sup>19</sup> provided a partial list of early nineteenth-century religious terminology evident in the Book of Mormon: saved from our sins, not in them (Alma 11:36, Helaman 5:10); the God of nature suffers (1 Nephi 19:12); the day of grace was passed (Mormon 2:15); crying aloud for mercy (Mosiah 4:2, Alma 18:41, 19:29, 36:18, 38:8); wrestling in prayer (Alma 8:10, Enos 2); the "falling exercise" (notably Jacob 7:21, Mosiah Chapters 4 and 27,

Alma Chapters 18, 19, 22, and 3 Nephi Chapter 1 in which "all the people upon the face of the whole earth ... fell to the earth"); trembling and shouting praises to God (2 Nephi 31:13); the Lord spake peace to my soul (Alma 38:8, 58:11); wrest the Scriptures (Alma 41:1); labourer in Zion (as ministers) (2 Nephi 26:29-31); take upon you the name of (believe in, worship) Christ (found throughout the Book of Mormon). One might also query such phraseology as "encircled about eternally in the arms of his love", "encircled about with the matchless bounty of his love", "encircled about with everlasting darkness and destruction", "the song of redeeming love", "for the arms of mercy are extended towards them", "your days of probation are past", "ye have procrastinated the day of your salvation until it is everlastingly too late", "brought before the altar of God", "carried away in God", "clasped in the arms of Jesus", "joined the choirs above in singing the praises of a just God", "struggling in the spirit", "the atoning blood of Christ", "all is well in Zion", "bearing down in pure testimony" and "unfold the scriptures".



## Section 7

Similarities between the Westminster Confession and Alma Chapter 40

In 1729 the Presbyterian Church adopted the Westminster Confession and Catechisms, a formulation of Presbyterian beliefs, which served as a creedal standard well into the nineteenth century. The Confession was known to Joseph Smith's family, which had been proselyted to the Presbyterian Church, and copies of the Confession were sold at a Palmyra bookstore in 1825, five years before the Book of Mormon was published.

A number of similarities in both wording and theological substance become apparent when one compares Chapters 31 and 32 of the Confession with Alma Chapter 40 of the Book of Mormon.

Alma Chapter 40 verses 11-14 and 20 read as follows:

11. Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection ... the spirits of all men ... are taken home to that God who gave them life.
12. ... the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, ...
13. ... the spirits of the wicked, ... shall be cast out into outer darkness ...
14. ... the souls of the wicked, ... remain in this state ... until the time of their resurrection.
20. ... the souls and the bodies are reunited ...

The Westminster Confession Chapter 32 (points 1 and 2) and Chapter 31 (point 1) read as follows:

... the State of Men after Death, and of the Resurrection ... (Chapter 32)

1. ... their souls ... return to God who gave them ... The souls of the righteous, ... are received into the highest heavens (31:1) ... the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, ... and utter darkness, ...
2. ... the souls of the wicked ... remain in ... darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day ... bodies ... shall be united again to their souls ...

That the second directly or indirectly influenced the first is evident.

## Section 8

Archaeological Difficulties

Efforts to tie Mesoamerican archaeology to Book of Mormon statements about its own iron and steel culture have led to the production of a number of books and articles. On the "pro-Mormon" side one could refer to the work of John Sorenson in his book "An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon", the work of Kirk Vestal and Arthur Wallace in their "The Firm Foundation of Mormonism" and Diane Wirth's "A Challenge to the Critics"<sup>20</sup>. Sorenson is the only one with graduate training in the field of anthropology or archaeology and his book is the most cautious. Sorenson's efforts appear to be directed to showing that people from the Mideast had some type of impact on Mesoamerican culture. On the other side, Michael Coe, a Mesoamerican archaeologist, has observed that significant problems exist between current understandings of Mesoamerican culture and Book of Mormon claims<sup>21</sup>. Coe concludes that "The bare facts of the matter are that nothing, absolutely nothing, has ever shown up in any New World excavation which would suggest to a dispassionate observer that the Book of Mormon, as claimed by Joseph Smith, is a historical document relating to the history of early migrants to our hemisphere ... few nonbelievers have been swayed when faced with the indigestible cattle, horses, wheat, and so forth" (page 46). In addition, no metal plates or other artifacts with Egyptian, "near Egyptian" or Christian symbols have ever been found in the Central American region where the Book of Mormon purports to take place. The Book of Mormon refers to silk, fine-twined linen (made of flax), pieces of gold and silver for monetary exchange (Alma 11:4), chariots, sails, rudders, glass in 2000 B.C. (Ether 3:1), elephants, sheep, asses, oxen and swine. None of these claims have archaeological support, although cloth and copper "money" have

been found as well as "wool" from alpacas but not sheep or goats. Sorenson points out some of the possible difficulties in interpreting Book of Mormon flora and fauna terminology, but past a point, the reliability of language is frustrated, i.e. Joseph Smith insisted that the Book of Mormon was translated by the power of God and was "correct". When, therefore, is a horse not a horse, and a cow not a cow? Ether 7:9 refers to a sword made of "steel" as early as 2000 B.C.. Sorensen himself has commented that absolutely nowhere is steel to be found in human culture as early as that<sup>22</sup>. Nephi found "oxen" upon arrival in the New World. Oxen are castrated bulls; by definition, therefore, oxen would not be found in the wild. The Book of Mormon also refers to barley and wheat, both of which were unknown to Central American cultures, although recently it appears that barley, or a variant thereof has been unearthed. It fails to mention, however, corn and potatoes which were commonplace in Mesoamerica. The afore-mentioned difficulties have led some of the few LDS archaeologists to state that there is no such thing as a Book of Mormon archaeology<sup>23</sup>.

One of the most serious difficulties that the Book of Mormon faces is the fact that it makes absolutely no mention of any other groups inhabiting or coinhabiting its land space. Yet, a culture of hundreds of thousands of people is presented as inhabiting an area roughly the size of Utah (see Sorenson's suggested map of Book of Mormon geography)<sup>24</sup>. Until recently, it was thought by orthodox Mormons that the Book of Mormon described all native Indian cultures, and that all the Book of Mormon peoples derived from two bands of Old World emigrants led by Lehi and Mulek. More careful analysis of native American cultures, however, points unequivocally to the fact that there is a diversity of native language which is impossible to

account for if they all spoke the same language until the end of the Book of Mormon era; moreover, demographic analysis shows that the thirty or so people in the initial groups could not logically account for the "multitudes" described in the Book of Mormon given probable annual growth percentages, natural disasters, and recurring wars in which "tens of thousands" are repeatedly lost.<sup>25</sup> This means, therefore, that the idea of the Book of Mormon accounting for all native Americans is untenable. Yet, the Book of Mormon mentions no other such people. There are other problems as well: although the Book of Mormon period closes as recently as the fifth-century A.D., only fourteen hundred years before the Book of Mormon was published in New York, there are no Book of Mormon place or people names evident in Central American culture. This is to be contrasted with the fact that there is substantial continuity in the names of people and places in other cultures around the world. Nor is there any clear relationship between any of the native American languages and the Hebrew allegedly spoken by the Book of Mormon peoples.

## Section 9

Inconsistencies and Improbabilities in the Book of Mormon

A careful reading of the Book of Mormon suggests that there are a number of inconsistencies and improbabilities. Although a number of references exist for this material most difficulties are identified in B.H. Roberts' "A Book of Mormon Study"<sup>26</sup>. 2 Nephi 5:16, for example, indicates that Nephi and his people (who could not possibly have numbered more than thirty adults at the time) "did construct (a temple) after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things; for they were not to be found upon the land" (notwithstanding verse 15 just before it which suggests that "all manner of wood, and of iron, and of copper, and of brass, and of steel, and of gold, and of silver, and of precious ores" were in great abundance). The original temple of Solomon took seventy thousand workers, eighty thousand "hewers" in the mountains and three thousand, six hundred overseers seven years to complete (2nd Chronicles, Chapter 2). Responses to some of Roberts' observations have been advanced by John Welch and others through the pro-Mormon Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (F.A.R.M.S.) in Provo, Utah.<sup>27</sup>

Other authors (e.g. Russell)<sup>28</sup> argue that Hebrew-Egyptian animosity would have prevented Hebrew sacred writings such as the five books of Moses from ever being drafted in Egyptian as suggested in 1 Nephi 5:10-13 and Mosiah 1:3-4. Mosiah 2:3 states that "they also took of the firstlings of their flocks, that they might offer sacrifice and burnt offerings according to the law of Moses". According to the law of Moses, however, all firstlings belonged to the Lord and could not be counted as a man's personal property; burnt offerings had to be selected from a man's own personal property. The

firstlings of the flock came into the hands of the High Priest to be offered as a peace offering but not as a burnt offering (Deuteronomy 15:19-20). Lehi appeared ignorant of his tribal genealogy until he had perused the plates of Laban (1 Nephi 5:14). Israelites were, however, well aware of their tribal affiliations. Another problem is Nephi's consecration of his nonLevite brothers, all of them younger than thirty years of age, to the priesthood. 1 Nephi 7:14 mentioned that "Jeremiah have they cast into prison". According to Jeremiah 32:1-2 and 37:15 this occurred in the tenth year of Zedekiah's reign, nine years after Lehi and his family left Jerusalem. The Book of Mormon makes no reference to Lehi or his group having contact with Jerusalem after they made their final departure. How did they know about Jeremiah's imprisonment? 2 Nephi 19:1 alters Isaiah 9:1 by inserting "Red Sea" into the phrase "by the way of the sea, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations". Galilee, however, is in northern Israel 250 miles North of the Red Sea; hence, the insertion generates a geographical impossibility.

Careful reading of the Book of Mormon finds a number of other problems. For example, Omni 14 suggests that the people of Zarahemla "did rejoice exceedingly, because the Lord had sent the people of Mosiah" to find them. In verse 17, however, it is suggested that "they denied the being of their Creator". In the same vein, the city of Zarahemla is portrayed as rejoicing because Mosiah had brought the brass plates; yet in the next sentence we are informed that their language had been sufficiently corrupted that Mosiah couldn't understand them, and they, presumably, him. But why not? It appears that they were separated in Mesoamerica for about three hundred eighty-eight years. According to Sorenson language develops at a fairly fixed rate of change, i.e. approximately eighty-one percent of the basic words in a language are still recognizable after one thousand

years. If two languages share recognizable roots for sixty-six percent of the basic list, for example, it is estimated that they would have separated one thousand years earlier<sup>29</sup>. This indicates, therefore, that a group that has only been separated an estimated three hundred eighty-eight years should have maintained considerably more than sixty-six percent commonality permitting, therefore, reasonable discourse.

Jacob 1:15 indicates that "under the reign of the second king, (the people of Nephi) began to grow hard in their hearts, and indulge themselves ... desiring many wives and concubines". This would have been approximately 540 B.C.. It is unlikely that they would have had sufficient numbers of people for institutionalized polygamy by that time. Lehi, his family and entourage constituted about thirty people. Even assuming they doubled their numbers every twenty years for sixty years it is hard to conceive of their group amounting to more than two or three hundred people total, with less than one hundred of them being adult (mind you, according to 2 Nephi 5:18 Nephi was made king about 30 years earlier over a handful of adults). Similarly, in Mosiah 20:5 the priests of king Noah carry off twenty four daughters of the Lamanites some time between 145 and 123 B.C.. Between fifty and seventy years later the offspring of the priests of Noah are described (Alma 43:13-14) as being "as numerous, nearly, as were the Nephites" (after a Nephite history of 450 years). In Alma 60:33 Alma complains to Pahoran, the chief judge, that the Lord had told him Pahoran had failed to support him militarily because of "sins and iniquities". Alma Chapter 61 reports, however, that Pahoran's hands were tied due to a rebellion; this statement apparently contradicts the Lord's words to Alma. Possibly one of the most doubtful accounts in the Book of Mormon involves an incident in which one Shiz is decapitated and then "raised upon his



hands and fell; and after that he had struggled for breath, he died" (Ether 15:31).

In his analysis of the Book of Mormon B.H. Roberts describes improbable parallels between the Nephite and Jaredite migrations. He concludes "It may be asked, what of this parallelism? What does it amount to? If such a question should be asked the opponent of the Book of Mormon would answer with emphasis - 'This of it. It supplies the evidence that the Book of Mormon is the product of one mind, and that, a very limited mind, unconsciously reproducing with only slight variation its visions.' And the answer will be accepted as significant at least, if not conclusive".<sup>30</sup> Roberts also notes parallels found in Nephite traits and in incidents in different Nephite periods. He refers particularly to the three "Anti-Christ": Sherem, Nehor and Korihor. Of particular interest is a comparison between the dialogue Aaron has with the Amalekites (Alma Chapter 21:7-10) and the words of Korihor (Alma 30:13-16). Roberts sums up his analysis of these "Anti-Christ" figures by saying: "The two Anti-Christ: Sherem and Korihor - the stories of their unbelief and the treatment of them, how alike they are! In both the denial of the Christ; the charge against the ministry, that they mislead the people; that they could not know things yet future; the denial of the Christ, and of the scriptures; the same method of attack by the prophets - 'believest thou the scriptures?' 'deniest thou the Christ,' 'believest thou there is a God'? The same hesitancy on the part of the Anti-Christ in answering directly; the same demand for a sign. The same hesitancy on the part of the prophet to invoke the power of God in a sign. In both cases the sign given upon the person of the blasphemer; in one case stricken that he fell of a mortal sickness; in the other stricken with dumbness, shortly afterwards to be run over and trodden to death. In both cases a confession of being deceived by the devil and in both cases a vain repentance".<sup>31</sup>

## Section 10

Joseph Smith's Other Translations and the Book of Mormon

Recent examination of other works purported to be translated by Joseph Smith may permit some insight into the Book of Mormon as a translation. In 1835 at Kirtland, Ohio Joseph Smith paid a collector \$2,400 for four Egyptian mummies. From papyrus scrolls found with the mummies, he translated the "Book of Abraham" including an account of the Creation attributed to the Old Testament patriarch. Subsequently, scholars have identified these papyri as fairly common funerary scrolls from the Egyptian Book of Breathings, which were buried with the dead. Eight years later Joseph Smith was presented with six bell-shaped brass plates covered with "hieroglyphics" from an old earth-mound outside of Kinderhook, Illinois near Nauvoo. William Clayton indicated in his diary for May 1, 1843 that "Prest J. has translated a portion and says they contain the history of the person with whom they were found, and he was a descendant of Ham through the loins of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and that he received his kingdom from the Ruler of heaven and earth"<sup>32</sup>. It was later discovered that the Kinderhook plates were fabricated by Joseph Smith's enemies to trap him into pretending to translate a writing that was not genuine. The August 1981 Ensign included a statement by Mormon scholar Stanley B. Kimball that "it is perhaps time that the Kinderhook plates be retired to the limbo of other famous faked antiquities"<sup>33</sup>. Doctrine and Covenants Section 7 purports to be a translation through the Urim and Thummim of a record written on parchment by the Apostle John. In this case no physical texts were used for the purpose of "translation". Likewise, Joseph Smith produced his inspired revision of the Bible without benefit of ancient texts. Regarding the Book of Mormon, the evidence suggests that Joseph

Smith "translated" the plates by placing his face in a hat to exclude all light while reading the English translation from a "peepstone". Physical stimuli such as the gold plates or parchments were not, therefore, a necessary part of the translation process.<sup>34</sup> Rather, the body of Joseph Smith's literary efforts point to a creative process which involved his interpretation of the religious and social events alive in the region where he and his family lived in the early nineteenth century.

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