Apologetic and Critical Assumptions about Book of Mormon Historicity

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The thesis of inspiration may not be invoked to guarantee historicity, for a divinely inspired story is not necessarily history.
—Raymond E. Brown[1]

[T]he laws of creative interpretation by which we analyze material from the first and second Christian centuries operate and are significantly eluci-dated by works like the Book of Mormon ...
—Krister Stendahl[2]

FOR TRADITION-MINDED MEMBERS of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints the Book of Mormon's historicity is a given: Book of Mormon events actually occurred and its ancient participants existed in ancient history. Apologetics for this stance, such as those espoused by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS), the Department of Religious Education at Brigham Young University, and the LDS Church Educational System, occasionally employ limited criti-cal perspectives but only to promote traditionalist assumptions of histo-ricity.[3]

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1. *The Birth of the Messiah: A Commentary on the Infancy Narratives in Matthew and Luke* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1977), 33-34.

2. *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 99.

3. Former BYU dean of religious education Robert J. Matthews articulated this position

One non-LDS biblical scholar has noted that for such interpreters "truth and historicity are so much identified with each other that [they are] led to conclude: *if it is true* (according to my faith), *it is historical.*"[A] In fact, writes Robert L. Millet, BYU dean of religious education, "the authenticity of an event is inextricably tied to its historicity; one's subjective testimony of a religious phenomenon is directly related to an objective and discernible occasion."[5] As such, "[t]he Book of Mormon is a guide to understanding persons and events in antiquity."[6] What I term "traditionalism" is distinguished, in short, by belief that the Book of Mormon is only *true* if the personalities and events it describes were objectively *real.*[7]

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in response to "[s]ome [who] have said that the Book of Mormon, the Bible, and the Pearl of Great Price are religious truths but not historical truths." According to Matthews, "That is actually a thinly veiled expression of unbelief. The reader of the Book of Mormon is forced to decide: either Joseph Smith was a fraud who has now been exposed through his citing of biblical passages that have been disproved by scientific investigation, or Joseph Smith was a prophet who translated an ancient historical, doctrinal, religious record—a new witness for Jesus Christ. There is no middle ground to this matter without compromise and a loss of truth" (Robert J. Matthews, "What the Book of Mormon Tells Us about the Bible," in *Doctrines of the Book of Mormon: The 1991 Sperry Symposium*, eds. Bruce A. Van Orden and Brent L. Top [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992], 107)."

   As a contemporary LDS official passionately echoed: "I would rather lay down my life this instant than deny that Nephi, King Benjamin, Alma, Ammon, Moroni, Mormon, and the Brother of Jared were prophets of God" (Vaughn J. Featherstone, "The Last Drop of the Chalice," in *Brigham Young University 1985-86 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, University Publications, 1986], 20). For some apologists a great deal hinges on Book of Mormon historicity. Noel B. Reynolds, BYU political scientist, once argued that the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon would be empirical proof for the existence of God ("Introduction," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1982], 3).

   4. Daniel Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 7.

   5. "Biblical Criticism and the Four Gospels: A Critical Look," in *"To be Learned is Good if . . .": A Response by Mormon Educators to Controversial Questions*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 191.

   6. Robert L. Millet, "Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the Nature of God," in *"To be Learned is Good if . . .",* 61; cf. Stephen D. Ricks, Review of *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites,* by Hugh W. Nibley, in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon,* ed. Daniel C. Peterson (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:139-40.

   7. New Mormon Historians have been reprimanded by some apologists for being objectivists (see D. Michael Quinn, "Editor's Introduction," in *The New Mormon History: Revisionist Essays on the Past,* ed. D. Michael Quinn [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992], vii-xx; and the essays in George D. Smith, ed., *Faithful History: Essays on Writing Mormon History* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992]). While I personally know of no New Mormon Historian who has ever suggested that Mormons must endorse his or her interpretation of history as true, I cannot say the same for some of their traditionalist critics. BYU political scientist Louis Midgley, arguing from the purview of philosophical hermeneutics, has asserted: "[t]o be a Latter-day Saint is to believe, among other things,

As one Mormon traditionalist has explained, "Without the historical component, the teachings and core message lose their divine warrant as God's revelation and they are also rendered doubtful"; as a result "the Restoration message is true if—and only if—the Book of Mormon is an authentic ancient history."[8] Apologists[9] adamantly defend these assumptions.

For critical approaches, historicity is not a barometer of religious merit. Judgments about historical matters can be separated from judgments about spiritual worth. The religious significance of scripture critically read may vary from a traditionalist reading, but it can nonetheless convey spiritual value as many devout religious critical scholars will attest. This is not to say that historicity is of no concern to critical approaches. On the contrary, the question of historicity is an intrinsic element of any historical-critical study. But the approach of scripture

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that the Book of Mormon is true, that there once was a Lehi who made a covenant with God and was led out of Jerusalem" ("The Challenge of Historical Consciousness: Mormon History and the Encounter with Secular Modernity," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, eds. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990], 2:526; introductions to philosophical hermeneutics are available in David Couzens Hoy, *The Critical Circle: Literature, History, and Philosophical Hermeneutics* [Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978]; Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Biblical Hermeneutics," in *Exegesis: Problems of Method and Exercises in Reading (Genesis 22 and Luke 15)*, trans. Donald G. Miller [Pittsburgh: Pickwick Press, 1978], 265-339). Granted, these interpretations may be historically factual or objective, but with what assumptions and based on what criteria can such objectivist claims be proffered? Midgley does not clarify how he would reconcile his absolutist faith assumptions with a hermeneutic of testimony which acknowledges limitations (see Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Lewis S. Mudge [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980], 119-54). Many hermeneutical apologists such as Midgley adopt the positivism they so readily condemn. They repudiate the possibility of historical objectivity in an empirical sense but insist on the historical objectivity of early Mormonism's truth claims in a religious or confessional sense.

A frustration for critical scholars seeking a dialogue with hermeneutical apologists is the failure of the latter to offer alternative scriptural exegesis and historical studies. For discussions to progress, hermeneuts need to produce samples of their own history and exegesis for critique. In a BYU master's thesis, Alan Goff ("A Hermeneutic of Sacred Texts: Historicism, Positivism, and the Bible and Book of Mormon," 1989) offered an attempt at a Book of Mormon hermeneutical-apologetic but achieved mixed results. His "structuralist" analysis, for instance, redefined structuralism (122-33; cf. Patte, *What is Structural Exegesis?; Structural Exegesis for New Testament Critics* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990]; Daniel Patte and Aline Patte, *Structural Exegesis: From Theory to Practice* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978]). Goff alerts readers that his interpretation is "a[t] best a half-hearted, and probably less than a quarter-hearted, attempt at a vulgarized structuralist criticism combined with a canonical approach" (186), but one is left wondering exactly what he meant by this.

8. Louis Midgley, "Faith and History," in *"To be Learned is Good if . . . ,"* 220, 224.

9. I do not consider "apologists" and "scholars" mutually exclusive; while a scholar may be an apologist, all apologists are not scholars.

critics looks beyond claims of tradition to place historical authority in disclosures of literary and historical context. In this way the document itself becomes the source of authority for interpretation. Both apologetic and critical scholars are led by prior assumptions, but they differ fundamentally. Apologists assume that the Book of Mormon is historical and from this they develop methods to sustain authenticity. The critical scholar's interpretation depends not on a proposition made by a text or tradition but on a methodology for exploring the broader context which structures and authorizes such claims. Ideally, within the critical mode, methods lead to conclusions instead of conclusions leading to methods.

In what follows I explore some underlying apologetic and critical assumptions about Book of Mormon historicity, and their interpretive implications. My essay is thus thematically broad while purposely limited in the extent of its treatment of these complex issues.

METHODOLOGY AND APOLOGETIC ASSUMPTIONS

A key project for apologists is "show[ing] that features of the [Book of Mormon] . . . accurately reflect the world from which it claims to derive in ways that could not have been known to [Joseph Smith]."[10] This method rests on the logical fallacy of negative proof,[11] setting up what amounts to an impossible horizon of evidence. For how can we prove what was not knowable or anticipated in Joseph Smith's environment? But if proving a thesis within such a framework is virtually impossible, undermining it is comparatively easy, requiring only one contemporary example of the phenomenon in question.

For example, Joseph Smith's claim that the Book of Mormon was engraved on gold plates illustrates the difficulties associated with this approach. Apologists have asserted that Smith and contemporaries could not have known that some ancient peoples engraved on metallic plates.[12]

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10. Ricks, Review of *Lehi in the Desert*, 135.

11. See David Hackett Fischer, *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970), 47-48; Brent Lee Metcalfe, "Exegetical and Revelatory Implications of 'Abrahamic' Geocentricity," response to "'And I Saw the Stars': the Book of Abraham and Ancient Astronomy," by William J. Hamblin, Daniel C. Peterson, and John Gee, delivered at the 1991 Sunstone Symposium.

12. See Paul R. Cheesman, "Ancient Writing in the Americas," *Brigham Young University Studies* 13 (Autumn 1972): 80ff; *The World of the Book of Mormon* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1984), 143-44; *Ancient Writing on Metal Plates: Archaeological Findings Support Mormon Claims* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1985), 11-12; C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, 77, 81; Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, the World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites*, eds. John W. Welch, Darrell L. Matthews, and Stephen R. Callister (*The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 5, the Book of Mormon*) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and

But even a cursory survey of early nineteenth-century literature disproves such a claim.

Translated into English by Thomas C. Upham, *Jahn's Biblical Archaeology* was published in Andover, Massachusetts, in 1823, five years before Smith began dictating the Book of Mormon. According to Jahn, "[t]ables of brass" were preferred by ancient scribes "for those inscriptions, which were designed to last the longest."[13] Similarly the brass plates procured from Book of Mormon villain Laban were intended to survive future generations (see 1 Ne. 3:3, 12; 5:10-19; Alma 37:3-5). Based on *Josephus* and *Pliny*, Jahn speculated that ancient "Hebrews went so far as to write their sacred books in gold."[14] This echoes Nephi's injunction that religious rather than secular history should be recorded on plates presumably made of gold (see 1 Ne. 6:3; 9:2-4; 10:4; 19:3; 2 Ne. 4:14-15; 5:30-33; Jacob 1:1-2; W of M 1:4). The manner in which these ancient tablets were joined, Jahn continued, was "by rings at the back, through which a rod was passed to carry them by,"[15] a description that compares to Smith's explanation that the Book of Mormon plates were "bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole."[16] Whether Smith knew of Jahn's publication, the idea that ancients inscribed on metal plates was available in Smith's culture.[17]

FARMS, 1988; originally published 1948-57), 107; *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (*The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 6, the Book of Mormon*) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988; originally published in 1957), 21-29; *Since Cumorah*, ed. John W. Welch (*The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 7, the Book of Mormon*) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988; originally published 1964-67), 56-57, 220-21; *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, ed. John W. Welch (*The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley: Volume 8, the Book of Mormon*) (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989; originally published 1953-88), 75-76, 245, 385; Mark E. Petersen, *Those Gold Plates!* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1979), 61; Kirk Holland Vestal and Arthur Wallace, *The Firm Foundation of Mormonism* (Los Angeles: LL Company, 1981), 106.

13. Johann Jahn, *Jahn's Biblical Archaeology—Translated from the Latin, with Additions and Corrections*, trans. and ed. Thomas C. Upham (Andover, MA: Flagg and Gould, 1823), 93-94.

14. Ibid., 95.

15. Ibid., 96.

16. *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 Mar. 1842): 707.

17. In considering nineteenth-century analogues to Book of Mormon warfare, FARMS founding president John W. Welch has acknowledged that Jahn's work preceded the Book of Mormon dictation but added: the "simple existence of [Jahn's] book . . . does not imply that Joseph Smith knew anything about it" ("Why Study Warfare in the Book of Mormon?" in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, eds. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990], 22n3). Welch may be unaware that paraphrased excerpts from *Jahn's Biblical Archaeology* appeared in early Book of Mormon apologia (*Evening and Morning Star* 1 [Jan. 1833]: 8), and while under Joseph Smith's editorial direction the *Times and Seasons* (3 [1 Sept. 1842]: 908-909) cited Jahn's volume to buttress

Another methodological problem follows from the assumption that the Book of Mormon is ancient: strategically-placed attention and inattention to evidence. For instance, Book of Mormon geographers currently argue that the Lehite/Jaredite promised land was in Mesoamerica. A representative example comes from emeritus BYU anthropologist John L. Sorenson.[18] He envisions the Book of Mormon landscape encompassing only a few hundred miles in Central America, including portions of present-day Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, and El Salvador with the Isthmus of Tehuantepec as the Book of Mormon "narrow neck of land." Sorenson and others must maintain a Mesoamerican geographical model in the face of evidence that Joseph Smith and contemporaries believed the Book of Mormon pertained to large stretches of North, Central, and South America and to all native American peoples.[19]

Attempting to accommodate Sorenson's model with the history of Book of Mormon interpretation, David A. Palmer has argued that the Nephite hill Cumorah/Jaredite hill Ramah is located in Mexico, contrary to prevalent Mormon belief that the drumlin in New York state is the Hill Cumorah. To mitigate this problem, Palmer alleges that "Oliver Cowdery . . . *may* have been the one to first name the New York hill 'Cumorah'" in

Smith's description of the Book of Mormon gold plates.

Similarly, BYU religion professor Keith H. Meservy's proposal that twentieth-century discoveries of ancient wooden writing boards filled with wax "confirm the correctness of Joseph Smith's interpretation [of Ezekiel 37:21-22] in a way impossible in 1830" (Meservy, "Ezekiel's 'Sticks,'" *Ensign* 7 [Sept. 1977]: 24; cf. 27) is also mitigated by Jahn. He opined that some biblical terms, including "sticks" in Ezekiel 37:16, alluded to wooden inscription tables occasionally coated in wax (*Jahn's Biblical Archaeology*, 93).

18. *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985).

19. See Kenneth W. Godfrey, "Joseph Smith, the Hill Cumorah, and Book of Mormon Geography: A Historical Study, 1823-1844," delivered as the 1989 Mormon History Association Meeting; Brent Lee Metcalfe, "A Documentary Analysis of the Zelph Episode," delivered at the 1989 Sunstone Symposium; Dan Vogel, "The New Theory of Book of Mormon Geography: A Preliminary Examination," privately circulated, 1985. Paradoxically, Sorenson's theory presupposes that linguistics, ethnology, zoology, botany, etc., do not support the traditional notion that Book of Mormon lands comprised North, Central, and South America. Sorenson may aptly be identified as a neo-traditional apologist. He has insisted that "either the Book of Mormon promised land was in some portion of Mesoamerica or it was nowhere" (in Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1985], 85). Despite the popularity of their theories, Book of Mormon geographers have been unable to deliver a single archaeological dig that can be verified by reputable Mesoamericanists as ruins of an ancient Near Eastern culture, much less of Lehites and Jaredites (see Deanne G. Matheny, "Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993], 269-328; Glenna Nielsen, "The Material Culture of the Book of Mormon," delivered as the May 1992 Sunstone Book of Mormon Lecture).

an 1835 letter.[20] BYU professor of history William J. Hamblin turns Pal-

20. *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon Publishers, 1981), 20, 26, emphasis added; *Messenger and Advocate* 1 [July 1835]: 158-59. This example is symptomatic of the penchant among some traditionalist and critical scholars of Mormon scripture to exaggerate evidentiary conclusions by claiming to have discovered the first appearance of some historical tidbit. For instance, one scholar has asserted that George Reynolds's identification of the brother of Jared as Mahonri Moriancumer in May 1892 constitutes "[o]ur earliest source for the name" (Kent P. Jackson, "'Never Have I Showed Myself unto Man': A Suggestion for Understanding Ether 3:15a," *Brigham Young University Studies* 30 [Summer 1990]: 75n2; see George Reynolds, "The Jaredites," *Juvenile Instructor* 27 [1 May 1892]: 282[-84]; cf. *Improvement Era* 8 [July 1905]: 704-705). Important as Reynolds's contribution may be, his remarks were preceded by a number of other references (*Juvenile Instructor* 13 [1 Dec. 1878]: 272-73; "History of Brigham Young," 3 Mar. 1874, 763, archives, historical department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah [hereafter LDS archives]). Besides Oliver Cowdery noted in 1835 that "[i]t is said, and I believe the account, that the Lord showed the brother of Jared (Moriancumer) all things which were to transpire from that day to the end of the earth, as well as those which had taken place" (*Messenger and Advocate* 1 [Apr. 1835]: 112, parentheses originally brackets; cf. *Times and Seasons* 2 [1 Apr. 1841]: 362). Thus "[o]ur earliest source for the name" of Jared's sibling occurs not in 1892 but in 1835, if not earlier.

Other scholars are not immune to such inaccuracies. Following RLDS historian Richard P. Howard (*Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* [Independence, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1969], 207-209; "Latter Day Saint Scripture and the Doctrine of Propositional Revelation," *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 1 [June 1971]: 216), several researchers have observed that the earliest use of the term "Urim and Thummim" as a synonym for divinatory spectacles like those used by Joseph Smith in producing the Book of Mormon appeared in a W. W. Phelps's editorial in January 1833 (*Evening and Morning Star* 1 [Jan. 1833]: 8; see Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984], 222n60; Lyndon W. Cook, *The Revelations of the Prophet Joseph Smith: A Historical and Biographical Commentary of the Doctrine and Covenants* [Provo, UT: Seventy's Mission Bookstore, 1981], 122-23; James E. Lancaster, "The Method and Translation of the Book of Mormon," *The John Whitmer Historical Association Journal* 3 [1983]: 59; Blake T. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion of an Ancient Source," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 20 [Spring 1987]: 70; Stephen D. Ricks, "Joseph Smith's Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon," *Paper* [WRR-86], reproduction of *Preliminary Report* [RIC-84] [Provo, UT: FARMS, 1986], 2; Robert F. Smith, "Translation of Languages," privately circulated, June 1980, 5; Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* [Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987], 28; Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steve Walker, "Joseph Smith: 'The Gift of Seeing,'" *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 15 [Summer 1982]: 53). But at least as early as July 1832 Phelps had already remarked that the exiled Hebrews "were even to do without the Teraphim, (Urim and Thum[m]im, perhaps) or sacred spectacles or declarers" (*Evening and Morning Star* 1 [July 1832]: 2, parentheses originally brackets).

Some Book of Mormon students have also maintained that the first use of the term "Christ" in the Book of Mormon appears in the context of Jacob's vision of an angel in 2 Nephi 10:3 (see references in Brent Lee Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah: A Prelude to Book of Mormon Exegesis," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 429.) However, the complete name-title "Jesus Christ" was initially dictated by Joseph Smith in 1 Nephi 12:18 according to the Original Manuscript, the Printer's Manuscript, and the 1830 edition of the Book of

mer's speculation into the emphatic declaration that "the *earliest explicit* correlation of the hill in New York . . . and the Hill Cumorah mentioned in the Book of Mormon comes not from Joseph Smith, but Oliver Cowdery" in 1835.[21] The desired effect of such statements is to reduce traditional geographical identification to personal opinion instead of authoritative or inspired proclamation. Palmer's and Hamblin's contention, however, is negated by the fact that the recipient of Cowdery's letter, W. W. Phelps, had editorialized eighteen months earlier in 1833 as if it were common knowledge that "the [Book of Mormon] plates came forth from the hill Cumorah, which is in the county of Ontario, and State of New-York, by the power of God."[22]

Sorenson's and Palmer's theories contradict Joseph Smith's own pronouncements on the Book of Mormon. Their theory of limited geography leaves only a smattering of contemporary native Americans who would qualify as Semitic stock. However, when W. W. Phelps declared in 1833 that the "wonderful conjecture, which left a blank as to the origin, or forefathers of the American Indians, was done away by the book of Mormon,"[23] he echoed Joseph Smith's sentiments. As Phelps was publishing, the Mormon prophet wrote to a Rochester, New York, newspaper describing the Book of Mormon as "a record of the forefathers of our western Tribes of Indians." The book instructs, Smith elaborated, "that our western tribes of Indians are des[c]endants from that Joseph that was sold into Egypt, and that the land of America is a promised land unto them, and unto it all the tribes of Israel will come."[24] Smith subsequently avowed that the letter had been

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Mormon. The words "Jesus Christ" were later changed to "Mosiah" in the Printer's (emended) Manuscript and eventually to "the Messiah" in the 1837 edition of the Book of Mormon (see Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah," 427-33).

To avoid questions of credibility such claims generate, researchers should resist assertions regarding the earliest occurrence of a given historical detail. This is not to say that we cannot speak meaningfully about anachronism; only that scholars should meticulously scan early Mormon literature before making too much of these early references.

21. "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2 (Spring 1993): 172, emphasis added. Hamblin's wording "earliest explicit" is an addition to a previous version of his essay published by FARMS under the same title (*Paper* [HAM-93] [Provo, UT: FARMS, 1993], 9). My indication to Hamblin (Metcalfe to Hamblin, 18 Apr. 1993) that in 1834 Wilford Woodruff attributed to Joseph Smith the phrase "known from the hill Camorah [sic] <or east sea> to the Rocky mountains" evidently persuaded him that Smith at least *implicitly* made the correlation before Cowdery. But Hamblin's revised remark is as problematic as his first (see W. W. Phelps's quote below).

22. *Evening and Morning Star* 1 (Jan. 1833): 8.

23. Ibid.

24. Smith to N. C. Saxton, 4 Jan. 1833, in Dean C. Jessee, comp. and ed., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 273.

written "by the commandment of God."[25] It is unclear how Book of Mormon geographers discriminate between Smith's inspired text and his inspired interpretations.

A Mesoamerican geography not only requires selective inattention to Joseph Smith but evasion of certain claims of the book itself. Sorenson urges rigid attention to what the book says about travel[26] but dismisses other assertions as problematic. For example, he sometimes discounts what the Book of Mormon says about native fauna. Aware that evidence for the existence of many of the book's animals in ancient Mesoamerica is absent, he renames problematic species, explaining, "In these cases we have to find another way to read the text in order to make sense of it."[27] He does not grant the same flexibility in interpreting geography even though such latitude seems warranted by the narrative.

A corollary of this interpretive rigidity is inconsistent attention to details about travel. On one hand Sorenson insists that "[t]he crucial information for determining [Book of Mormon geographical] dimensions is how long it took people to get from one place to another."[28] Yet in the sole Book of Mormon passage where specific points of departure (Jerusalem) and arrival (the Red Sea) are identifiable with any degree of certainty (1 Ne. 2:4-7), the length of the journey (three days) seems to depend on a literary motif from Exodus.[29] Given this dependence, one

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25. Smith to N. C. Saxton, 12 Feb. 1833, in ibid., 275.

26. Sorenson, 5ff.

27. Sorenson, 294. In Sorenson's opinion Book of Mormon "cows" were more likely deer, brockets, or bison; "goats" were either brockets or deer; and "horses" could have been deer, tapirs, or horses (*equus* sp.). As a result the Nephite "cow," "goat," and "horse" may all have been deer (299). William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill similarly redefine problematic Book of Mormon elements. Accordingly, they propose that since there is no conclusive evidence in ancient Mesoamerica for conventional swords, the Book of Mormon "sword" is a wooden club with obsidian protruding from the sides, called in Náhuatl *"macuahuitl"* ("Swords in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon,* 329-51; cf. Hamblin, "Sharper than a Two-edged Sword," *Sunstone* 15 [Dec. 1991]: 54-55). Such flexible interpretations suggest a lack of methodological rigor on the part of those already certain of the Book of Mormon's ancient historicity (see Matheny, "Does the Shoe Fit?" in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon;* Mark D. Thomas, "Swords into Pruning Hooks," *Sunstone* 15 [Dec. 1991]: 55).

28. Sorenson, 8.

29. Dependence of the Lehite exodus on the Bible can be illustrated this way:

1 Nephi 2:6-7	Exodus 3:18b	Exodus 5:3b	Exodus 8:27
he ... three	we ... three days'	we ... three days'	We ... three days'
days... wilder-	... wilderness ...	... desert ... sacri-	... wilderness ...
ness ... offering	sacrifice ... LORD	fice ... LORD our	sacrifice ... LORD
... Lord our God.	our God.	God ...	our God ...

wonders how Sorenson can confidently identify the lengths of other Book of Mormon migrations, which may also be motific or symbolic rather than literal, especially when points of departure and arrival are not known. In other words, the specific details of a history are at worst compromised by, and at best are always filtered through, literary forms and conventions as well as linguistic structures.

In this arena of literary analysis, chiasmus has been touted as one of the best, indeed "objective," indicators of the Book of Mormon's Hebraic roots.[30] The term "chiasmus" typically describes a literary phenomenon in which words or ideas repeat in converse order (e.g., A, B, C; c, b, a). Biblical scholars have pointed to chiastic structure in ancient Hebrew texts like Isaiah 6:10: "Make the [A] *heart* of this people fat, and make their [B] *ears* heavy, and shut their [C] *eyes*; lest they see with their [c] *eyes*, and hear with their [b] *ears*, and understand with their [a] *heart* . . ." By identifying similar parallel structures in the Book of Mormon traditionalists conceived a new apologetic. Numerous essays have been written extolling the significance of chiasmus in the Book of Mormon. It is inconceivable for some apologists that chiasms are accidental or that Joseph Smith intentionally created these patterns since they presume he was ignorant of the phenomenon. Only ancient writers, they contend, conscious of an established literary device can be responsible. As a result concentric patterns demonstrate the Book of Mormon's ancient historicity.

However, relying on chiasmus as evidence of Hebraic influence in the Book of Mormon leads to new methodological difficulties. First, "chiasms" are discernible in other revelatory texts from Joseph Smith, including those documents with no claim to antiquity (see Figures 1 and 2).

Cf. Ex. 15:22; Num. 10:33; 33:8. Reliance on the motific "three days" is further suggested by the unlikelihood of Lehi's party traveling the approximately 180-mile stretch between Jerusalem and the Gulf of Aqaba so rapidly. Evidently, "a normal days' journey in the biblical world covered between 17 and 23 miles" (Barry J. Beitzel, "Bible Lands: How to Draw Ancient Highways on Biblical Maps," *Bible Review* 4 [Oct. 1988]: 37, passim). Suggesting that the "three days" refers to an interim phase (eg., Lynn M. Hilton and Hope Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976], 18, 49) only accentuates difficulties in interpreting Book of Mormon travel durations.

30. See Daniel C. Peterson, "Editor's Introduction: By What Measure Shall We Mete?" in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Daniel C. Peterson (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1990), 2:xxiii; John W. Welch, "Criteria for Identifying the Presence of Chiasmus," *Working Paper* (WEL-89b) (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1989), 4; "A Masterpiece: Alma 36," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights You May Have Missed Before*, eds. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 131.

Figure 1.
Doctrine and Covenants 19:16-17

For behold,
   A *I*, God, have suffered these things for all,
    B that *they might not suffer*
     C *if they would repent;*
     But
     c *if they would not repent*
    b *they must suffer*
   a even as *I;* . . .

Figure 2.
Doctrine and Covenants 93:16-18

A And I, *John,*
  B bear *record*
   C that *he received a fulness*
    D of *the glory of the Father;*
    And he received all power,
     E both *in heaven*
     e and *on earth,*
    d and *the glory of the Father* was with him,
    for he dwelt in him.
   c And it shall come to pass,
   that if you are faithful *you shall receive the fulness*
  b of the *record*
a of *John.*[31]

Parallelisms described by apologists as chiasmus can also be found in the non-Hebraic portions of the Joseph Smith Revision of the Bible (JSR) and in the Book of Abraham, which Smith said derived from Egyptian papyri.[32] In view of the apparent ubiquity of chiasmus in Mormon scripture, some students have theorized that chiasmus reflects the literal vernacular of deity.[33] However, given traditionalist assump-

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31. D&C 93:16-18 is a hybrid example; note that the text *A-d* is ascribed to an ancient writer while *c-a* is an appended modern revelation to Joseph Smith and colleagues. See also D&C 29:30b-32; 76:26b-27; 88:36-38a; 88:118; 132:22-25.

32. E.g., Moses 7:48b; Abr. 3:21; see David O. Peterson, "Chiasmus, the Hebrews, and the Pearl of Great Price," *The New Era* 2 (Aug. 1972): 40-43; cf. James R. Clark, "Dear Editor: 'Chiasmus, the Hebrews, and the Pearl of Great Price,'" *The New Era* 2 (Oct. 1972): 3.

33. Charles G. Kroupa and Richard C. Shipp, *From the Mind of God* (Salt Lake City:

tions, chiasms in secular documents and in literature outside the Judeo-Christian tradition militate against this proposal.[34] Moreover selections from Joseph Smith's own secular writings also demonstrate parallel structuring (see Figure 3).

Figure 3.
Joseph Smith Diary, 1 April 1834

A the Lord shall destroy him
   B who has lifted his heel against me
   even that wicked man Docter P. Hrlbut
      Cx he <will> deliver him
         Cy to the fowls of the heaven
            and
      cX his bones shall be cast
         cY to the blast of the wind
   b <for> he lifted his <arm> against the Almity
a therefore *the Lord shall destroy him*[.][35]

Nor was Smith unique among contemporaries in composing works that exhibit concentricity.[36] Consider the reflections of fourth LDS church president John Taylor (see Figure 4).

Shipp Bros. Printing, 1972); Richard C. Shipp, "Conceptual Patterns of Repetition in the Doctrine and Covenants and Their Implications," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975; cf. Wade Brown, *The God-Inspired Language of the Book of Mormon: Structuring and Commentary* (Clackmas, OR: Rainbow Press, 1988).

34. E.g., Bezalel Porten, "Structure and Chiasm in Aramaic Contracts and Letters," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structure, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildersheim: Gerstenberg, 1981), 169-82; Robert F. Smith, "Chiasm in Sumero-Akkadian," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 17-35; John W. Welch, "Chiasmus in Ugaritic," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 36-49; "Chiasmus in Ancient Greek and Latin Literatures," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 198-210.

35. See Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1989), 25; Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 32, 57. Some may view Smith's curse as inspired—a theological dilemma since it failed. If one argues that Smith learned chiasmus by dictating the Book of Mormon it is just as easy to theorize that Smith acquired the pattern through his youthful exposure to the KJV Bible.

36. Modern enthusiasm for chiasmus is evident. LDS official John K. Carmack consciously structured a sampling of some of the favorite themes of a deceased Mormon apostle chiastically (Carmack, "The Testament of Bruce R. McConkie," in *Brigham Young University 1984-85 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* [Provo, UT: University Publications, 1985], 112-13), and contemporary Mormon poet, Carol Lynn Pearson, composed a psalm to the Mother God in chiasm (Pearson, "Chiasm to God the Mother," *Sunstone* 15 [Sept. 1991]: 19).

Figure 4.
John Taylor

A And He in ***His own person***
  B *bore the sins of all,*
    C and ***atoned*** for them
      D by the ***sacrifice*** of Himself,
        E so there came upon Him the weight and ***agony***
        F of ***ages***
        f and ***generations***,
        e the indescribable ***agony*** consequent upon
      d this great ***sacrificial***
    c ***atonement***
  b wherein He ***bore the sins of the world,***
a and suffered in ***His own person*** the consequences of an eternal
law of God broken by man.[37]

Such examples undermine chiasmus as evidence of antiquity or Hebraism in the Book of Mormon. Furthermore, they complicate the related claim that parallelism (or chiasmus) is a sign of conscious intentionality rather than accident. As evidence FARMS founder John W. Welch points to Mosiah 5:10-12. According to Welch, these three verses form a chiasm[38] within a chiasm (Mosiah 2:9-5:15)[39] within a chiasm (Mosiah 1:1-29:32).[40] Welch identifies this as the first Book of Mormon chiasm he discovered,[41] deeming it and its oratory context "a masterpiece of religious literature"[42] that "strains reason to imagine . . . occurred accidentally."[43]

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37. John Taylor, *An Examination into and an Elucidation of the Great Principle of the Mediation and the Atonement of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, Printers and Publishers, 1882), 149-50.

38. "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 205.

39. Ibid., 202-203.

40. Welch, "A Study Relating Chiasmus in the *Book of Mormon* to Chiasmus in the *Old Testament*, Ugaritic Epics, Homer, and Selected Greek and Latin Authors," M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1970, 150-51, 170.

41. "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon—Annotated Transcript of CHI-V," *Study Aid* (CHI-VA) (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 5-6.

42. "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon, or, the Book of Mormon Does it Again," *The New Era* 2 (Feb. 1972): 8.

43. "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 205. Welch doubts this chiasm was an accident, finding the alternative more probable: Mosiah 5:10-12 reports the authentic words of an elderly Hebrew monarch who led a thriving community of Christian Jews in the Americas approximately 130 years prior to the advent of Jesus. By logical extension Welch's conclusion also presupposes the transmission of the Book of

More conservative analysis tempers these conclusions. Such claims, for instance, do not take into account the extent to which interpreter ingenuity may be implicated in what is "objectively" present in the text. Unnoticed in Mosiah 5:9-12 is a second concentric structure in verses 9-10 which asymmetrically overlaps the chiasm in verses 10-12 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5.
Mosiah 5:9-10

And it shall come to pass
 '*A* that whosoever doeth this shall be found at the *right hand of God,*
  '*B* for he shall know the *name* by which he is *called;*
   '*C* for he shall be *called by the name of Christ.*
   And now it shall come to pass,
   '*c* that whosoever shall not *take upon* him *the name of Christ*
  '*b* must be *called* by some other *name;*
 '*a* therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God.*

Mosiah 5:10-12

A And now it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall not take upon him the *name of Christ*
 B must be *called* by some other name;
  C therefore, he findeth himself on the *left hand of God.*
   D And I would that ye should *remember* also, that this name
    E that I said I should give unto you that never should be *blotted out,*
     F except it be through *transgression;*
     f therefore, take heed that ye do not *transgress,*
    e that the name be not *blotted out* of your hearts.
   d I say unto you, I would that ye should *remember* to retain the name written always in your hearts,
  c that ye are not found on the *left hand of God,*
 b but that ye hear and know the voice by which ye shall be *called,*
a and also, the *name* by which he shall call you.

Clearly the chiasm in verses 9-10 is the tighter of the two. In any case,

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Mormon through a lineage of ecclesiastical leaders, eventually delivered by an angel to a young prophet who with the aid of stone(s) placed in his hat was able to read the unknown language. Intentionality may be weakened for some interpreters when seen in terms of the additional historical assumptions Welch's thesis presupposes.

it seems premature to conclude that verses 10-12 contain "six perfectly matched elements" in which "every word or phrase figures precisely into the pattern."[44]

Other explanations besides Welch's, which depends on antiquity and intention, can account for the parallelisms in Book of Mormon passages—and in contemporary documents by Joseph Smith and his colleagues. Perhaps both Mosiah 5:9-10 and 5:10-12 illustrate lexical and ideational redundancy mingled with the author's intention merely to juxtapose those who are accepted of God with those who are not. Organizing these ideas into chiasms may be the result of subsequent interpreters rather than the intention of the original author. Appeal to chiasmus began as an innovative apologetic for Book of Mormon antiquity, but under critical scrutiny it is less persuasive.[45]

Some proponents of chiasmus have asserted that entire books, includ-

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44. Welch, "Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon—Annotated Transcript," 6. Abandoning symmetry by structuring both chiasms in an interweaving pattern (i.e., 'A, C, c; 'B, B, b; 'C, A, a; D, d; E, e; F, f) does not bolster Welch's speculation that the chiasm was premeditated when an alleged key word like "called" can mean *designated* ('B, 'C, 'b, B) or *summoned* (b, a), and when a clearly parallels 'B and B more than 'C and A. The key word "Christ" is also problematic if it is maintained that the passage derives from a Hebrew or Egyptian original (on the anachronism "Christ," see Edward H. Ashment "'A Record in the Language of My Father': Evidence of Ancient Egyptian and Hebrew in the Book of Mormon," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 346; Melodie Moench Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 86; Metcalfe, "The Priority of Mosiah," 427-33).

Indeed, the entire key phrase "take upon the name of Christ"—not found in the KJV and based on dubious translations of the Greek New Testament—was contested by early nineteenth-century religionists (Mark D. Thomas, "Scholarship and the Book of Mormon," in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture*, ed. Dan Vogel [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990], 73). Christian Primitivists applied the expression polemically, insisting that true disciples of Christ must relinquish titles such as Baptist, Lutheran, and Methodist and assume the name "Christian" (e.g., "We took upon us the name of CHRISTIANS singly and alone in contradiction to all other sectarian names, because we thought it was removing one great bar to the union of all Christ's followers" [*Gospel Luminary* 1 (Oct. 1825): 220; see also 3 (May 1827): 115-16; Elias Smith, *The Life, Conversion, Preaching, Travels, and Sufferings of Elias Smith* [Portsmouth, NH: Beck and Foster, 1816], 298, 343, 355, 380, 386; for an early rebuttal to this argument, see *The Methodist Magazine* (Feb. 1800), 82-83]; cf. "true believers in Christ took upon them, gladly, the name of Christ, or Christians as they were called" [Alma 46:15; see also vv. 18, 21; 3 Ne. 27:2-8]). Unitarians concocted a variant translation of 1 Corinthians 1:2b, *"take upon themselves the name of our Lord Jesus"* as an anti-Trinitarian refutation (Andrews Norton, *A Statement of Reasons for not Believing the Doctrine of the Trinitarians Respecting the Nature of God, and the Person of Christ* [Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1819], 50[-51]). See also Thomas, "A Rhetorical Approach to the Book of Mormon: Rediscovering Nephite Sacramental Language," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 74.

45. See also Brent Lee Metcalfe, "A Critique of Chiasmus as Evidence of Ancient Semitic Origins," delivered at the 1988 Sunstone Symposium.

ing 1 Nephi[46] and Mosiah,[47] can be structured chiastically. These claims broach the relationship between the historicity of narrative history and the literary forms in which it is structured.[48] I have already touched on a version of this in arguments about geography which depend on literal readings of time spent on journeys. What if the author of 1 Nephi used a literary motif (a parallel with the journey of Moses in Exodus, for example) to determine the length spent journeying (three days) rather than a literal description of geographic terrain?

In the case of claims about chiastic structuring of entire books, we must ask if the historical sequence of events produced the chiasm or if the chiasm arranged the historical episodes. Because Book of Mormon apologists say that chiasmus is an intentional literary device,[49] they must conclude that chiasmus can arrange historical episodes. At a minimum this means that some historical details of the Lehite story may not have occurred in the order presented in the narrative. Apologists must also allow for the possibility that some historical incidents never actually happened but were fictions imposed on the text to complete a chiastic structure designed to convey a moralistic or theological teaching.[50] Within this apologetic, the

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46. Noel B. Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," in *Book of Mormon Authorship*.

47. Welch, "A Study Relating Chiasmus," 150-51, 170.

48. Recent literary theory focuses on the complex and attenuated relation between language and the "real" world. Useful introductions to the theoretical problems include: Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953); James Clifford and George E. Marcus, eds., *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1982); Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart, *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contexts* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1981); Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967); Wallace Martin, *Recent Theories of Narrative* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986); W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *On Narrative* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); Elaine Showalter, ed., *The New Feminist Criticism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1973); *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1978); *The Content of Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University, 1987). On the application of narrative theory in biblical exegesis, see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981); and Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

49. E.g., Reynolds, "Nephi's Outline," 57, 63, 65-67; Welch "Criteria for Identifying the Presence of Chiasmus," 8-12; "A Masterpiece," 130.

50. Similar problems of establishing historicity exist with other apologetics involving throne-theophany, treaty-covenant, and other hypothetical literary forms (Blake T. Ostler,

antiquity of Lehi and other Book of Mormon characters may be asserted but the historicity of their actions is open to question.

Attention to other literary forms and structures can be similarly problematic. One striking literary phenomenon in the Book of Mormon is the instance of narratives which mirror each other.[51] As a case study we can distinguish twelve parallels between the stories of the Nephite king Noah and the Jaredite king Riplakish:

1. Zeniff and Shez were both righteous kings succeeded by their sons Noah and Riplakish (Mosiah 11:1; Ether 10:4).
2. Unlike their fathers, Noah "did not keep the commandments of God" and Riplakish "did not do that which was right in the sight of the Lord" (Mosiah 11:2a; Ether 10:5a).
3. Noah and Riplakish each had "many wives and concubines" (Mosiah 11:2b; Ether 10:5b).
4. Noah compelled his subjects to "do that which was abominable . . . and they did commit whoredoms," while Riplakish "did afflict the people with his whoredoms and abominations" (Mosiah 11:2c; Ether 10:7b).
5. By edict, Noah's and Riplakish's people were laden with oppressive taxes (Mosiah 11:3; Ether 10:5c).

"The Throne-Theophany and Prophetic Commission in 1 Nephi: A Form-Critical Analysis," *Brigham Young University Studies* 26 [Fall 1986]: 67-95; Stephen D. Ricks, "The Treaty/Covenant Pattern in King Benjamin's Address (Mosiah 1-6)," *Brigham Young University Studies* 24 [Spring 1984]: 151-62; "King, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1-6," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 209-19).

51. B. H. Roberts's contention that storyline repetitions may simply be evidence of Joseph Smith's "amateurishness" (Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Brigham D. Madsen [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985; Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992], 271) is too simplistic. The Book of Mormon and other Mormon scriptures espouse a radically cyclical view of history in which clandestine brotherhoods, theology, heresy, conversion, apostasy, ritual, socio-economics, politics, and so on are repeating facets of human existence. From this perspective the Book of Mormon accommodates nineteenth-century theology *precisely* because antebellum thought is seen as a reverberation of former ideas revealed by God, the devil, or humankind (e.g., 2 Ne. 29:8-9; Hel. 6:21, 26-30; Alma 1:7-22). Character identities change but actions and beliefs reemerge throughout history (cf. Ammon's preaching and Lamoni's subsequent conversion in Alma 18-19 with the parallel narrative of Aaron's evangelism and conversion of Lamoni's father in Alma 21-22; Roberts [251-83] catalogued several parallel Book of Mormon stories).

Susan Taber's ("Mormon's Literary Technique," in *Mormon Letters Annual: 1983* [Salt Lake City: Association of Mormon Letters, 1984], 117-25) suggestion that parallel narratives indicate a single author's—Mormon's—"literary technique" is also insufficient given the fact that according to the Book of Mormon, the Noah and Riplakish stories (discussed below) were the products of father and son redactors Mormon and Moroni. On the other hand Taber's thesis may be viable if the single author is Joseph Smith.

6. Noah and Riplakish each erected "spacious buildings" with the money secured from taxation (Mosiah 11:[4-]8; Ether 10:5d).

7. Both kings built opulent thrones (Mosiah 11:9; Ether 10:6a).

8. Noah's workers crafted "all manner of fine work," while Riplakish's prison workers produced "all manner of fine workmanship" (Mosiah 11:10; Ether 10:7a).

9. Under both rulers dissidents were incarcerated or killed (Mosiah 12:17; 17:11-20; 18:35; Ether 10:6b).

10. Due to internal revolt, Noah and Riplakish were executed (Mosiah 19:20; Ether 10:8a).

11. Noah's priests and Riplakish's descendants were exiled (Mosiah 19:21, 23; Ether 10:8b).

12. Following the subsequent political discord, Limhi (a son of Noah) and Morianton (a descendant/son of Riplakish) reigned over the kingdoms (Mosiah 19:26; Ether 10:9).

Some of these parallels are unique to these kings. Although the Book of Mormon refers generally to taxation (Mosiah 2:14; 7:15) and polygamy (Jacob 1:15; 2:23-35; 3:5-10; Mosiah 11:4b), Noah and Riplakish are the only monarchs identified as polygamists and taxers, and they alone construct "spacious buildings." Ten of the twelve comparisons also follow the same sequence. The two narratives share common phrases such as "many wives and concubines," "spacious buildings," and "all manner of fine work[manship]." And while the details of Noah's life cover five chapters in Mosiah, Riplakish's biography comprises six verses in Ether. Everything we know about the Jaredite ruler bears an analogue to the corrupt Nephite king.[52] These mirrorings suggest that one narrative may depend on the other, and that only one, or perhaps neither, represents a factual account of historical events.

Some Book of Mormon students have implied that we may be dealing with a wicked-king literary formula.[53] Yet other decadent kings in the book do not follow this pattern with any precision. One also wonders what is inherently evil about laborers producing "all manner of fine work[manship]" (Mosiah 11:10; Ether 10:7a). Still, allowing for a literary device, questions regarding historicity remain since it is possible that Noah and

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52. Noah and Riplakish also share biblical motifs. Polygamists and tyrants who instigate religious dereliction is a familiar theme in the Hebrew scriptures (e.g., 1 Kgs. 11:4-6; 14:16; 15:25-26; 16:1-2). Like his diluvian namesake, Nephite king Noah was a wine-bibber (Mosiah 11:15; Gen. 9:20-21).

53. *Book of Mormon (Religion 121-122) Student Manual*, prepared by the Church Educational System (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 496; *Book of Mormon Student Manual (Religion 121 and 122)*, prepared by the Church Educational System (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1989), 141.

Riplakish were actually monogamists but were portrayed as polygamists to accentuate their debauchery. If Noah and Riplakish existed anciently, the historicity of every detail of their biographical sketches is nonetheless uncertain.

It is as risky for apologists to stake claims of Book of Mormon historicity on evidence from literary studies as it is on evidence from theories of geography. In fact, emphasis on literary phenomena may be even more precarious, since careful attention to literary features underscores the complicated relation between language and reality. Even if one could plausibly argue for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon within this context, the historicity of every Book of Mormon person and event would be suspect. Apologists must delineate why sacred fiction has greater religious merit when written by ancient prophets than a nineteenth-century prophet.

APOLOGETIC-CRITICAL RECONCILIATION

An innovative, traditionalist bid to solve such methodological problems has been tendered by Blake T. Ostler.[54] Attempting to reconcile apologetic and critical assumptions, Ostler argues that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Semitic document which has been "expanded" with nineteenth-century elements. The appeal of this theory is that it allows one to believe, for example, that Book of Mormon accounts of robbers resemble reports of early nineteenth-century political insurgencies because the scriptural narrative was imbued with the anti-Masonic rhetoric permeating Joseph Smith's culture.[55] Thus it is possible to account for nineteenth-century elements in the Book of Mormon while preserving the integrity of the book's core antiquity.[56] Despite its apologetic nuances, Ostler's so-called

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54. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion of an Ancient Source."

55. E.g., "craft" in Hel. 2:4; "secret combinations" in 3:23, etc.; see Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion," 73-76.

56. Ostler's theory is a logical extension of Hugh Nibley's concept of "prophet's prerogative," the idea that "any prophet is free to contribute anything to the written record that will make that message clear and intelligible" (Nibley, *Since Cumorah*, 132-33). On the composition of the JSR, Robert J. Matthews theorized in 1975 that "[p]ortions may consist of inspired commentary by the Prophet Joseph Smith, enlarged, elaborated, and even adapted to a latter-day situation" (Matthews, "A Plainer Translation": Joseph Smith's *Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* [Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1975], 253). Victor L. Ludlow concurs ("The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible: A Panel," moderated by C. Wilfred Griggs, in *Scriptures for the Modern World*, eds. Paul R. Cheesman and C. Wilfred Griggs [Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1984], 79). Inexplicably, Robert L. Millet accepts Matthews's theory when applied to the JSR but rejects it when Ostler relates it to the Book of Mormon ("Joseph Smith's Translation," 43-44; cf. "Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism: Orthodoxy, Neo-orthodoxy, Tension, and Tradition," *Brigham Young University Studies* 29 [Summer

expansionist theory has been criticized by both traditionalists[57] and antagonists,[58] who judge that it goes too far or not far enough in its deductions.[59]

Expansionism does leave perplexing historical and theological questions unanswered. A central premise of the theory is that the Book of Mormon is a literary hybrid containing both nineteenth-century and ancient elements. .The process of distinguishing ancient from modern can result in methodological inconsistency. Ostler acknowledges that themes such as anti-Masonry or the idea of an Infinite Atonement were popular notions among Joseph Smith's contemporaries and are modern interpolations in the Book of Mormon text.[60] But equally popular among Smith's contemporaries was the belief, which the Book of Mormon shares, that ancient Israelites civilized parts if not all of the Western Hemisphere[61]—a conjecture that enjoys no reliable archaeological support today.[62] To be

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1989]: 51ff).

An emerging neo-traditionalist rationalization for nineteenth-century theology in the Book of Mormon is the proposal that Nephites espoused similar or identical theology adhered to by Joseph Smith's Protestant contemporaries (Thomas G. Alexander, "Afterwords[: A Reply to Robert L. Millet's 'Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism']," *Brigham Young University Studies* 29 [Fall 1989]: 143-44). This does not explain, however, why God would reveal doctrines to Nephites and then again to Smith while translating (e.g., trinitarianism) only to have them supplanted by Smith's later Nauvoo doctrinal explications (e.g., tritheism; see Thomas G. Alexander, "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine," in *Line Upon Line: Essays on Mormon Doctrine*, ed. Gary James Bergera [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989], 54ff).

57. Millet, "Joseph Smith and Modern Mormonism," 51ff; Stephen E. Robinson, "The 'Expanded' Book of Mormon?" in *The Book of Mormon: Second Nephi, the Doctrinal Structure*, eds. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1989), 391-414 (cf. Ostler, "Criticisms of the Expansion Theory of the Book of Mormon From the Scriptural Fundamentalist's Perspective," privately circulated, 1988).

58. Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, "Mormonism and Plagiarism," *Salt Lake City Messenger* 63 (May 1987): 5-10.

59. More recently Ostler has aligned himself with apologists by condemning scholars who suggest Joseph Smith was the author of the Book of Mormon even though Ostler himself previously argued that pivotal concepts—such as the christological purpose of the book (Title Page)—originated with Smith (Ostler, "The Covenant Tradition in the Book of Mormon," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, 239-40; cf. "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion," 82ff, 112).

60. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion," 73-76, 82.

61. See Lynn Glaser, *Indians or Jews?* (Gilroy, CA: Roy V. Boswell, 1973); Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986).

62. E.g., Michael Coe, Dean Snow, and Elizabeth Benson, *Atlas of Ancient America* (New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1986), 24-25; Stuart J. Fiedel, *Prehistory of the Americas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 2-4.

methodologically consistent, expansionists must conclude that the Book of Mormon's self-claimed Hebraic origin is as anachronistic as other nineteenth-century elements, such as anti-Masonry or an Infinite Atonement.

The problem is that this nineteenth-century belief of native American origins serves as the expansionist's justification for appealing to ancient Near Eastern sources in sustaining the claim that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Hebraic document. In fact, all of Ostler's subsequent arguments for antiquity depend on his conviction that Jews anciently resided in the Americas. If expansionists await archaeological verification,[63] their method argues as much from silence as does that espoused by traditionalists who anticipate vindication or accept on faith that Book of Mormon christology, soteriology, and theology were tenets of ancient Israelite religion.[64] With expansionism—as with traditional approaches—the Book of Mormon is evidence of its own antiquity in lieu of supporting empirical data that ancient Hebrews occupied pre-Columbian America—a circularity of reasoning at best.

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of the expansionist theory is its concept of revelation. On the one hand, it presumes that God propositionally revealed and that Joseph Smith received factual information about ancient ritual, legal, and visionary forms, including authentic Semitic names and word patterns.[65] Regarding the nature of God, however, expansionism infers that instead of communicating a Nephite concept or correcting pre-1830 theology, God permitted Joseph Smith to embellish the Book of Mormon text with Smith's own ideas about deity, ideas which would eventually be superseded or at least modified by later doctrinal developments.[66] Ultimately God is more concerned with accurately revealing literary and cultural traits than with disclosing a truthful representation of himself. This revelatory dynamic between God and Joseph Smith seems less than adequate to account for a book whose expressed goal is persuading "Jew and Gentile that JESUS is the CHRIST, the ETERNAL GOD" (Title Page), a concept Ostler dates to the nineteenth century and has since become antiquated in contemporary Mormon doctrine.[67]

Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles, whom Ostler cites with approval,[68]

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63. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion," 101-102.

64. Cf. Joseph Fielding McConkie, "Modern Revelation: A Window to the Past," in *"To be Learned is Good if . . ."*, 126, and passim.

65. Ostler, "The Book of Mormon as an Expansion," 87-101; elsewhere Ostler repudiates the notion of propositional revelation despite its being an integral characteristic of expansionism, see p. 108.

66. Ibid., 112, cf. 79-87.

67. Ibid., 82ff, 112.

68. Ibid., 108.

cautions that it "would be superficial and irresponsible" to postulate a theology of revelation that "use[s] one model [of revelation] in dealing with one problem, other models for other problems."[69] Yet it is precisely this theological fallacy that expansionism presumes when it suggests that God revealed propositionally to Smith in some cases but differently in others. Because of these deficits, expansionism will likely serve as a theological way-station between traditionalist and critical schools rather than the final intellectual depot.

AUTHORITY AND CRITICAL ASSUMPTIONS

As I have noted, traditionalist approaches to the Book of Mormon focus on ancient historical claims. Much is made by advocates of the book's antiquity about "what it claims to be."[70] Their concern is that because the Book of Mormon claims to be an inspired ancient record, the book's self-disclosures of antiquity should be given priority. This claim becomes the source of meaning and authority for the text and as a result is made the guiding investigative hypothesis. Scholarship becomes a matter of establishing historical plausibility for the claim.

Critical scholars shift the terms of investigation, finding ultimate authority not so much in claims made by and for scripture—despite the sincerity of these claims—but in the overall phenomena of the text in its broad historical and literary framework. This nontraditional view of authority requires that claims be assessed in the context of the narrative and in the historical setting within which readers first encountered the text.[71]

Sincerity is no reliable index of reality or truth.[72] Early Mormon apostle

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69. Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1983), 125.

70. Louis Midgley, "Revisionist Pride," Sunstone 15 (Sept. 1991): 5; Nibley, *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 56; Peterson, "Editor's Introduction," xxv, cf. xx; Ricks, Review of *Lehi in the Desert*, 129, cf. 135, 138; Welch, "Why Study Warfare," 19.

71. The concept of biblical authority has fostered considerable discussion among Bible scholars. See James Barr, *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980); Dewey M. Beegle, *Scripture, Tradition, and Infallibility* (Ann Arbor, MI: Pryor Penttengill, Publishers, 1979); D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge, *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986); Robert Gnuse, *The Authority of the Bible: Theories of Inspiration, Revelation, and the Canon of Scripture* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985).

72. Cf. Stephen D. Ricks, "Response to Edward Ashment, 'Canon and the Historian,'" delivered at the 1991 Mormon History Association meeting. Ricks states his position thus: "I am, for instance, convinced that George Q. Cannon was an honest man. When he claims to have seen Christ, I see no reason to doubt him. When Lorenzo Snow, a similarly honest man, claims to have seen Christ, I see no reason to doubt him, either. And if they saw Christ,

Parley P. Pratt may have been sincere when he declared in 1838, "I will state as a prophesy, that there will not be an unbelieving Gentile upon this continent 50 years hence; and if they are not greatly scourged, and in a great measure overthrown, within five or ten years from this date, then the Book of Mormon will have proved itself false."[73] But his sincerity does not alter the fact that his prophecy was not fulfilled. Certainly the failure of prophecy does not annul a prophet's religious import, but it does caution us against assuming that a perception of prophetic experience is infallible just because a prophet is sincere.

Moving to the context of religious experience allows us to briefly consider claims about Book of Mormon gold plates made by the three witnesses Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, and Martin Harris. Because they experienced the plates in a religiously ecstatic context, the experience is best approached from within a visionary tradition.[74] Such a testimonial vision from God is not designed to address the empirical world of its human participants and cannot lend itself to historical-critical assessment. However, each witness had subsequent experiences which occasionally intruded on history or challenged theological assumptions and world views

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then why not Joseph Smith?" (3). Aside from Ricks's circularity, this is question begging of the worst kind.

73. Parley P. Pratt, *Mormonism Unveiled: Zion's Watchman Unmasked, and its Editor Mr. L. R. Sunderland Exposed: Truth Vindicated: The Devil Mad, and Priestcraft in Danger!* (New York: O. Pratt and E. Fordham, 1838), 15.

74. Specific conditions had to be met, according to Smith's revelations, before anyone could see the gold plates:

1. The plates could only be revealed to witnesses God chose (D&C 5:3a, 11);
2. God's directive alone enabled a mortal agent to manifest the existence of the plates (v. 3b);
3. witnesses had to be accorded divine power to see the plates (v. 13; 17:5); and
4. viewing the plates depended on one's faith (17:2).

If these criteria were not met, the plates would not be visible. This is evident in Smith's remark that when praying with Martin Harris "the same vision [of the angel and gold plates] was opened to our view—*at least it was, again to me,*" implying that Harris was present but may not have shared Smith's experience (Dean C. Jessee, ed., *The Papers of Joseph Smith: Volume 1, Autobiographical and Historical Writings* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989), 237, emphasis added; see also Joseph Smith, Jr., et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* 7 vols. [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978], 1:55 [hereafter HC]). Unlike the secrecy cloaking the gold plates, Smith openly displayed the Book of Abraham papyri and the Kinderhook plates (e.g., Josiah Quincy on the Egyptian papyri, in William Mulder and A. Russell Mortensen, eds., *Among the Mormons: Historic Accounts by Contemporary Observers* [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1958], 136-37; William Clayton on the plates from Kinderhook, Illinois, in George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books in association with Smith Research Associates, 1991], 100).

of later interpreters and as such are more amenable to historical-critical inquiry.

For instance, while transcribing early Mormon blessings in September 1835,[75] Oliver Cowdery was enraptured in a vision of the future life of Joseph Smith. Cowdery claimed he recorded the experience "while in the heavenly vision" and admonished readers, "let no one doubt of their correctness and truth, for they will verily be fulfilled."[76] The vision, written in the form of a blessing, detailed Smith's future achievements and renown. At the culmination of the vision, Cowdery witnessed that Smith "shall remain to a good old age, even till his head is like the pure wool,"[77] a prophecy that failed with Smith's martyrdom at age thirty-eight.

David Whitmer consistently related that he had seen an angel holding the gold plates. But in an impassioned recollection, he also told how God instructed him to leave the Latter-day Saint movement. "If you believe my testimony to the Book of Mormon," he implored, "if you believe that God spake to us three witnesses by his own voice, then I tell you that in June, 1838, God spake to me again by his own voice from the heavens and told me to 'separate myself from among the Latter Day Saints, for as they sought to do unto me, so should it be done unto them.'"[78] In also denouncing the RLDS church, Whitmer was no less vehement: "God commanded me by his voice to stand apart from you."[79] Contemporary Mormons are left to confront Whitmer's challenge: believe that God confirmed the Book of

75. See Faulring, 33; Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 58.

76. Fred C. Collier, comp., *Unpublished Revelations of the Prophets and Presidents of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Collier's Publishing Company, 1979), 75. Cowdery initially recorded the vision on the evening of 22 September 1835, copying it into volume 1 of the blessings book on 3 October 1835. Although Cowdery clearly anticipated future readers (e.g., "The reader will remember" [ibid., 74]) and several blessings have been published with church sanction (e.g., Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 21-25, 62, 99-101, 152-54, 530-37), the original of this source for understanding early Mormonism remains closed to researchers in the LDS historical archives.

77. Collier, 77.

78. David Whitmer, *An Address to all Believers in Christ, by a Witness to the Divine Authenticity of the Book of Mormon* (Richmond, MO: David Whitmer, 1887), 27. BYU religion professor Richard L. Anderson (*Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981], 164) contends that this is the only occasion in which Whitmer describes renouncing Mormonism under an audible mandate from God. While Whitmer may have failed to explicitly mention a divine "voice" in other reports, he did echo his earlier statement that God had spoken to him when he told Zenas H. Gurley in 1885, "I left because <I> could not accept it, being led out by the outstretched arm of God—promised life and blessing, and that my opponents would suffer that which they had tried to bring upon me" (Gurley, "Questions asked of David Whitmer at his home in Richmond Ray County Mo - Jan 14 - 1885," 1885, 1-1 verso, LDS archives; portions of this interview are cited in *Autumn Leaves* 5 [1892]: 453).

79. *An Address*, 28.

Mormon translation and later instructed him to repudiate Mormonism or reject his testimony *in toto*. For Whitmer there was no distinction between the two experiences.

In July 1875, shortly before his death in Clarkston, Utah, Martin Harris attested that he had indeed seen an angel turning the "golden leaves." Ninety-one-year-old Harris then added:

> I will tell you a wonderful thing that happened after Joseph had found the plates. Three of us took some tools to go to the hills and hunt for some more boxes of gold or something, and indeed we found a stone box. We got quite excited about it and dug quite carefully around it, and we were ready to take it up, but behold by some unseen power it slipped back into the hill. We stood there and looked at it, and one of us took a crow bar and tried to drive it through the lid to hold it, but it glanced and broke one corner off the box. Some time that box will be found, and then you will know I have told the truth.[80]

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80. Ole A. Jensen, "Testimony of Martin Harris, a Witness of the Book of Mormon," 1875, LDS archives; cf. Lettie D. Campbell, "Testimony As to the Divinity of the Book of Mormon," 1918, LDS archives; Comfort Elizabeth Godfrey Flinders, "Testimony of Martin Harris a Witness of the Book of Mormon," 8 May 1939, in *Utah Pioneer Biographies* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society, 1946), 10:63-66; George Godfrey, "Testimony given to Ole A. Jensen by Martin Harris, a Witness of the Book of Mormon. Given at Clarkston July 1875," n.d., LDS archives. At a stake conference on 17 June 1877, Brigham Young told the Saints a "story which will be marvelous to most of you." As related to him by Orrin Porter Rockwell, the narrative covers similar details to those mentioned by Harris: "Porter was with them one night where there were treasures, and they could find them easy enough, but they could not obtain them. . . . He said that on this night, when they were engaged hunting for this old treasure, they dug around the end of a chest. . . . One man who was determined to have the contents of the chest, took his pick and struck into the lid of it, and split through into the chest. The blow took off a piece of the lid, which a certain lady kept in her possession until she died. That chest went into the bank. Porter describes it so (making a rumbling sound); he says this is just as true as the heavens are" (*Journal of Discourses*, 19:37, parentheses originally brackets).

For Young the story was evidence of angels hurling treasures through the earth (see ibid., 36-39). According to other sources the woman who retained possession of the broken piece of lid was Lucy Mack Smith (William Blood, "A Life Sketch of William Blood," n.d., 65, LDS archives; Ivy Hooper Blood Hill, *William Blood: His Posterity and Biographies of their Progenitors* [Logan, UT: J. P. Smith and Son, 1962], 48; cf. "Journal of President B. Young's Office Great Salt Lake City Book D," 1858-63, 21 Nov. 1861, LDS archives). Echoing Harris's and Young's stories, early Smith neighbor Joshua Stafford recalled that "Joseph [Smith] once showed [him] a piece of wood which he said he took from a box of money, and the reason he gave for not obtaining the box, was, that it moved" (Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed: Or, a Faithful Account of that Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time* [Painesville, OH: Eber D. Howe, 1834], 258). It is difficult to resist inferring that Stafford, Young, and Harris are relating the same episode (D. Michael Quinn, *Early Mormonism and the Magic World View* [Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1987], 48-49), but there are differences. Harris's box was stone while Smith's was wood, and according to one source Rockwell's diggings were in Ohio not New York (Blood, 65; I. Hill, 48). Perhaps the

Harris testified of treasure that "slipped" from his grasp "by some unseen power" as having literally occurred.[81] Arguably the most colorful Book of Mormon witness, Harris emerges from available documents as an impetuous New York farmer who found as much sanctity in money digging and enchanted treasures as in his encounter with an angel and gold plates.[82]

Cowdery's vision of Joseph Smith's life, Whitmer's testimonies of the Book of Mormon and his departure from Mormonism, and Harris's belief in treasure digging cause us to wonder what objective reality meant for them and if this meaning has any application or relevance to readers today. We must do more than ask if these and other witnesses were convinced the gold plates were "real"; we must delve into additional otherworldly phenomena they said were "real." We need to place their vision of an angel and gold plates in a broader framework.

If it is important to provide such a framework for traditional claims about the Book of Mormon, it is equally valuable to consider a broader framework for claims made by the book itself. One crucial context is provided by Joseph Smith's emendations of the Bible. Some of Smith's most sig-

accounts merely indicate the commonality of this type of experience among Mormonism's founders. W. W. Phelps alluded to Harris's participation in Smith's excavations (Phelps to Eber D. Howe, 15 Jan. 1831, in Howe, 273). The notion of slippery treasures is not limited to Mormon money diggers. In the *Wayne Sentinel*, 16 Feb. 1825, treasure seekers reportedly "Put upon a chest of gold/ And heard it chink with pleasure,/ Then all prepared, *just taking hold*,/ To raise the shinning treasure." When a member of the expedition abruptly spoke up, "the chest move[d] off through the mud, and has not been seen or heard of since."

81. Nephites were also impeded in their quest for treasure because the hidden wealth was "slippery" (Hel. 13:31-34, 36; Morm. 1:18) and had "slipped away" (Hel. 13:35) due to divine malediction. Non-Mormon novelist Daniel P. Thompson also employed the term "slippery" in describing elusive supernatural treasure (*May Martin: Or the Money Diggers* [Montpelier, VT: E. P. Walton and Son, 1835], 98).

82. See Anderson, 95-120; Rhett Stephen James, *The Man Who Knew: Dramatic Biography on Martin Harris* (Cache Valley, UT: Martin Harris Pageant Committee, 1983), passim; Quinn, "Early Mormonism," 35, 38, 47-49, 115-16, 120-23, 193-95, 210; Ron Walker, "Martin Harris: Mormonism's Early Convert," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 19 (Winter 1986): 29-43. For early non-Mormon depictions of Harris, see John A. Clark, *Gleanings by the Way* (Philadelphia: W. J. and J. K. Simon, 1842), 222ff; Joel Tiffany, "Mormonism," *Tiffany's Monthly* 5 (1859): 46-51, 119-121, 163-170. Manchester, New York, resident Wallace Miner recalled a boyhood incident with Harris echoing this magic world view. "Martin Harris stayed at this home when I was about 13 yrs of age," Miner reminisced, "I used to go over to the diggings[—remains from Joseph Smith's treasure seeking—]about 100 rods or a little less S. E. of this house. It is near a clump of bushes. Martin Harris regarded it as fully as sacred as the Mormon Hill diggings" (in M. Wilford Poulson, "Notebook Containing Statements Made by Residents of Palmyra, N.Y., Manchester, N.Y., and Other Areas, and Notes and Excerpts from Periodicals, Books, and Other Sources Pertaining to Joseph Smith, Other Mormon Church Leaders or Mormon Church History and Doctrine," ca. 1932. M. Wilford Poulson Collection, Archives and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah).

nificant emendations challenge the assumption that a text's antiquity is ensured simply because Smith ascribed certain concepts to ancient individuals.

Smith periodically incorporated revisions into the Bible he later discarded because the King James Version (KJV) better articulated his Nauvoo, Illinois, theology. For example, the KJV renders Hebrews 11:40, "God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect." Smith altered this to read: "God having provided some better things *for them through their sufferings, for* without *sufferings they could* not be made perfect." Later, however, when he enunciated a doctrine of vicarious baptism for the dead, he reverted to the KJV as a prooftext. Salvation of the dead, he insisted, "is necessary and essential to our salvation, as Paul says concerning the fathers—that they without us cannot be made perfect [KJV Heb. 11:40]—neither can we without our dead be made perfect" (D&C 128:15).[83] Smith here specifically ascribed authorship of the KJV rendition to Paul, yet the JSR had suggested otherwise. Smith abandoned his JSR emendation that the *living faithful* are purified by suffering in favor of the KJV as the redemption of the *unconverted deceased.*

In 2 Peter 1:19 the KJV reads, "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed." The JSR embellished this: "We have *therefore* a more sure *knowledge of the* word of prophecy, to which word of prophecy ye do well that ye take heed." Then in May 1843 Smith returned to the KJV to communicate his theology of calling and election (D&C 131:5).[84] Initially Smith had changed the KJV to suggest that Peter and his companions possessed an absolute witness of the prophesied Christ, of which believers were instructed to "take heed." Later when developing his doctrine of election, Smith returned to the KJV to stipulate that all believing males can know they are bound for exaltation.

Smith similarly vacillated on the wording of Revelation 1:6. Jesus in the KJV "hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father," but in the JSR he "hath made us kings and priests unto God [. . .], his Father." The awkward "and" is omitted. Just weeks prior to his martyrdom in June 1844, Smith not only appealed to the KJV to support a multiplicity of gods but pronounced KJV Revelation 1:6 "altogether correct in the translation."[85] Smith evidently reversed his JSR omission of "and" in order to secure scriptural prooftext for the idea that another father-god presides over the

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83. See also Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 330, 333-34, 336, 342, 346, 353, 360.

84. See also ibid., 201-202, 204, 206, 209.

85. HC 6:473, 476; see also Ehat and Cook, 378, 380, 383.

father of Jesus.[86]

Apologists for Smith's equivocation point out that the resulting ideas may differ but do not contradict each other. The differences—whether the author of Hebrews wrote about the living or the dead, if the "more sure word of prophecy" referred to the Mount of Transfiguration or was a universal call for securing one's exaltation, or if the apocalyptic author intended Jesus' father or a divine grandparent—are inconsequential since each idea is theologically sound if not necessarily historical.[87] This recourse to harmonization acknowledges the impossibility of determining which words were originally recorded by which author based on Smith's emendations. These examples provide instances where the internal claim of Smith's scriptures vary with the phenomena of the texts themselves. In other words, the phenomena of the texts—Smith's Bible revisions versus his later assertions about what the ancient writers actually meant and recorded—render the authorial and historical claims of the texts ambiguous at best.

More problematic, however, are Smith's emendations which create a disparity of ideas. The two-stage development of Matthew 5:40-41 is especially useful here because it implicates the Book of Mormon. Unlike the

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86. Although Robert J. Matthews conjectured that the omission of "and" may have been a scribal slip, contextual evidence favors Matthews's preferred alternative that "the Prophet did not possess as much knowledge about the plurality of Gods when he dictated this part of the Bible revision . . . as he did eleven years later in 1844 when he delivered a special discourse on the subject" ("A Plainer Translation," 183). Matthews intimates that Joseph Smith's scriptural products in some instances reflect Smith's theological development instead of the ancient authors'. This is corroborated in Smith's emending the KJV either to eradicate plural god references (e.g., JSR Gen. 11:5; JSR Ex. 7:1; 22:28; JSR 1 Sam. 28:13) or to infuse popular nineteenth-century trinitarianism (e.g., Moses 2:26; 7:59-62; JSR Matt. 9:19; 11:28; JSR Luke 10:23; JSR 1 Tim. 2:4). It is telling that not one JSR emendation alludes to multiple gods. (On Smith's early conceptions of deity, see Charles, "Book of Mormon Christology"; Van Hale, "Defining the Contemporary Mormon Concept of God," in Line Upon Line, 7-15; Boyd Kirkland, "The Development of the Mormon Doctrine of God," in Line Upon Line, 35-52; Dan Vogel, "The Earliest Mormon Concept of God," in Line Upon Line, 17-33.) Matthews dismisses a notation made in 1845 by John Bernhisel that JSR New Testament manuscript 2 (NTms.2) indicated that KJV Revelation 1:6 is "correct" because it is contradicted by the very document Bernhisel was copying ("A Plainer Translation," 181-83).

87. See Robert J. Matthews, "I Have a Question: Some Passages Such as Matthew 6:13 and Hebrews 11:40 in Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible Read Quite Differently From the Comparable Passages in the Book of Mormon and/or Other Statements by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Why is this So, and How Could We Know Which of the Variants is Correct?" Ensign 11 (Sept. 1981): 16-17; Clyde J. Williams, "The JST and the New Testament Epistles," in The Joseph Smith Translation: The Restoration of Plain and Precious Things (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1985), 231-32; "The JST in Retrospect and Prospect—A Panel," in The Joseph Smith Translation, 296-97; cf. Monte S. Nyman, "The Sublime Epistles of Peter," in Studies in Scripture: Volume 6, Acts to Revelation, ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 232-33.

above KJV and JSR passages, which propose arguably compatible theology, Smith's renderings of this Matthean passage ascribe varying standards for Christian behavior to Jesus (see Figure 6).

Figure 6.
Two-stage Development of Matthew 5:40-41

Stage One

KJV Matthew 5:40-41

And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

3 Nephi 12:40-41

And if any man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.

JSR Matthew 5:42-43, NTms.1

and if any man <will> sue thee at the law and take away thy coat let him have a cloak also and whosoever shall compel thee to go with him a mile go with him twain

Stage Two

JSR Matthew 5:42-43, NTms.1rev.

and if any man <will> sue thee at the law and take away thy coat let him have a cloak also <it and if he sue thee again let him have thy cloak also> and whosoever shall compel thee to go with him a mile go with him twain <a mile and whosoever shall compel thee to go with him twain thou shalt go with him> <twain>

JSR Matthew 5:42-43, NTms.2

And if any man will sue thee at the law, & take away thy coat, let him have it; and if he sue thee again, let him <have> thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compell thee to go a mile, go with him a mile; and whosoever shall compell thee to go with him twain, <thou shalt> go with him twain.

Stage One depicts Jesus imploring disciples to surrender more than the law requires and to journey a mile further than necessary. The concept is simple enough: in the face of adversity true Christians perform *more* than is required. In both 3 Nephi and JSR New Testament manuscript 1 (*NTms.1*), Smith incorporated the wording of the KJV verbatim. In revising JSR New Testament manuscript 1 (*NTms.1rev.*), however, he made emendations which were assimilated into JSR *NTms.2*, the final version.

Stage Two alters the meaning of Jesus' saying. Now Jesus enjoins

followers to surrender that which is seized and to travel as far as compelled.[88] The sense has shifted from doing more than required to performing what is required only.[89] If the Book of Mormon's "do *more* than required" tradition is reliable, questions arise about the source of Smith's JSR "do what is required" emendation. Conversely if the JSR rendition is authoritative, then the ancient historicity of the Book of Mormon admonition is open to question.

An instinctive apologetic response asserts that the final version of the JSR restores Jesus' homily in Palestine and that 3 Nephi preserves Christ's sentiments to ancient Mesoamericans. But such an assertion creates more problems than it settles.[90] Some students have suggested a social or literary

88. Smith emended the corresponding passage in Luke's Sermon on the Plain differently from Matthew's version to include a curse against the enemies Christians were being enjoined to love unconditionally:

JSR Luke 6:28-30
Bless them who curse you, and pray for them who despitefully use <you *and persecute you*> [New Testament manuscript 2, revision (*NTms.2rev.*); cf. Matt. 5:44]. And unto him who smiteth thee on the cheek, offer also the other; *or, in other words, it is better to offer the other, than to revile again.* And to him who taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. *For it is better that thou suffer thine enemy to take these things, than to contend with him. Verily I say unto you, Your heavenly Father who seeth in secret, shall bring that wicked one into judgment.*

For an insightful glimpse into the historical setting of the Lucan narrative, see Joseph A. Fitzmeyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX (Anchor Bible)* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1981), 627-44.

89. See Edward H. Ashment, "Making the Scriptures 'Indeed One in Our Hands,'" in *The Word of God: Essays on Mormon Scripture,* ed. Dan Vogel (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1990), 253, 263n75; Geoffery F. Spencer, "A Reinterpretation of Inspiration, Revelation, and Scripture," in *The Word of God,* 21. It is surprising that in his study on the Sermon on the Mount in LDS scripture John W. Welch (*The Sermon at the Temple and the Sermon on the Mount: A Latter-day Saint Approach* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990) omits any treatment of this predicament (cf. ibid., 190). Robert A. Cloward, director of the LDS Institute of Religion at the University of Tennessee, noted that the JSR emendation "averts the mistaken impression that we should make unnecessary concessions in the face of persecution" (Cloward, "The Sermon on the Mount in the JST and the Book of Mormon," in *The Joseph Smith Translation,* 182). Cloward declined, however, to remedy the contradiction between the JSR's correction and the Book of Mormon's retention of the "mistaken impression."

90. First, it requires that we conclude Jesus taught Nephites one moral code and Galileans another. If the moral systems of the two hemispheres were different, then modern readers do not know which ethic applies to them. Second, it does not acknowledge that 3 Nephi 12:40-41 is borrowed from KJV Matthew 5:40-41. Could one reasonably conclude that the revised JSR Matthew 5:42-43 ("do what is required") through textual corruption eventually resulted in KJV Matthew 5:40-41 ("do *more* than required") which in turn coincidentally parallels verbatim 3 Nephi 12:40-41? Literary indebtedness of 3 Nephi to KJV Matthew is also evident in view of the observation that Matthew's notion of being forced

stimulus for the revision of Jesus' saying.[91] Whatever the motivation for the JSR emendation, a few observations seem inescapable: (1) Joseph Smith vacillated on the wording and meaning of Jesus' saying in Matthew 5:40-41; (2) KJV Matthew 5:40-41, 3 Nephi 12:40-41, and JSR Matthew 5:42-43 *NTms.1* agree against JSR Matthew 5:42-43 *NTms.1rev.* and JSR *NTms.2*; (3) 3 Nephi, JSR *NTms.1* including *NTms.1rev.*, and JSR *NTms.2* were the ostensible products of inspiration; and (4) the ethics of the Book of Mormon and the final JSR sayings differ. The phenomena within the documents reveal that merely because Smith attributed various concepts to Jesus does not ensure that Jesus ever expressed them in biblical or in Book of Mormon times. Thus an appeal to either saying to establish authoritatively what Jesus said anciently in Galilee or in the Americas is ill-advised.

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to travel a mile echoes Palestinian legalities that presumably were foreign to Nephite culture (e.g., Georg Strecker, *The Sermon on the Mount: An Exegetical Commentary* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988], 84; see in general commentaries on Matthew 5:41; cf. Matt. 27:32). Third, for convincing reasons virtually all biblical scholars view the Sermon on the Mount as a "collection of unrelated sayings of diverse origin" (W. D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1966], 1), not a single "speech made by Jesus but the literary work of the Evangelist Matthew" (Strecker, 11). This alone argues against its having been delivered as a unified speech in the Americas as recorded in 3 Nephi. Fourth, it is improbable that two writers at opposite ends of the globe would understand and then record a sermon delivered on separate occasions so identically that subsequent translators would employ almost identical language to convey the sermon's content. Even a cursory perusal of Joseph Smith's Nauvoo discourses illustrates how the same speech comprehended and recorded by different scribes can differ so significantly as to appear as separate sermons (see Ehat and Cook; cf. Dean C. Jessee, "Priceless Words and Fallible Memories: Joseph Smith as Seen in the Effort to Preserve His Discourses," *Brigham Young University Studies* 31 [Spring 1991]: 19-40). Fifth, Smith's inspiration initially led him to retain the KJV/3 Nephi "do *more* than required" reading in JSR *NTms.1*. Smith incorporated the "do what is required" revision into *NTms.1rev.* only after further reflection. Compounding these difficulties are text-critical anomalies (see Stan Larson, "The Historicity of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount in 3 Nephi," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 115-63). It seems questionable then that the variant sayings in 3 Nephi and the JSR are *both* authentic maxims of the risen Christ and the mortal Jesus.

91. Richard P. Howard has theorized that the realignment of Jesus' saying reflects Smith's attitude toward the persecution his church was enduring, and "consequently he sought to rephrase this text perhaps in the light of his own historical experience" (*Restoration Scriptures*, 99). This hypothesis corresponds to Robert J. Matthews's impression that portions of the JSR were "adapted to a latter-day situation" ("*A Plainer Translation*," 253). Another possibility is that Smith emended the JSR to harmonize a superficial discrepancy between Matthew's Sermon on the Mount in the KJV (5:40-41) and the coinciding passage in KJV Luke's Sermon on the Plain which states, "and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take away thy coat" (6:29). In the Matthean version Christians not only relinquish their cloaks but also freely offer their coats. But the Lucan narrative in the KJV could be construed in another way: Christians surrender both their cloaks and coats only when they are "take[n] away" not of their own volition—an ethic more compatible with the final rendition of JSR Matthew 5:42-43.

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

Apologists look for authority in the ancient historical claims made by and for the Nephite record; scripture critics evaluate these claims in terms of what the phenomena of the Book of Mormon disclose. Reconciling these assumptions is a problematic task.[92] Answers to questions posed by these perspectives will not surface from *ex cathedra* pronouncements or scriptural prooftexting. Perhaps the least tenuous approach is found in precedence, rather than an appeal to a particular theory of how Joseph Smith produced or understood the Book of Mormon. A pattern emerges from Smith and his successors that fresh inspiration leads to change. Indeed, change is the hallmark of Latter-day Saint theology, not the exception. By virtue of this heritage believers should welcome and even expect that historical and theological perspectives on the Book of Mormon will be subject to continuing refinement.

In anticipation of these revisions, methodological integrity can only be maintained if we are willing to explore intricacies of the phenomena of Mormon scripture which can transform the most fundamental assumptions of antiquity and historicity. No matter where one falls on the interpretive spectrum, ultimately all students should commence at the same point—the texts of Mormonism's founding prophet. These provide the pieces for solving the complex puzzle of the nature of Mormon scripture. When placing details together we would be irresponsible to alienate the Book of Mormon from other texts which Joseph Smith professed to have translated or said stemmed from the same inspired source. Only from this rudimentary historical framework can an honest quest for understanding the Book of Mormon begin. One can dismiss problems of historicity by harmonizing them in isolation with what are frequently contradictory rationalizations. It is now the task of interpreters to develop a synthesis of Joseph Smith's models of antiquity.

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92. See Anthony A. Hutchinson, "The Word of God is Enough: The Book of Mormon as Nineteenth-Century Scripture," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, 1-19; David P. Wright, "Historical Criticism: A Necessary Element in the Search for Religious Truth," *Sunstone* 16 (Sept, 1992): 28-38.