# Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins

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Had circumstances permitted a marked grave for the slain prophet, a fitting headstone could have read, "By Joseph Smith, Junior, Author and Proprietor." Such an epitaph, taken from the title page of the Book of Mormon, captures the enduring bond between the man and the book, and also the controversy which coalesced around both with the book's publication and the organization of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints[1] in 1830. In the ensuing and continuing "war of words" (Joseph Smith–History 1:10) and prejudice, redemption may hang on the single preposition "by." What hand did Joseph[2] have in producing the book?

Joseph claimed he translated by the power of God an ancient record inscribed on golden plates entrusted to him by an American angel. His account of the origin of the Book of Mormon is, to understate the obvious, outrageously incredible. One critique dubbed it "knavery on two sticks."[3] Or is it? Are Joseph's claims truth or nonsense? How can one know? This question implicates classic antitheses between science and religion, reason and faith. I consider both faith and reason here in evaluating competing explanations of the book. When confronted with the book, most people reject it because of its cover story. Sterling M. McMurrin, a former Latter-day Saint, said critically, "You don't get books from angels and translate them

by miracles."[4] Others excommunicate the angels and pull the book back down to earth. Joseph Smith, they argue, wrote the book from his galloping imagination, aided and abetted by scraps of truth and speculation rifled from others. From this skeptical view, the book is a fiction, fraud, hoax. There are other explanations, but the never-ending quarrel is between the book as hoax and the book as history. Born of a miracle or a hoax, and father to another, the book commands serious attention from believers and skeptics alike. An overriding question in Book of Mormon scholarship is: did Joseph Smith write or translate the book?[5]

Any fair understanding of Joseph Smith must derive from a plausible explanation of the Book of Mormon, and both science and reason can and should be involved in the evaluation. Because the book makes claims about American prehistory, archaeology has long been implicated in assessments of the book's credentials as ancient history, and, by direct implication, of the veracity, sanity, or honesty of Joseph Smith. I revisit issues of archaeology and the Book of Mormon here in addressing the character of Joseph Smith. Archaeology shows that almost everyone involved in the running quarrel over Joseph and his book have misrepresented and misunderstood both.

## "By Joseph Smith . . . ": Rival Hypotheses of the Book of Mormon

For Mormons, Joseph Smith is a prophet, seer, and revelator, and the Book of Mormon is the word of God. Detractors ridicule both as blasphemous frauds. There is no secure middle ground between positions, but there is one spectacular point of agreement. Champions on both sides see the Book of Mormon as the key to Joseph Smith's claim to be a prophet. Divergent views on the origin of the book lead to different supposed authors; in each case the deduced person thought to be responsible for the book remains incomplete. Surprisingly, both friends and foes have diminished Joseph and the Book of Mormon in the same way—by exaggerating his abilities. Considerable as his abilities were, Joseph Smith was neither superman nor superbrain.

Critics see Joseph Smith as author of a romantic fiction, the Book of Mormon, and in so doing they distort both the man and

the book beyond belief. They see the book as a logical product of its 1820s intellectual environment, combined with Joseph Smith's native intelligence and deceitful propensities.[6]

Most Mormons fall into a more subtle error that also inflates Joseph's talents; they confuse translation with authorship. They presume that Joseph Smith knew the contents of the book as if he were its real author, and they accord him perfect knowledge of the text. This presumption removes from discussion the most compelling evidence of the book's authenticity—Joseph's unfamiliarity with its contents. To put the matter clearly: Joseph Smith did not fully understand the Book of Mormon. I propose that he transmitted to readers an ancient book that he neither imagined nor wrote.

One thing all readers share with Joseph is a partial understanding of the book's complexities. Indeed, many things about the book were simply unknowable in 1830. Over the last sixty years, Hugh Nibley, John Sorenson, and other scholars have shown the Book of Mormon to be "truer" than Joseph Smith or any of his contemporaries could know.[7] Consequently, what Joseph Smith knew and understood about the book ought to be research questions rather than presumptions. Thanks in large part to his critics, it is becoming clear that Joseph Smith did not fully understand the geography, scope, historical scale, literary form, or cultural content of the book.

For example, early Mormons believed Book of Mormon lands stretched throughout all of North and South America, a presumption clearly at odds with the book itself (fig. 1a).[8] The book speaks specifically only of a limited land about the size of Pennsylvania. In 1842, after reading about ancient cities in Central America, Joseph speculated that Book of Mormon lands were located there (fig. 1b).[9] I derive two lessons from his speculation: First, Joseph did not know exactly where Book of Mormon lands were; second, he considered their location an important question addressable through scholarship. The book makes hundreds of claims about ancient peoples in the Americas. It has always been clear to people on both sides of the controversy that antiquities could be, and should be, used to corroborate or destroy the book's pedigree.

The rival hypotheses about the book's origins implicate four knowledge worlds of diverse content and undetermined relationship: the ancient world, the nineteenth-century world, the twenty-first-century

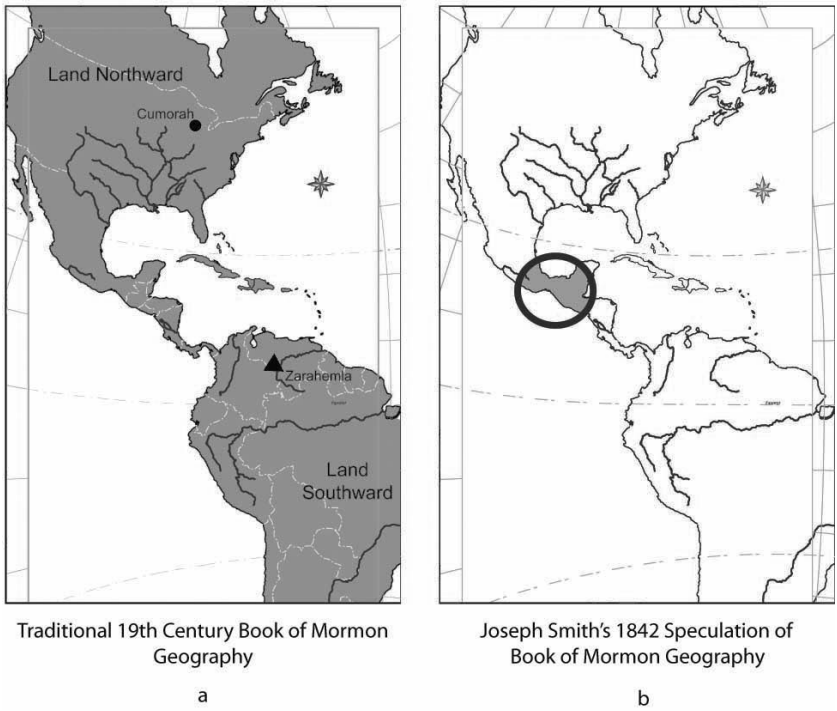



**Figure 1.** Views of Book of Mormon Geography compared.

world, and the Book of Mormon world. Environmental or naturalistic explanations see the book as a hoax tethered to its nineteenth-century background. Thus, all details mentioned in the book should conform to knowledge and speculations available to Joseph Smith before the book was written in 1829. Mormon explanations see the book as history and situate it in the ancient world. These opposed views will play out differently through time because knowledge of the past has increased since Joseph Smith's day and will continue to do so. These gains in knowledge should allow us to identify the stronger hypothesis. Noel Reynolds puts the matter this way:

> While a book might conceivably be made to look authentic by matching the standard knowledge at the time of its production, it would gradually become less persuasive as more and more is learned about the times it claims to describe. On the other hand, truly authentic ancient documents would continue to look ancient, even in light of new discoveries and new expectations.[10]

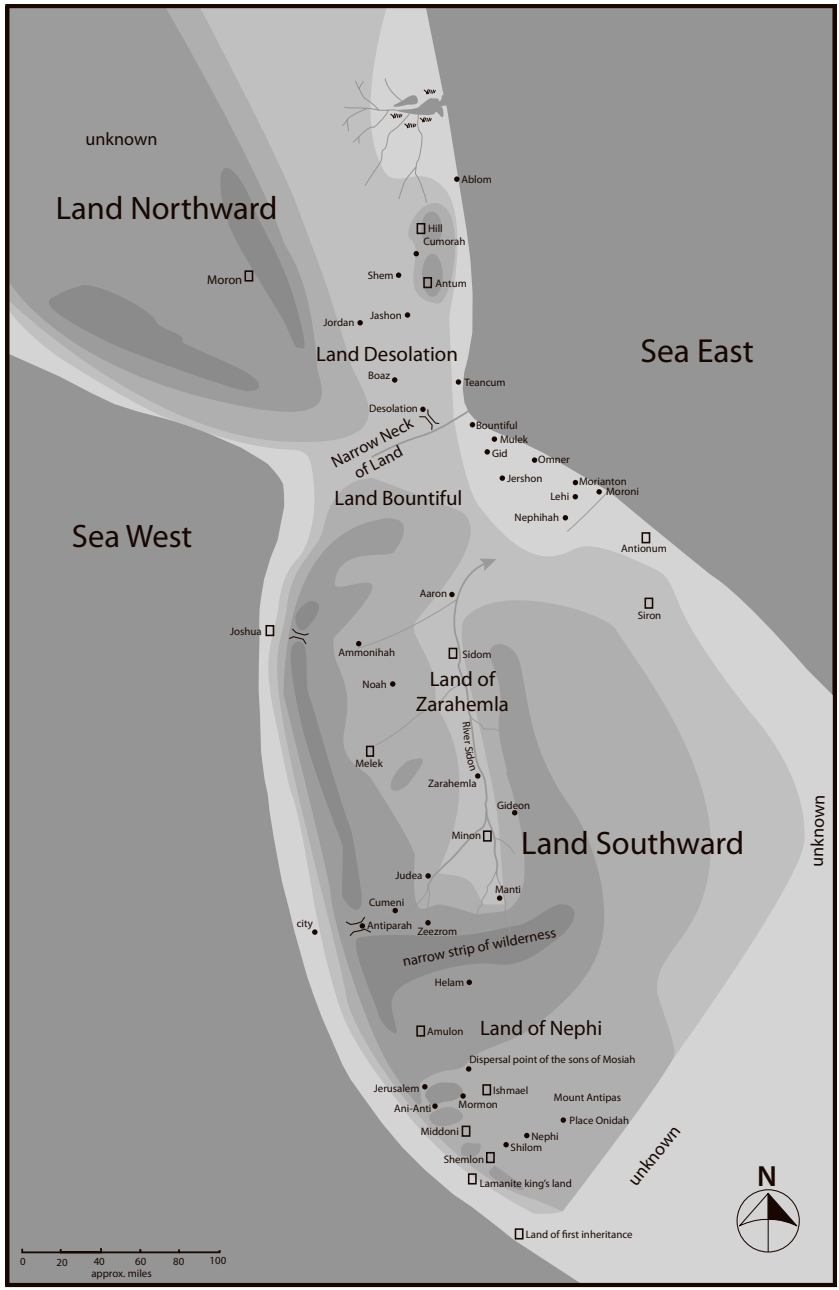
What should this trend look like? If the Book of Mormon was part of the ancient world, more and more details ought to be confirmed as scholarship learns more about the past. Therefore, if the book is history, one would expect confirmations of the book's claims to increase as modern scholarship reveals more about the ancient world and the Book of Mormon's part of that world.[11]

The Book of Mormon has been discussed and dissected now for 175 years, but only during the last fifty has American archaeology been capable of addressing issues of history and generating reliable facts. In this paper, I will marshal recent facts from archaeology to evaluate the trends in seeing the Book of Mormon as hoax or as history. Past quarreling has ranged over hundreds of topics. Rather than attempting a comprehensive review, I will focus on evidence of place, time, and population that was unknowable in 1829.

## "Where in the World?": Finding a Place for the Book of Mormon

A major turning point in Book of Mormon studies came with the realization that early Mormons had missed or misunderstood salient facts of geography, history, and culture embedded in its narrative. The book describes a small place. This insight has shifted the whole debate in recent years. Consider Reverend M. T. Lamb's criticisms in 1886:

> An ordinary school boy who had studied geography with any attention, should have been able to form a plot and locate cities and lands in a way to conform in the main to the physical conformations of the country. . . . Not one of the physical peculiarities of either of these western continents is alluded to except the existence of the large lakes and "many fountains of waters," in the northern part of the United States (the only portion of our country that our youthful prophet knew anything about). . . . The Book makes a large number of geographical statements that could not under any possible conditions or circumstances be true except upon some imaginary continent, of size and shape wholly unlike anything existing upon our world to-day, or that has ever existed since Noah's flood. The facts are, my good Mormon brother—that Book *has been proven a fraud beyond the possibility of question.*[12]




Courtesy FARMS, Brigham Young University

**Figure 2.** John Sorenson's internal Book of Mormon geography.

It should be clear that Reverend Lamb was precipitous in deploying geography to deliver the *coup de grace* to the Book of Mormon. The point is still being argued today, a century after his proclamation of the book's demise. If Book of Mormon geography does not rise to the standards of an "ordinary school boy," and if it bears no resemblance to obvious physical features, we should not expect to find any place for it in the Americas, but we do.

Book of Mormon geography is a complex topic that covers swaths of both the Old and New Worlds. Recent studies demonstrate that the book's description of Old World lands is precise, down to place names.[13] The New World geography is less crisp, but not less impressive. The book provides over seven hundred references to its geography and is consistent from beginning to end, allowing construction of an internal geography.[14] The book describes a narrow, hour-glass-shaped territory several hundred miles long that is sandwiched between eastern and western seas. John Sorenson has demonstrated that southern Mexico and northern Central America fit remarkably well the book's geography in overall size, configuration, and location of physical features. His proposal for Book of Mormon geography is illustrated in figure 2.

These highly credible Book of Mormon lands are tucked away where Joseph Smith never saw them and would never have found them. Contrary to Reverend Lamb and subsequent critics, the Book of Mormon does have a place in the Americas—just not a place in Joseph Smith's experience. Book of Mormon geography fits a corner of the Americas Joseph did not know. Therefore, the book's geography could not have derived from his personal experience. It follows that he dictated a book with complexities beyond his own comprehension.

## "Finding the Time": The Book of Mormon as American Prehistory

After geographical considerations, the second major challenge for Book of Mormon correlations is history. Reverend Lamb found no support for the book's claims as he understood them in 1886.

> We have found that the entire ancient history of this western world is flatly against the claims in the Book of Mormon. . . . *The entire civilization of the Book of Mormon, its whole record from beginning to end is flatly contradicted by the civilization and the history of Central America.*[15]

Because current understandings of prehistory differ significantly from what was believed in Lamb's day, they provide an independent check for Book of Mormon claims. For present purposes, the best place to search for histories matching those in the book is Mesoamerica.

Peoples there had calendar systems. Evidence of these native calendars is doubly interesting because Joseph Smith's critics have accused him of plagiarizing books that contain information on Hebrew and Aztec timekeeping, principally from Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* published in 1825.[16] Similarities between Amerindian and Hebrew months were taken long ago as evidence that American Indians descended from the Lost Ten Tribes,[17] another idea Joseph supposedly pilfered. Neither accusation holds up. Timekeeping in the Book of Mormon differs from descriptions available in 1829 of Hebrew and Indian lunar counts. Of greater interest, some peculiar details in the book correspond to Maya time-cycles discovered nearly sixty years after the book's publication.[18]

As the consummate recordkeepers in Mesoamerica, the Maya erected numerous stone monuments in their cities that recorded the time elapsed since 3114 BC, their year zero. Maya calculations were based on counting by twenties instead of our practice of counting by tens. The major cycle of Maya time was a four-hundred-year period called a *baktun*. The Book of Mormon records several references to a significant four-hundred-year prophecy,[19] consistent with this idiosyncratic Mesoamerican calendar practice.

This similarity in recording time in Mesoamerica and Book of Mormon times is reinforced by each group's parallel narratives of sequential civilizations. Historic similarities include time, place, and content. Lamb relied on the best archaeology of his day to demonstrate a lack of correspondence between Book of Mormon claims and American

antiquities. That was 1886; what about 2005? The top of figure 3 displays the broad histories of Book of Mormon cities. Jaredite culture started towards the end of the third millennium BC, and its first cities were built later. The Jaredites vanished from the Book of Mormon record about 500–400 BC. Nephites arrived on the scene about 580 BC and disappeared about AD 400. Figure 3 juxtaposes Book of Mormon claims with current facts about Mesoamerica, and the trend is quite remarkable.[20] The Olmecs featured on this chart were not identified as a real culture until 1942, and archaeologists did not know their true age until 1967.[21] If early critics cannot be faulted for failing to predict these discoveries, the Book of Mormon should not be denigrated for getting them right.

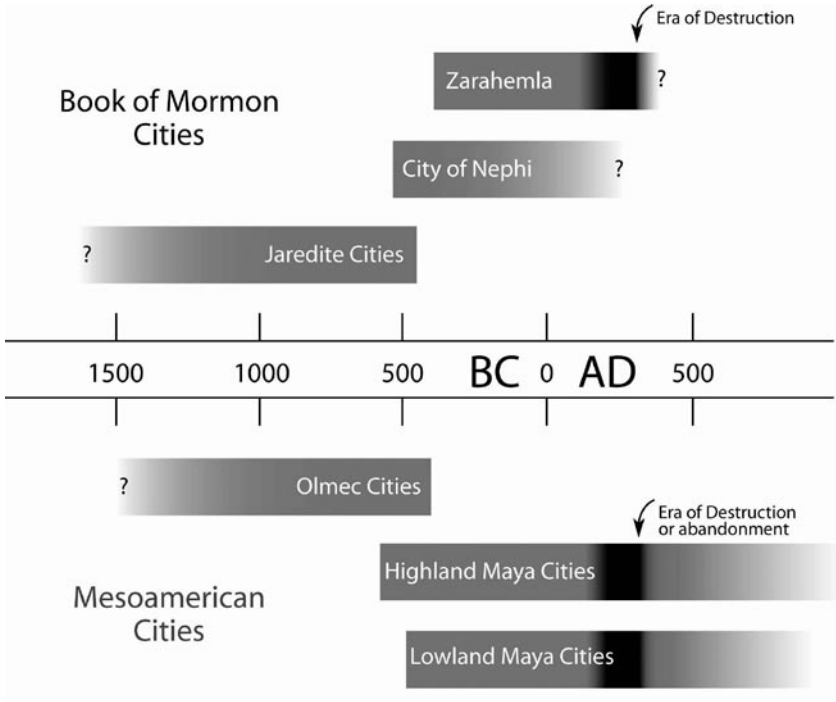



**Figure 3.** Comparative histories of Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican cities and civilizations.

## "Spread upon All the Face of the Land": Populations in the Book of Mormon

One perplexing issue in the Book of Mormon is its population counts. The numbers in the book have always looked out of kilter with traditional readings of the reproductive potential of its founding groups. In 1834, E. D. Howe questioned how the Nephites had become so numerous in just forty years:

> He [Jacob, a first-generation Nephite] says that a hundredth part of the doings of these people could not be engraved on plates on the account of their having become so very numerous, . . . and all sprang from five or six females, in about forty years; . . . According to the most extravagant calculation, in point of increase among five or six females, the whole could not have amounted to more than about sixteen hundred.[22]

The close of the Nephite history is equally problematic in terms of the numbers, as aptly stated by Tyler Parsons in 1841:

> This Mormon bulletin or sword fight with the Lamanites sets Napoleon Bonaparte all in the shade. The battle of Waterloo or Trafalgar is not a circumstance to this. Here is 230,000 of God's people killed, but the 24 that General Mormon saved in his 10,000. The Mormons fought bravely, that's a fact. Mormon says he was wounded. He gives us no account of the loss of the Lamanites, the black sceptics. Probably the Lord was on their side, and of course, as in old times, they did not lose a man.[23]

Millions died in the final Jaredite wars, and at least half a million souls perished in the final Nephite and Lamanite battle, if one allows for Lamanite casualties. These statistics worry some analysts, but they should not. Estimating ancient populations is one of the most difficult tasks archaeologists undertake, and it may require another fifty years to reconstruct Mesoamerica's demographic history.[24] Enough is known, however, to address some claims about lands and peoples.

It is now known that the pan-American model of Book of Mormon geography was wrong and that the lands were actually small. A corollary of this insight is that the book does not describe all peoples on both continents. A further implication is even more

important: Book of Mormon peoples who immigrated to the New World did not come to vacant lands.[25] Natives occupied American territories for millennia before Jaredites and Nephites arrived. The apparent rabbit-like population counts for early Nephites, therefore, are best explained by the Nephites' incorporation of natives. The book does not provide a clear account of such associations, but this is an issue of record keeping, not of biological reproduction. At the closing chapter of their history, the astronomical casualty numbers that set Napoleon "all in the shade" may also reflect reporting practices as much as body counts. It is worth remembering that we are dealing with ancient books and their reporting practices, and not with yesterday's newspaper. The Aztecs inflated their war numbers for the record; they described armies of 200,000 soldiers plus their support personnel,[26] the same size as Nephite armies.

Although archaeology does not currently allow an assessment of Book of Mormon population counts, it is important to recognize that Mesoamerica was the most densely populated spot in the Americas and had millions of inhabitants,[27] an order of magnitude that supports the general plausibility of Book of Mormon demography. Crude population profiles can be constructed for the Jaredites and the lowland Olmecs.[28] The Olmec population grows and falls in respectable parallel to that of the Jaredites' reported increase and demise. To summarize, in terms of its claims for lands, peoples, populations, and chronology, the Book of Mormon gets better than passing marks.

## The Changing Face of Missing Evidence for the Book of Mormon

As a final check of the book's historical authenticity, I consider a long list of frequently voiced complaints. Standard arguments against the book concern things mentioned in the text not found archaeologically, such as gold plates. In past research, I considered sixty supposed blunders of the Book of Mormon as asserted by three popular nineteenth-century critics. I found that about 60 percent of those criticisms have been resolved in favor of the book.[29] This exercise

was meant, however, only as an indicator of trends rather than as a valid, statistical sample of criticisms. Because I am now working with others to obtain a scientific sample of criticisms and a reliable statistic of the number of those that have been resolved, I will exclude the details of that preliminary study pending results of the broader analysis. A few comments on this ongoing research are appropriate here to establish the simple point of this paper: the Book of Mormon looks better with age.

This project will catalog every criticism of the Book of Mormon published in English from 1829 to 2004 related to historic details potentially verifiable through archaeology. We have already identified over 1,000 criticisms from 150 sources for the nineteenth century, and we anticipate uncovering another thousand more fresh complaints for the twentieth century. This means that the original sample of sixty was only about 3 percent of published criticisms, so the number of confirmations from that sample should not be taken as conclusively indicative of the whole. As far as we are able, we will assess the validity and current status of each criticism—whether each is an accurate and fair reading of the text, has been confirmed or not, or is in the process of being confirmed. This list and its documentation, which exceeds the scope of this publication, will be made available elsewhere. The final percentage of confirmed and unconfirmed items relating to Book of Mormon claims will never be a fixed number, of course, because new criticisms of the book are devised each year, and science continues to recover evidence for items mentioned in the book. We will always be dealing with a "ballpark" number indicative of a trend.

Many items mentioned in the Book of Mormon have not been and may never be verified through archaeology, but many have been. Verification is a one-way street in this instance. Positive and negative evidence do not count the same, as anyone tested for a serious medical condition knows. Given current means of verification, positive items are here to stay, but negative items may prove to be positive ones in hiding. "Missing" evidence focuses further research, but it lacks compelling logical force in arguments because it represents the absence of information rather than secure evidence.

It is in this light that we should consider many arguments against the Book of Mormon. The most frequently mentioned deficiencies of the book concern the lack of hard evidence in the New World for the right time periods of precious metals, Old World animals and plants, and Book of Mormon place names and personal names. These deficiencies of negative evidence persist, for the most part, but they should not distract attention from the scores of other unusual items mentioned in the book which have been confirmed through archaeology—nor from the possibility that missing evidence may someday be found.

The overall trend in the data over the past 175 years fits the expectations for the Book of Mormon as history rather than hoax. The Book of Mormon did not play well in Joseph Smith's lifetime as ancient American history; Mormon missionaries got the worst of most debates on the merits of physical evidence in the 1840s.[30] But that was decades before scientific archaeology appeared on the scene. Today, current science is more supportive because many claims made in the book have been substantiated. Given the number of complaints over the years and the range of evidence, quibbling over a point or two of fact will not alter this trend. As seen by science, the Book of Mormon is stronger today than it was in 1830, 1844, 1950, or even 2000, so I expect it will continue to become stronger in the future.

Claims in the book once thought absurd that have been confirmed in recent years include evidence in the Old World of steel swords and metal plates for the right time and place, and in the New World, a strain of domesticated barley, cement, military regalia, assorted weapons, Hebrew words, evidence of reading and writing, and multiple expectations for geography and history. Other probable items await full confirmation, including horses, Solomon-like temples, scimitars, large armies, a script that may qualify as reformed Egyptian, and the two hundred years of Nephite peace.[31] The absolute percentages of confirmed items will change, of course, but not likely the pattern. If the book were a hoax, we would not expect any more than about 1 percent of the items to be confirmed beyond random chance, but several hundred items supporting the book's historical validity have already been verified.

## Evidences and Consequences

What do these myriad facts and observations add up to? They constitute a strong case that the Book of Mormon is an ancient Mesoamerican record, an authentic old book. This conclusion harbors multiple ironies, two worth touching on in closing. First, if the book is an ancient Mesoamerican record, most past arguments for and against it have been wrongheaded. Second, if the book is authentic history, most biographies of Joseph Smith are deficient.

Consider the book. For the first 120 years of debate, until 1950, assumptions made by both sides were self-defeating. Critics assumed the book could be, and should be, read as American fantasy and that its moorings could be recovered in early New York and in Joseph Smith's biography. If the book is a Mesoamerican record, however, it cannot be nineteenth-century fiction. The cultural worlds of ancient Mesoamerica and early New York are far enough apart that it ought to be simple to discover from which one the book came. The cultures described in the Book of Mormon fit much better in Mesoamerica than in New York for any century.

For their part, Mormons have traditionally assumed that the book pertained to all peoples in the New World. But if the book describes only four groups from Middle America, it is not a blanket history of all the Americas. Arguments raised by critics through the years demonstrated the insufficiency of the Book of Mormon as universal history and helped Mormon scholars realize they had been misreading the book and overgeneralizing its claims. The book is a regional rather than a continental record.

Now consider Joseph Smith. Friends and foes have used the book to take his measure. The view of the Book of Mormon as hoax distorts Joseph Smith beyond recognition and creates an impossible paradox, as follows.

Early arguments—made at a time when the Book of Mormon remained virtually unread—were greatly flawed by insisting on trumped-up slanders that dismissed Joseph Smith as a lazy liar with a host of even more serious flaws.[32] These *ad hominem* arguments left Joseph without sufficient skills to have written any book, let alone

the Book of Mormon. Once the book's complexity became public knowledge, however, it became logically impossible for detractors to derive the book from Joseph Smith. The second round of argumentation imagined intelligent co-conspirators and a plagiarized text. This raised the book's authorial I.Q. but countered obvious facts that eventually leaked out and undermined the argument.[33] In the third and current round of reassessments, critical historians who returned Joseph Smith to his environment have identified over two hundred books from which Joseph could have cribbed an idea or two.[34] This would make the Book of Mormon something of a doctoral dissertation written by a slick, very well-read operator with photographic recall—but without the footnotes. Joseph has gone from being a fool to a genius or perhaps even more than that.[35] Ironically, it is Joseph's critics, not his supporters, who have lately been according him phenomenal powers in their attempts to explain the Book of Mormon through his biography.[36] Although an improvement over base slanders, this swing in opinion lacks credibility or logic, and it does nothing to resolve the Book of Mormon problem.

As Truman Madsen points out, a genius could no more have written the Book of Mormon than could a fool:

> How could any genius or set of geniuses in the nineteenth century concoct a book that is filled with stunning details, now confirmable, of the ancient cultures it claims to represent? By the use of Occam's razor and David Hume's rule that one only credits a "miraculous" explanation if alternatives are more miraculous, the simplest and least miraculous explanation is Joseph Smith's: he translated an ancient record.[37]

This is where archaeology intersects theology and history. The basic question to be resolved is this: What needs to be explained about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon? The most remarkable things about the book are *not* the intricate plots, myriad characters, rich settings, or textual consistencies. Ordinary novelists and movie-makers create elaborate fantasy worlds every year. The Book of Mormon separates itself from all fantasy and fiction in its *predictions about the past*. Accurate predictions of a then unknown past beg explanation. Emerging facts from archaeology, as shown, confirm a

trend of unusual and specific details in the book that could not have been known in any book or language in 1829.[38]

The continuing challenge is to explain how these facts made their way into the Book of Mormon. The two most likely answers are that they either had to be conveyed to Joseph Smith through supernatural means, or he had to guess each one individually and sequentially at virtually impossible odds. Thus, explanations of the book will need to admit God or the Devil into the equation, or grant supranatural clairvoyance or abilities to Joseph Smith.

Latter-day Saints typically do not turn to extraordinary human abilities in explaining Joseph's role in bringing forth the book, because they see God as doing most of the work, with Joseph Smith as His human conveyance. That Mormons are currently running a distant second to Joseph's critics in praising his human abilities should give both parties pause. Accepting that Joseph translated a book beyond his and our comprehension is the beginning of wisdom. To understand Joseph Smith, all must take his limitations seriously.

As I see it, Joseph Smith did not write the Book of Mormon, it cannot be understood through recourse to his biography, and his biography cannot be recovered by studying the book. The scientific trend of archaeological evidence of its historic facticity indicates that the Book of Mormon is what Joseph Smith claimed it was—an ancient book. It follows that no amount of scrutiny of the book will ever betray Joseph's mind or heart because it is not mirrored in the text. It further follows that Joseph was neither a fool nor a genius, an imposter nor a liar. He was an honest man who told the truth about the book. The Book of Mormon is part of Joseph Smith's story but not the window to his soul. It vouchsafes his claim to prophetic status, not to literary genius. The book was a product of his activity and obedience, not of his imagination.

## Notes

1. The Church was first called the Church of Christ when it was organized on April 6, 1830; the name was officially changed in 1838 to The Church of

Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Doctrine and Covenants 115:3). Members of the Church were first called "Mormonites" by outsiders to identify them as believers in the Book of Mormon, and this was later shortened to "Mormons," among whom the preferred term of self-reference is "Saints" or "Latter-day Saints." Latter-day Saints do not consider the term "Mormon" derogatory, only insufficient and ambiguous. Jesus Christ is at the center of their worship, not Mormon, Joseph Smith, or any other prophet.

2. I follow the Latter-day Saint practice of referring to the prophet Joseph Smith Jr. by his first name rather than the distancing academic practice of referring to scholars by their patronym. This usage of the first name signals my affiliation with the community of believers and my lack of disinterested distance in the matters discussed.

3. Adrian Orr, *Mormonism Dissected, or, Knavery "On Two Sticks," Exposed* (Bethania, Penn.: Reuben Chambers, 1841).

4. Sterling M. McMurrin, quoted in Louis Midgley, "The Current Battle over the Book of Mormon: 'Is Modernity Itself Somehow Canonical?'" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 204.

5. For legal reasons, Joseph Smith had to claim to be the "author or proprietor" of the Book of Mormon to obtain and maintain legal copyright, but it has always been clear that he claimed to have translated the book and not to have written it. For a discussion of these matters, see John W. Welch, ed., "Joseph Smith: 'Author and Proprietor,'" *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies [FARMS], 1992), 154–57.

6. For popular critical stances towards Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon, see John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints, Or, An Exposé of Joe Smith and Mormonism* (Boston: Leland and Whiting, 1842); Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1945); Eber D. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed: or, A Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion from Its Rise to the Present Time* (Painesville, Ohio: Howe, 1834); M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible or, The Book of Mormon: Is It from God?* (New York: Ward and Drummond, 1886); Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993); David Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 1985); Dan Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon: Religious Solutions from Columbus to Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986); Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004); Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe, eds., *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002).

7. For popular favorable views of Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon see the following: Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites*

(Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952); Hugh Nibley, *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967); Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 2d ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976); John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985); John L. Sorenson, *Nephite Culture and Society: Collected Papers* (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997); John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998).

8. For good overviews of Book of Mormon geographies and related issues, see Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*; John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992); John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000).

9. This claim is based on an editorial published in the *Times and Seasons*, attributed to Joseph Smith: "Since our 'Extract' was published from Mr. Stephens' 'Incidents of Travel,' & c. [*Times and Seasons* 3, no. 22 (September 15, 1842): 911–15] we have found another important fact relating to the truth of the Book of Mormon. Central America, or Guatimala [*sic*], is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien [Panama] and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south.—The city of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior, and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land." *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 23 (October 1, 1842): 927.

Joseph Smith's personal authorship of this statement cannot be established with final certainty because it is unsigned. The basic facts attributing the statement and sentiments to him are summarized by V. Garth Norman, "Joseph Smith and the Beginning of Book of Mormon Archaeology," *Meridian Magazine* (2005): http://www.ldsmag.com/ideas/030930joseph.html.

Joseph Smith had assumed personal responsibility for the contents of the paper on March 15, 1842: "This paper commences my editorial career, I alone stand responsible for it, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward. I am not responsible for the publication, or arrangement of the former paper; the matter did not come under my supervision. Joseph Smith." *Times and Seasons* 3, no. 9 (March 15, 1842): 710. Joseph Smith turned editorial control over to John Taylor on November 15, 1842: "I beg leave to inform the subscribers of the Times and Seasons that it is impossible for me to fulfil the arduous duties of the editorial department any longer. The multiplicity of other business that daily devolves upon me, renders it impossible for me to do justice to a paper so widely circulated as the Times and Seasons. I have appointed Elder John Taylor, who is less encumbered and fully competent to assume the responsibilities of that office, and I doubt not but that he will give satisfaction to the patrons of the paper. As this number commences a new volume, it also commences his editorial career. Joseph Smith." *Times and Seasons* 4, no. 1 (November 15, 1842): 8.

This valedictory statement by Joseph Smith, and the statement following by John Taylor, are clear evidence that Joseph took his responsibility seriously and was responsible for the volumes under his editorship. Although it is hypothetically possible that someone else penned the statement, it is sufficiently clear that the sentiments expressed represented Joseph's views and are likely his own words.

10. Noel B. Reynolds, "The Logical Structure of the Authorship Debate," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 98–99.

11. For an insightful evaluation of the environmental hypothesis of the Book of Mormon, see John Gee, "The Wrong Type of Book," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 307–29.

12. Lamb, *The Golden Bible,* 308, 321. I quote extensively from this book, not because it is an easy target for polemics, but because he argued so carefully from the facts of the Book of Mormon and from the best archaeology available to him at the time. Thus, his book is a valuable time capsule of how arguments against the book have evolved through time necessitated by the changing facts of science.

13. See S. Kent Brown, "'The Place That Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 66–68; Warren P. Aston, "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, no. 2 (2001): 56–61; S. Kent Brown, "New Light from Arabia on Lehi's Trail," *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 55–125.

14. See note 8.

15. Lamb, *The Golden Bible*, 319, 289.

16. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews or The Tribes of Israel in America*, 2d ed. (Poultney, Vt.: Smith and Shute, 1825).

17. James Adair, *Adair's History of the American Indians*, ed. Samuel Cole Williams (1775; repr., Johnson City, Tenn.: Watuaga, 1930), 77–83.

18. The classic statements on the Maya Calendar are: Sylvanus G. Morley, *An Introduction to the Study of Maya Hieroglyphics* (1915; repr., New York: Dover, 1975); J. Eric S. Thompson, *Maya Hieroglyphic Writing: An Introduction* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960). Most introductory books on Mesoamerican archaeology cover the basics of the calendar. I recommend any edition of Michael D. Coe, *The Maya* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1966–2005). Ernst Wilhelm Förstemann is credited with discovering the principles of the Maya calendar in 1887; see his article repr. in Stephen Houston, Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos, and David Stuart, *The Decipherment of Ancient Maya Writing* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001).

19. See Alma 45:10, Helaman 13:9, 2 Nephi 26:9–10, Mormon 8:6, and Moroni 10:1.

20. Not all Mesoamerican cities followed the same historic trajectory, of course. The city histories shown in figure 3 represent the largest cities in their regions, El Mirador in the Maya Lowlands, Kaminaljuyú in the Guatemala highlands, Chiapa de Corzo in central Chiapas, Mexico, and La Venta in the Olmec heartland of Tabasco, Mexico. Summaries of these and other cities can be found in Susan Toby Evans and David L. Webster, eds., *Archaeology of Ancient Mexico and Central America: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Garland Publishing, 2001).

21. The precise dates for Olmec culture have not been determined to everyone's satisfaction. The culture achieved official recognition at the Second Round Table of the Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología, Olmecs and Mayas, held in Tuxtla Gutiérrez, Chiapas, Mexico, in 1942. A major controversy at the conference was the chronological placement of Olmec culture, with most Mexican scholars arguing for it being earlier than Maya culture. With the advent of radiocarbon dating in 1950, the Olmecs were soon dated to about 1000 BC at their principal site of La Venta, Tabasco. Subsequently, an even earlier Olmec city, San Lorenzo, was explored and dated to about 1200 BC. See Michael D. Coe, Richard A. Diehl, and Minze Stuiver, "Olmec Civilization, Veracruz, Mexico: Dating of the San Lorenzo Phase," *Science* 155, no. 3768 (March 17, 1967): 1399–401; for a recent synthesis of Olmec culture, see Richard A. Diehl, *The Olmecs: America's First Civilization* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

22. Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed,* 55–56.

23. Tyler Parsons, *Mormon Fanaticism Exposed: A Compendium of The Book of Mormon, or Joseph Smith's Golden Bible* (Boston: n. p., 1841), 26.

24. Estimating ancient populations is always only approximate even under the best of conditions. Good estimates require that archaeologists find or extrapolate through controlled sampling all the sites in a region, their sizes, the dates of their occupations, the size of each site during any given century, the number of occupied houses, house sizes, and the likely average of the number of persons per household per generation. This is a long string of "ifs," so archaeologists generally take precise estimates of population with considerable skepticism. Most estimates could be off by more than 100 percent, given the conditions for the preservation and/or recovery of evidence of ancient occupation. We are on slightly firmer ground in projecting general trends of high and low population densities for any time or place.

25. John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1, no. 1 (1992): 1–34, repr. in John L. Sorenson, *Nephite Culture and Society*.

26. Diego Durán, *The Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (New York: Orion, 1964), 217.

27. An appreciation for the population history of North American can be obtained by comparing two recent synthetic treatments of its archaeology:

Brian M. Fagan, *Ancient North America: The Archaeology of a Continent*, 3rd ed. (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2000) and Susan Toby Evans, *Ancient Mexico and Central America: Archaeology and Culture History* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

28. The population profile for the Lowland Olmecs is based on data for the history of the two principal capitals in the area, San Lorenzo and La Venta, as well as some limited surveys around both capitals. I draw from the following sources: Michael D. Coe and Richard A. Diehl, *In the Land of the Olmec* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980); Ann Cyphers, "Reconstructing Olmec Life at San Lorenzo," in *Olmec Art of Ancient Mexico*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson and Beatriz de la Fuente (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1996), 61–71; Ann Cyphers, *Escultura Olmeca de San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2004); Ann Cyphers, ed., *Población, Subsistencia y Medio Ambiente en San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1997); Rebecca González Lauck, "La Venta: An Olmec Capital," in *Olmec Art of Ancient Mexico*, 73–82; Stacey C. Symonds and Roberto Lunagómez, "Settlement System and Population Development at San Lorenzo,"in *Olmec to Aztec: Settlement Patterns in the Ancient Gulf Lowlands*, ed. Barbara L. Stark and Philip J. Arnold III (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1997), 144–73; Stacey C. Symonds, Ann Cyphers, and Roberto Lunagómez, *Asentamiento Prehispánico en San Lorenzo Tenochtitlán* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2002); Christopher von Nagy, "The Geoarchaeology of Settlement in the Grijalva Delta," in *Olmec to Aztec*, 253–77; Richard A. Diehl, *The Olmecs: America's First Civilization* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004).

29. The three sources I considered in my original sample of critiques were Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*; Bennett, *The History of the Saints*; and Lamb, *The Golden Bible*; see note 6.

30. See Origen Bacheler, *Mormonism Exposed: Internally and Externally* (New York: 162 Nassau St., 1838); Orr, *Mormonism Dissected*; Parsons, *Mormon Fanaticism Exposed*; La Roy Sunderland, *Mormonism Exposed. In Which Is Shown the Monstrous Imposture, the Blasphemy, and the Wicked Tendency, of that Enormous Delusion, Advocated by a Professedly Religious Sect, Calling Themselves "Latter Day Saints"* (New York: Office of the N.Y. Watchman, 1842).

31. Documentation for all Book of Mormon claims is an ongoing process that has not been attempted systematically. Recent books published by FARMS list dozens of novel items. See Parry, Peterson, and Welch, *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*; Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1982); Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*; John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991); John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, eds., *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s* (Provo,

Utah: FARMS, 1999); John W. Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: The F.A.R.M.S. Updates* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992).

32. See Alexander Campbell, "Delusions," *Millennial Harbinger* (February 1831): 85–96; Howe, *Mormonism Unvailed*.

33. See John C. Bennett, *The History of the Saints*; Persuitte, *Joseph Smith and the Origins of the Book of Mormon*; Bacheler, *Mormonism Exposed*.

34. See Brodie, *No Man Knows My History;* Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon*; Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*.

35. See Harold Bloom, *The American Religion: The Emergence of the Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

36. Metcalf, *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*; Vogel and Metcalf, *American Apocrypha*; Vogel, *Indian Origins and the Book of Mormon*; Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet*.

37. Truman Madsen, "B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship*, 12.

38. See John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6, no. 1 (1994): 297–361; Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, 391–521.