The Other Stuff: Reading the Book of Mormon for Cultural Information

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Abstract   Review of *Nephite Culture and Society: Selected Papers*
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THE OTHER STUFF:
READING THE BOOK OF MORMON
FOR CULTURAL INFORMATION

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Nephite Culture and Society is a collection of essays that elucidate the cultural milieu of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon. Some readers may approach this collection in the same way that they have Sorenson's earlier *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon,*[1] as a place to find new "proofs" of the Book of Mormon. While the previous book provided some points that could be so interpreted, those who search for such proofs with this latest volume will miss the most important impact not only of these essays but of the earlier work as well: understanding the Book of Mormon.

As a collection of essays, the volume leaves to the reader the task of synthesizing the various articles into a coherent picture of the cultural background of the Book of Mormon. This is not to say that Sorenson himself does not have such a unified picture; indeed, the nature of all his work on the Book of Mormon in a real place and time suggests that he has a very strong vision of how all these pieces fit together. His earlier *An Ancient American Setting* provides the most comprehensive treatment of how he views the Book of Mormon in a real-world setting. The current volume, *Nephite Culture and*

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

Society, provides some in-depth views of themes that were not as extensively treated in *An Ancient American Setting.* These are not new essays that change any of his substantive positions; in fact, most are reprints of previously published articles gathered here around the theme of Nephite culture. These essays are closer examinations that continue to develop the theme of a cultural setting for the Book of Mormon.

Sorenson explains his conceptual approach early in the first essay: "A characteristic of Hugh Nibley's study of the *Book of Mormon,* which he has urged others to emulate, is close study of the scriptural text to reveal information which myopia had previously led readers to ignore" (p. 2). This close reading makes some assumptions about the Book of Mormon text that should be stated explicitly:

- The Book of Mormon is to be taken seriously as an ancient document.
- As with other ancient texts, the Book of Mormon may be better understood with a knowledge of the real places and real times in which it was written.
- As with other ancient texts, the Book of Mormon will not always reveal everything plainly, but hints are available to discern the cultural background of the writers of the text.
- Regardless of how one might understand the nature of the translation of the Book of Mormon into English, the essential meaning has been preserved, and we may trust the meaning of the English text to reflect correctly the ancient milieu that produced the original document.

These foundational assumptions allow Sorenson to read the text as Nibley has suggested and certainly allow us to understand aspects of culture and society to which our more myopic readings of the text have blinded us.

Of the whole work I can offer only two criticisms, one trivial and one that will influence my review of the essays. The first is that some of the footnotes do not provide easy access to the essential references. For instance, Robert F. Smith's works are cited frequently but never with enough detail to make them easy to find. In a second example,

reference is made to a Mexican myth of an ocean crossing with a sacred stone (see p. 114). The references are to other articles rather than to the specific myth. I would have found it much easier had texts containing the myth itself been referenced.[2]

The second overall observation is that the articles tend to back away from one of the most important aspects of Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting.* In that work Sorenson not only studied the events and situations in the Book of Mormon, but also analyzed it in terms of its historical setting. Thus he provided a context that lent a greater depth of meaning to our understanding of the Book of Mormon. What these articles do is return to an almost exclusive examination of the text only, separate from the rich cultural background found in *An Ancient American Setting.* This real-world interpretive context is certainly not completely absent from these articles, but by comparison to the greater detail in that watershed book, these articles serve as an appetizer to a main course that is yet to be served. Nevertheless, the cultural context of the Book of Mormon would be significantly less well understood without these important studies.

"The Composition of Lehi's Family"

Originally published in the 1990 FARMS publication *By Study and Also by Faith,*[3] this essay concentrates on the named individuals in Lehi's extended family group who left Jerusalem. Sorenson examines the people mentioned in the group to determine what we can learn from the text about each one. In particular, he is attentive to the relative ages of the members of the group. For many readers, the value of the article will be the humanizing effect of seeing this important family in light of their real-world conditions and their spiritual struggles. For historians of the Book of Mormon, part of the value

2. For instance, a Cakchiquel myth fits the description very closely, but the Cakchiquel are not considered Mexican—see Francisco Hernández Arata Xajilá and Francisco Díaz Gebuta Quej, *Annals of the Cakchiquels,* trans. Adrián Recinos and Delia Goetz (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1974), 45–46.

3. "The Composition of Lehi's Family," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley,* ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:174–96.

comes from the estimated size of the original colonizing group, a number that necessarily forms the basis of population expectations for this group settling in the New World.

Sorenson's work on the relative ages of the children also provides information on the probable ages of the family members as they arrive in the New World. While this is mostly a point of interest, it becomes much more crucial in working with Book of Mormon chronology. One of the most difficult chronological issues in the Book of Mormon concerns Enos, who nears the end of his life 179 years after the departure from Jerusalem (see Enos 1:25). Into that 179 years we must fit the life of Enos and the life of his father, Jacob. Either we have only two people spanning 179 years, or we must posit a missing generation in which Jacob the father of Enos was Jacob the son of Jacob, or perhaps Enos the son of Jacob was the father of Jacob the father of Enos. Each of these suggestions would be a difficult situation to justify, though either is possible. To make the numbers work at all, the most favorable scenario would be to have Jacob, and his younger brother, Joseph, as young as possible prior to the voyage across the ocean (allowing us to shave up to 8 years from the 179 since they were born during the family's sojourn in the wilderness, not by the time the party left Jerusalem). While Sorenson does not address this particular issue, his relative dating of Jacob and Joseph is directly relevant to the question, as will be seen when those two sons are discussed below.

Sariah

Sariah becomes the crucial focus of the essay as the mother of sons and daughters ("sisters" in the plural are mentioned in 2 Nephi 5:6). The minimum number of births for Sariah would be eight. Sorenson observes:

> In the case of Sariah, numerous questions arise about her birth history. This is so because two sets of facts press credibility toward two limits when they are compared: (1) on the one hand, the oldest four sons were all of marriageable

age at the time of the family's departure from Jerusalem. Given Nephi's apparent age the eldest, Laman, could not plausibly be less than twenty-two or twenty-three as the story begins; yet, (2) Jacob and Joseph were born "in the wilderness," and the probable timing would make Joseph approximately twenty-four to twenty-eight years younger than Laman. For one woman to have had such a long birth career is sufficiently unlikely that we should examine whether Sariah was the sole mother of all Lehi's mentioned offspring. (p. 7)

Sorenson does conclude that Sariah is the logical mother of all the children, but we are left with a birth history that pushes the limits of typical modern-day biology. Once again, a key to this issue is the birth of Jacob and Joseph in the wilderness.

Jacob and Joseph

Sorenson suggests that Jacob was born in the first year in the wilderness and that Joseph was born two years thereafter (see p. 11). Having Jacob born this early in the wilderness increases the time span that must be accommodated between Jacob and Enos (though with that number of years, a few years here or there are still on the outside of typical life spans for any age, let alone the ancient world). One possibility that Sorenson does not consider is that they could have been twins—that may allow for Jacob to be born later and may diminish some of the other chronological questions that he raises about the two (such as their ages at the time of the ocean crossing).

No direct evidence exists for this hypothesis, but some details suggest this is more than simple wishful thinking. The line of evidence lies in the nature of the names and the fact that we know that Jacob precedes Joseph. Both of these sons were born after the retrieval of the brass plates from Jerusalem. It is important to remember the value of these plates to Lehi:

And it came to pass that my father, Lehi, also found upon the plates of brass a genealogy of his fathers; wherefore he knew that he was a descendant of Joseph; yea, even that

Joseph who was the son of Jacob, who was sold into Egypt, and who was preserved by the hand of the Lord, that he might preserve his father, Jacob, and all his household from perishing with famine. And they were also led out of captivity and out of the land of Egypt, by that same God who had preserved them. And thus my father, Lehi, did discover the genealogy of his fathers. And Laban also was a descendant of Joseph, wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records. And now when my father saw all these things, he was filled with the Spirit, and began to prophesy concerning his seed. (1 Nephi 5:14–17)

Clearly, the discovery of Lehi's ancestry was a transcendent event for him. In the course of discovering his roots, Lehi was also inspired to prophesy about his progeny. In this event, past and future became tied together, and the impression of his lineage must have been indelibly pressed into Lehi's consciousness.

When Lehi had sons born after the plates were in his possession, it was no surprise that he would name those sons Jacob and Joseph for the two important names in his lineage. I suggest that the order in which the names are given is important. Of course, had they been born a year or two apart Lehi might still have used the names in that order, but I propose that the promises made through the lineage of Joseph were so strong that Lehi would have used that name first *unless* he knew that another son could receive that name. In other words, we would expect *Joseph* to be the most important name and that *Jacob* would be second. Given Lehi's age and circumstances, this is best answered if the two were twins, since it would not be assured that he would have any more children, let alone that any future child would be male.

"The 'Brass Plates' and Biblical Scholarship"

This essay originally appeared in *Dialogue* in 1977[4] and has also been available as a FARMS reprint. It seeks mainly to apply some of

4. "The 'Brass Plates' and Biblical Scholarship," *Dialogue* 10/4 (1977): 31–39.

the work done on the documentary hypothesis of the Bible to an examination of the nature of the brass plates. Sorenson prefaces this discussion with an overview of the controversy surrounding the documentary hypothesis but cites John Bright as authority for the article's presumption that, notwithstanding the controversy, certain blocks of material can be identified as source material in the Old Testament (see p. 27). These blocks of material are conventionally identified by a letter in scholarly discussions, and each represents a particular type of tradition, with some defining characteristics. These traditions include the "J" (Jehovah, or Yahweh tradition, emphasizing the name Jehovah); the "E" (Elohim, emphasizing the name Elohim), "P" (Priestly, emphasizing "a God distant from the lives and immediate concerns of men"); and "D" (Deuteronomist tradition, emphasizing the Deuteronomic law) (see p. 26).

Two important aspects of the brass plates are identified. First, from the evidence of the language used in passages cited from these plates, that text appears to fall into the "E" tradition. This assignment to a biblical tradition becomes more important when geographic sources are associated with textual traditions. The history of Israel was naturally altered by the separation into northern and southern kingdoms. The Masoretic text is typically associated with the southern kingdom, and the "E" source "was fundamentally a Northern Kingdom expression" (p. 31). This analysis would create a separate provenance for the brass plates and set the stage for variations in them not available in the tradition flowing from the southern kingdom. Most immediately, this allows for an explanation for the presence of the writings of Zenos and Zenock in the brass plates but their absence in the tradition from the Septuagint and the Masoretic text.

The importance of this analysis for understanding the brass plates should not be underestimated. A separate provenance may help us understand the Egyptian connections and the familial guardianship of this text while in the Jerusalem of the southern kingdom. However, this understanding also comes with a price. It opens a door that cannot be capriciously closed. If the documentary hypothesis can be used to support the nature of the brass plates, the techniques and assumptions of that hypothesis cannot be entirely rejected when

applied to other textual matters. Latter-day Saint scholars cannot accept portions of the documentary hypothesis when it is useful for the brass plates but then completely reject the documentary hypothesis when it is applied to other texts. Of course there is still legitimate room to apply the methodology critically, but, once accepted, it can no longer be casually dismissed in all other situations.

"Transoceanic Crossings"

This article first appeared in 1988 in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*[5] and consists of two parts: a general framework of questions to be asked of an ancient sea voyage and the application of those framework questions specifically to Lehi's voyage. The framework provides the organizational structure of the specific example and perhaps serves as a generic model for the investigation of ancient sea voyages. However, this section seems superfluous to the real intent of the article, which is the use of these issues to examine a specific voyage. Some slight rewriting could have removed that framework entirely and made the resulting article more immediately useful.

When Sorenson begins to apply the framework questions to the specific case of Lehi's voyage, he suggests that he will stick only to scriptural evidence (see pp. 46–47), but, fortunately for his readers, he finds himself unable to remain within those boundaries. As with most of the close reading done by Sorenson, his ability to call upon historical and anthropological literature allows him to fill in gaps in the scriptural record with possible explanations. As with many other subjects, he is thus able to discuss in detail things that scriptural authors (here Nephi) gloss over.

This article does not deal with the historical plausibility of the transoceanic journey. Sorenson and Martin Raish's subsequent separately published massive bibliography expands on that theme for

5. "Transoceanic Crossings," in *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, the Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 251–70.

those who are truly interested.[6] This article instead discusses what might be surmised about a single voyage, that of Lehi and his family.

Since this article is based on a brief scriptural text, large sections of the analysis address questions raised by the text rather than by analyzing the text directly. This approach is certainly made necessary by the sparse scriptural evidence, and it creates an illuminating picture. Nevertheless, the point is not to prove anything in the Book of Mormon but to provide a human perspective to the scriptural story. Most important is Sorenson's explanation of the significance of stopping places (see pp. 55–56); his discussion highlights numerous things that have been left out of the historical report of the Book of Mormon, an omission that is not so much surprising as it is frustrating to the historian.

"When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?"

This 1992 article attempts to deal with one of the most frequently asked and most important questions about the historical context of the Book of Mormon: Why is the Book of Mormon silent about everyone but the Lamanites and the Nephites?[7] In fact, the text does refer to "others" but does so indirectly.

In keeping with the tenor of the articles in this collection, Sorenson concentrates on the internal evidence. However, it is in this article that the limitations of this approach are most evident. Assuming it is a necessary step to turn to the text first, Sorenson presents textual examples in which an oddity is best explained by assuming the presence of others in the land. Logically, what the approach misses in terms of direct reference is supplied by assumption. The Book of Mormon is presumed to be an accurate ancient record, and

6. John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, eds., *Pre-Columbian Contacts with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 vols., 2nd rev. ed. (Provo, Utah: Research Press, 1996).

7. "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 1–34.

therefore anomalies in the text should be seen in the light of the most reasonable solution.

It should be reiterated that proving the Book of Mormon is not Sorenson's goal with this book. Thus it is not a criticism to say that Sorenson does not create an argument that is compellingly probative. However, the artifice of accepting the evidence of the text while diminishing or ignoring the external context narrows the evidence that might be brought to bear on the question. The focus on internal textual evidence alone rather than investigating external evidence as well seems to me less powerful than a cultural-to-textual analysis of the same premise.

Sorenson begins his analysis with the internal problem of population growth. He suggests that both the Nephites and the Lamanites increase in population at a much greater rate than might be expected from typical ancient demographics. In spite of the fact that he certainly understands the archaeological and linguistic research showing clear evidence of peoples in virtually all parts of the Americas (as he notes on p. 72), he neglects to use the specific archaeological information for Mesoamerica (where he places the Book of Mormon) to bolster this argument. We are left with what appears to be an all-too-rapid increase in population without the concomitant evidence that a ready population was near and available to them when they arrived. Once again, I should clarify that this omission occurs not because Sorenson does not have access to this information but rather because his explicitly stated mode of analysis led him to exclude it.

Since his avowed interest is in the internal evidences for the "others," it is perhaps understandable that he applies this method, but it does slow down the logical creation of the argument for the presence of others in Book of Mormon lands. The archaeological reality is such that it is more probable that the Lehite party would have encountered others than it is that they could have remained isolated. The nature of the parties they might have met could also provide a rationale behind the merger of those populations into the Lehite population rather than the merger and absorption of the Lehites into those communities.

In Mesoamerican archaeological chronologies, the time frame for the arrival of the Lehites is the Middle Preclassic, or the Middle Formative. Particularly important for our view of the social environment of the early Lehites are the coastal areas where the party would have landed. In this context, it should be pointed out that in the Middle Formative period an abundance of population centers dotted the coastal regions of Mesoamerica. Most important, however, is the size of those units: "Villages were not necessarily larger, but simply more numerous."[8]

The fact that the villages were numerous suggests a greater challenge for the Lehites to have landed and found an area in which they would be completely alone. The probability that they encountered other people soon after their landing is very close to one hundred percent, based on archaeological evidence alone. Finding such people would answer the question of where the "others" came from—they were already there. The next question involves the direction of assimilation. This requires an examination of the size of the villages.

Joyce Marcus examined the population sizes of several Mesoamerican regions and classified them by size. Her only data for the Guatemalan coast comes from the time period of 1350–850 B.C., which is sufficiently earlier than Book of Mormon times to suggest that populations might have been higher when the Lehites arrived. At that early point, she surveyed seven sites and found them ranging from a single household (which might have multiple family members) to perhaps twelve households.[9]

Data for a different region but closer to the appropriate time range (850–550 B.C.) provided a sampling of 26 sites in the Valley of Mexico (the extreme northern end of Sorenson's Book of Mormon geographic model—but likely a reasonable comparison for sizes of population to the Book of Mormon area). These sites range from hamlet (10–75 households) to village (90–300 households) to a single site

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8. Muriel P. Weaver, *The Aztecs, Maya, and Their Predecessors: Archaeology of Mesoamerica* (New York: Seminar Press, 1972), 44.

9. Joyce Marcus, "The Size of the Early Mesoamerican Village," in *The Early Mesoamerican Village*, ed. Kent V. Flannery (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 85.

with 600–1200 households. Of the 26 sites, 22 were in the hamlet range of a population of 10–75 households.[10]

Depending on the accuracy of the use of the term *village* for the description of the coastal areas as indicated above, these data suggest that when the Lehites arrived in the New World, they could have found multiple population sites ranging from 10 households on the smaller level to perhaps 300 at the larger end, with the smaller populations predominating. This population density is important because it can tell us something of the probable type of "others" who would have joined with the Lehites, and perhaps their reasons for doing so.

We can probably discount assimilation by the Lehites of the larger communities of up to 300 households. Considering that each household might contain more than one nuclear family, we could estimate the populations of these locations to be from two to four times greater than the household numbers. For instance, the Lehites entered with perhaps eight or nine households at the maximum— and that assumes a single family per household site. With the great disparity of numbers, one would expect not only that the weight of numbers would encourage integration into the existing village, but that the existing political and social structures would be much more difficult to abandon in a larger village.

This suggests that the probable unit that the Lehites encountered and assimilated would have been one or two of the smaller hamlets, say with no more than 20 households. Smaller hamlets would have fewer people, and that corresponds to less social and political stratification and therefore fewer factors inhibiting their joining with the Lehites. The question now, of course, is of what advantage it would be to the small hamlet to join with the Lehites.

It is probable that the first contact would have been on a level at which the groups did not join permanently, but perhaps a friendly hamlet extended hospitality to the newly arrived people with strange customs. After some time together, residents of the hamlet would have found that the newcomers had enviable skills. The Lehites had come from a much more complex society (for all that the hamlet

10. Ibid., 80–81.

might have been tangentially attached to a larger center, they would not have had the benefits of that center localized in the hamlet). The newcomers also worked with metal, an expertise that would be desirable (Nephi works metal to make tools for their vessel—see 1 Nephi 17:8–11, 16—and to fabricate the plates on which he engraves his record—see 1 Nephi 19:1; 2 Nephi 5:28–30).

On the other hand, the Lehites would have welcomed a friendly hamlet and would have found tremendous benefit in associating with natives of the land. The new land offered new challenges and, for a people who were required to make many of their own personal goods, knowing where to find game, where and how one might cultivate, and where to find appropriate raw materials for such things as pottery and clothing would be invaluable information that would save the Lehites a tremendous amount of time and effort.

Does the text lend any credence to the idea that "others" had come into the Lehite colony this early? Nothing points definitively to that conclusion, but on at least one occasion (in 2 Nephi 5:6) the most plausible explanation rests squarely on the presence of "others." Nephi describes the flight of his family and of those who would follow him from the machinations of Laman and Lemuel:

> And it came to pass that the Lord did warn me, that I, Nephi, should depart from them and flee into the wilderness, and all those who would go with me. Wherefore, it came to pass that I, Nephi, did take my family, and also Zoram and his family, and Sam, mine elder brother and his family, and Jacob and Joseph, my younger brethren, and also my sisters, and all those who would go with me. And all those who would go with me were those who believed in the warnings and the revelations of God; wherefore, they did hearken unto my words. And we did take our tents and whatsoever things were possible for us, and did journey in the wilderness for the space of many days. (2 Nephi 5:5–7)

The identity of "all those who would go" with Nephi rests on those who are specifically named and the probable division of Lehi's clan. Not specified among Nephi's followers are the children of

Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael, thereby leading us to assume that they remained behind. A comparison of Lehi's final counsel to the sons and daughters of Laman and Lemuel (see 2 Nephi 4:3–9) with his words to the seed of Sam (see v. 11) makes the loyalties of the children of Laman and Lemuel to their fathers appear obvious. Previous alliances of the sons of Ishmael to Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 16:37; 2 Nephi 1:28), as well as their behavior immediately following Lehi's death (see 2 Nephi 4:13), suggest that they were not inclined to follow Nephi. It is rather unlikely that any of the wives chose to split into a clan separate from their husbands, and indeed the Book of Mormon indicates the early preferences of the wives of Laman and Lemuel (see 1 Nephi 7:6; 18:9) and Nephi (see v. 19), although their individual alliances at this time of division are not specifically mentioned. When we account for the named or mentioned persons and those likely to remain behind, very little room remains for "others" from the original Lehites. In fact, using individuals mentioned in the text and their logical progeny, we can account for everyone. Regardless of how the group split up, however, if "all those who would go" were only one or two people we would expect that Nephi might make mention of them, at least by their head of household, as he does for the families of Zoram, Sam, Jacob, and Joseph.

The best hypothesis, then, to explain Nephi's mention of "all those who would go" is that he referred to those of the hamlet or hamlets who had joined with the Lehites and who, in recognition of the greater social and technological sophistication of the newcomers, had permitted them to occupy roles of leadership over their hamlet in exchange for the new knowledge or goods they brought with them (in addition to the gathering power of religious conversion; see 2 Nephi 5:6). Indeed, Nephi's descriptions of "his people" begin very early to have the appearance of referring to more than the named individuals, if only in the characterizations of the activities mentioned, activities that, from Sorenson's internal perspective, would indicate a larger population.

Against this backdrop of the probable presence of others, we may better measure the types of internal evidence Sorenson accumulates, as well as add other items that continue to build the picture. The result-

ing view of the Book of Mormon makes complete social, political, re-
ligious, and economic sense when we understand this early inclusion
of "others" in places where the Book of Mormon would otherwise re-
main enigmatic.

One such enigma concerns the appearance of Sherem. Sorenson's
method of reading the text closely highlights an aspect of this en-
counter that has gone unnoticed since the publication of the Book of
Mormon. If there were no "others" present, the description of the ap-
pearance of Sherem among the Nephites would make no sense what-
soever. Jacob records Sherem's self-introduction: "And it came to pass
that he came unto me, and on this wise did he speak unto me, saying:
Brother Jacob, I have sought much opportunity that I might speak
unto you; for I have heard and also know that thou goest about
much, preaching that which ye call the gospel, or the doctrine of
Christ" (Jacob 7:6).

Both from Sherem's words and the way Jacob describes the en-
counter, we have an impression that Sherem and Jacob had never
met before. As Sorenson insightfully points out, the population size
of the village of Nephi if there were no "others" present would have
been so small as to make it impossible that Sherem could not have
known Jacob (see p. 68). With the clear enmity between lineal Ne-
phites and Lamanites at this early period, it is unlikely that Sherem
was a Lamanite born after the separation of the two colonies, yet that
would be the only other possibility if we do not factor "others" into
the equation.

Similar to the economic argument above for the intermingling of
the Lehites with residents of the area, Sorenson points out that the
Nephites list corn as one of their staples, a food that requires human
intervention to grow (see p. 69). The Nephites would certainly have
learned this technique from others since they did not bring corn with
them from the Old World.

An analogous case that Sorenson fails to mention is the problem
of wealth among the early Nephites. Jacob informs us:

> And now behold, my brethren, this is the word which I
> declare unto you, that many of you have begun to search for

> gold, and for silver, and for all manner of precious ores, in the which this land, which is a land of promise unto you and to your seed, doth abound most plentifully. And the hand of providence hath smiled upon you most pleasingly, that you have obtained many riches; and because some of you have obtained more abundantly than that of your brethren ye are lifted up in the pride of your hearts, and wear stiff necks and high heads because of the costliness of your apparel, and persecute your brethren because ye suppose that ye are better than they. (Jacob 2:12–13)

These verses give the appearance of a direct relationship between gold and silver and the wealth that they have obtained. This makes sense to a culture raised on the Western notions of intrinsic value in the metals, but in the context of an early Nephite culture both of these verses are nonsense unless others are in the land.

Verse 12 discloses that gold and silver (and "all manner of precious ores") are plentiful in the land. The very fact that they are plentiful is a direct dismissal of their economic value. Value is a relative term, and nothing that is plentiful—no matter what it is—makes one wealthy if one's neighbor has an equal amount of it. In the case of gold and silver, we assume that the metals are valuable because they can purchase things. If we think of an early Nephite population isolated from all other populations, what could gold or silver "buy"? In a barter world, where the necessities of food and shelter are paramount, piling up gold and silver rocks in the back of one's home doesn't lead to wealth but to time taken from more productive and important chores. You cannot trade gold for food if everyone has gold. It has no exchange value.

Jacob 2:13 indicates even more clearly that others must have been present and that the Nephites had active commerce with them. A result of the "wealth" of the Nephites is that they begin to wear costly apparel. Again our modern sensibilities trick us into an assumption that this would be logical. However, if no others are present and the Nephites are isolated as a small group, how does one obtain costly apparel? In a society without stores, in which everyone

must make his or her own clothing from the locally available fibers and dyes, where would "costly apparel" come from? If all members of the society have access to the same materials and dyes, they simply copy the style—they do not have anything that anyone else does not have, and they certainly do not "purchase" it to render it costly. They make it. These two verses describing the economic conditions of this early Nephite society make sense only if the Nephites are a larger population and are trading goods with other communities.

Another of Sorenson's indications of the presence of "others" relies on an understanding of language change; most readers of the Book of Mormon would be unaware of these issues. Our Sunday School lessons certainly point out that the Mulekites had lost their language, but what those lessons do not explain is that this would have been rather unlikely. Languages do change, but they are not "lost" without the outside influence of another language that becomes more dominant and replaces the lost language. Sorenson does not miss this bit of information but indicates that the study of historical linguistics has revealed a basic rate of change for the same language that develops in two independent locations in which the two populations are unable to communicate (see p. 83). The rate of change from the time of the departure from the Old World for either the Mulekites or Nephites to the time of the arrival of Mosiah and his people in Zarahemla is insufficient to create mutually unintelligible languages, as is clearly the case in the Book of Mormon. Once again, we have a feature of the Book of Mormon that could not represent society accurately unless we understand that "others" were present and interacted with the Book of Mormon populations.

"The 'Mulekites'"

This article is an excellent background piece on the origin of the "Mulekites."[11] Modern Latter-day Saints are familiar with the term *Mulekites* even though it is never used in the Book of Mormon to describe the people who descended from Mulek. In the Book of Mormon,

11. "The 'Mulekites,'" *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 6–22.

those people are consistently described as the "people of Zarahemla." Sorenson does not explicitly provide a reason for this designation, but he describes the people of Zarahemla (the man) as a recently created group that formed around Zarahemla's leadership (see p. 117). This new group would naturally mark Zarahemla as both their leader and the creator of their new lineage of rulers. Thus the "break" with the line of Mulek is natural in the Book of Mormon. For political accuracy, it would be better if Latter-day Saint authors were as careful as Sorenson in discussing the Zarahemlaites (rather than talking about the Mulekites) since a historical point of separation seems to occur between the descendants of Mulek in general and the people of Zarahemla specifically.

Sorenson proposes in this article to return to origins, however, and he begins with background on the reign of Zedekiah, the father of Mulek, according to the Book of Mormon. He observes that while we are most familiar with the spelling "Mulek," it was spelled "Muloch" in the printer's manuscript and "Mulok" in the printed editions of the Book of Mormon from 1830 to 1852. These variations suggest to Sorenson a Hebrew root *MLK, meaning "king," that generates the name (see p. 108). While Zedekiah's sons are never clearly named, our "Mulek" might be mentioned in the Bible in Jeremiah 38:6 as "Malkiyahu, the son of the king" (based on a different rendition of the Hebrew). However, Sorenson cautions that this evidence is not conclusive.

Sorenson discusses the probable history of the Mulekites from the time of their arrival in the New World until the discovery of the people of Zarahemla by Mosiah$_1$. This is perhaps the most critical part of the discussion because it lays the foundations for the later contentions in the land of Zarahemla. Sorenson explains that the probable enculturation of the Mulekites into the customs of the New World would have been the basis for conflict between the Zarahemlaites and the people of Mosiah. Indeed, dissensions in Zarahemla occur early in the reign of Benjamin (son of Mosiah$_1$; see Words of Mormon 1:15–18). Sorenson seems to be on the right track when he says that "it is plausible that later 'contentions' and 'dissensions' in Nephite society were in part led by unhappy descendants of Zara-

hemla who considered that they were not given their due when Mosiah became king" (p. 120). More than simple envy of rulership, however, the principal contentions were more fundamental and dealt with an entire way of life.

Sorenson develops this more fundamental issue as well: "The initial political amalgamation reported in Omni seemingly did not lead to genuine cultural integration but masked a diversity in lifeways that sometimes came forth as conflict in beliefs and behavior. Non-Nephite ways seem to have kept bubbling up from beneath the ideal social and cultural surface depicted by the Nephite elite record keepers. After all, the descendants of the people of Zarahemla probably always constituted a majority of 'the folk' ('the people of the Nephites' in the record?)" (p. 121). This difference in the fundamental approach to lifeways is critical to understanding the development and resolutions to the contentions seen in the book of Alma.

The article on the Mulekites is an important piece of the puzzle of Book of Mormon history. While the Old World connections to Book of Mormon historicity are interesting, the developments in the New World are critical for Book of Mormon history. An important distinction exists between questions of historicity and history: the former discusses authenticity, the latter the temporal events. Comprehending the cultural history of the people of Zarahemla prior to the merger with Mosiah$_1$'s Nephites is critical to understanding all Book of Mormon history after that point and up to the appearance of Christ in the Americas, an event which arguably changed some of the particular dynamics of the Book of Mormon story.

"The Settlements of Book of Mormon Peoples"

Here, Sorenson attempts to create a typology of settlement patterns among Book of Mormon peoples.[12] As much as any other, this paper demonstrates the attention to detail that characterizes Sorenson but that most analysts of the Book of Mormon lack. This typology is important for creating a picture of the Nephite worldview. For those who are interested in issues of historicity relating to the Book of

12.   This previously unpublished paper took its final form in December 1996.

Mormon, Sorenson's arcane discussion is nevertheless important, and his clarification of the internal system may be compared to a similar typology of Joseph Smith's world. As usual, the differences are striking.

The following is Sorenson's typology, including my own quick comments:

Earth as a Whole

In this model the earth is part of the solar system. While it is an important overall conception, this idea plays only a modest role in the historical development of Nephite culture.

Promised Land as a Unit

This concept of the "promised land" must be based primarily on internal evidence because it is an area in which modern definitions may not reflect ancient realities. Sorenson carefully analyzes the comments about the "land of promise" in internal references and concludes that they conform to the overall bounds of the geography inhabited by the Nephites. This is quite important for modern interpreters of the Book of Mormon who see North America as the "promised land." If we follow Sorenson's geographic correlation of the Book of Mormon to a Mesoamerican location, the conceptual limitation of the land of promise in the text would preclude North America as being directly referred to as this land. When the "other nations" come to "take away from them the lands of their possessions" (2 Nephi 1:11), this would refer to a limited geographic area and not the whole of the Americas (see p. 134). While the Western history of conquest is most readily brought to mind, multiple fulfillments of this prophecy took place within the limited land itself, long before the arrival of the intruders from over the sea.

Land Southward and Land Northward

This major distinction in the Book of Mormon generally delineates the relationship of land to the narrow neck of land and is also a

general division for the land of Lehi as opposed to the land of later Book of Mormon Nephites.

Extended Lands, or Realms

Sorenson describes this as an implicit rather than an explicit category. The Book of Mormon clearly indicates that, at a point of greater population, Zarahemla was both a specific city and a general designation of lands attached to that city. Thus the concept of a named location might indicate both the ruling location as well as the lands ruled. In the case of Zarahemla, this extension of the realm eventually led not only to governance of farmland but other named cities or villages. While the idea of a "realm" is not explicitly mentioned in the text, it clearly allows us, for instance, to understand the relationship of Zarahemla to Gideon, Alma's first stop on his missionary tour early in the book of Alma (see Alma 6:7–8:1).

Quarters of the Land

"Quarter of the land" refers to a general division that conceptually separates areas of the land into quarters based on the east-west and north-south axes. Although the particular directions might not correlate to modern ones, Sorenson neglects to pursue such a real-world correlation. While he does observe that the notion of quarters might be inherited from the Old World (see p. 137), he neglects to mention the importance of a fourfold division of the world in Mesoamerican thought. The conceptual quarters of the land in no way constitute a proof that the Book of Mormon did take place in Mesoamerica, but this notion fits easily into the prevailing worldview of that time period.

Sorenson declares that "the quarters were thought of as peripheral units surrounding a 'heart' land consisting of the zone around the city of Zarahemla. There in 'the center' was where the political headquarters resided" (p. 137). Since he is certainly familiar with the Mesoamerican concept of four quarters and a center (five world directions, rather than just four), it is probable that the particular

wording of this sentence is at the very least a subconscious link to the Mesoamerican world concept.

Local Land

The idea of "local land" needs to be more clearly distinguished from that of "extended lands." A local land is the area dependent on a single central city, while "extended lands" would be subject to the political influence of a central city location that included other specific cities with their appended "local lands." Sorenson suggests a probable radius for these attached lands of 15 to 20 miles (see p. 139).

Cities and Their Domains

Terminologies for types of collectives are important to scholars but not necessarily to the layman. In the case of the Book of Mormon it is legitimate to wonder if distinctions in terminologies reflect real categories or simply literary differences. For Sorenson, though, the various types of cities reflect real categories that appear to have a distinct meaning in the Book of Mormon. He suggests that the three types of cities are an administrative center for a local land, a city without any dependent land, and a "great city."

The definition of *city* in the ancient world does not correlate to our modern concept of cities. The ancient world did not have the large populations that we deal with today, and major ancient cities could be much smaller than modern cities. What is important for the ancient definition of *city* was the function. Sorenson remarks: "Also apparent in statements in the *Book of Mormon* is the fact that certain cities took on that status from the very moment of their founding. Such instant cities must have been given that title because of their intended function, and perhaps because of their initial, ambitious site plan, not because of the size of their populations" (p. 143).

This functional definition of a city is important to the Book of Mormon and would contrast with the more population-based model with which Joseph Smith would have been familiar on the New York frontier lands. In his discussion of Old World classifications, Soren-

son frequently identifies "cities" as locations with fortifications, regardless of size (see pp. 140–41). The terminology for cities in the Book of Mormon clearly corresponds much more closely with this definition of intended function than it does with a population- or importance-based definition.

Town

Towns are only mentioned late in the Book of Mormon (see p. 145). Even though they are not mentioned earlier, it is not improbable that such a designation would have existed at an earlier time. The distinction between a town and a city, though probably dependent on population and centralized governance, is not clearly described. This distinction, however, likely existed before the late mentions in the text.

Village

The Book of Mormon mentions only one named village but refers consistently to villages. The notions of *town, village,* and *small village* (the next category) appear to have been present but not of great interest to the record keepers of the Book of Mormon. This is a fairly logical result of the record keepers being city or "great city" based and therefore more interested in the greater affairs of state than the events of smaller locations (see p. 145).

Small Village

Sorenson suggests that "small villages" might match the more modern term of *hamlets.* This connection is important for purposes of reading and understanding modern archaeological literature. Once again, the category may have been real to the writers of the Book of Mormon but is rarely mentioned. This lack of attention probably results from the interest of the writers in the affairs of the centralized government of the Nephites rather than in the particulars of life in the smaller villages.

Wilderness vs. Civilized

This discussion of the notions of "wilderness" and "civilized" is important for understanding the nature of geography in the Book of Mormon. If we try to impose a modern definition of *wilderness* on the Book of Mormon, we might picture a particular type of terrain. However, the wilderness terrain in the Book of Mormon might be dramatically different from our modern vision. Sorenson suggests that the essential definition for the Book of Mormon *wilderness* was keyed not to a terrain but rather to a comparable concept that meant "not civilized/settled" and thereby explains a great deal more of the relationship of the people to their geography. Thus wilderness does not always remain wilderness but may be transformed as it is settled (see the discussion of Helaman 3:23 on p. 146).

Hierarchy of Settlements

While not a typology of settlements, this section discusses important concepts about the complex interrelationships of communities. Earlier, Sorenson described an extended realm, inside of which were different cities. What was the relationship among those cities?

The text of the Book of Mormon depicts Zarahemla as the top-ranking city of a group of settlements. Sorenson provides the example of Korihor, who is taken to Gideon (presumably from a village) and presented to authorities. This implies a governance relationship between Gideon and the unmentioned village. When the judges in Gideon are unable to come to a conclusion, they take Korihor to Zarahemla, clearly indicating that Zarahemla has a governance relationship to Gideon (see pp. 148–49). Sorenson demonstrates that archaeologists perceive differences in architectural complexity among these hierarchically ranked locations. This is useful information for those who wish to read the archaeological data for communities in this time period, but Sorenson does not present the research for us, and most readers of this article will decline to do it for themselves.

Students of the Book of Mormon should realize that this dependence on a hierarchical relationship among cities pertaining to a

central location is very clearly the pattern of Mesoamerican city building. A defining government is not linked to a county, state, or federal government, any of which might have been logical models for Joseph Smith. The pattern is clearly city-dependent, and the Book of Mormon will even place dependent "kings" in cities subservient to a higher "king." This matches the Mesoamerican model but certainly not that of Joseph's Smith's time (or historical acquaintance).

"Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica"

This article, previously published in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*,[13] is valuable as a part of this collection not only for its wider accessibility but also for its postscript (see pp. 172–75), in which Sorenson informs us that some of the dating correlations should be changed on the basis of updated research on Nephite calendrical systems. This article also breaks from the conceptual mold of most of the articles and does make specific correlations to a Mesoamerican context. That context powerfully enhances the information from the text and only serves to highlight this missing piece from other articles.

The article specifies that ancient warfare is directly related to the availability of manpower and the weather. The Aztec military is the best documented from ancient America, and while it appears much later than Book of Mormon events, its world was not much different from that which existed in the Book of Mormon. Ross Hassig describes this later and very important military organization:

> Political provocations could occur at any time, but Mesoamerican city-states did not always react to them immediately, because they could not mount effective military campaigns year round. Two factors influenced the timing of campaigns: the agricultural cycle and the rain cycle.

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13. "Seasonality of Warfare in the Book of Mormon and in Mesoamerica," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990).

Since the army was largely composed of commoners who were agriculturalists, the availability of soldiers was determined by cultivation and harvest schedules. In the central highlands planting was done in the spring (usually beginning in late April or May), and harvesting, in the late summer or fall (as late as October or early November). Thus throughout the summer and early autumn the men needed for a major campaign were occupied in activities vital both to themselves and to the society as a whole. Moreover, this seasonal cycle also affected the supplies needed to mount a campaign. Grain was stored for use throughout the year, but the greatest surplus was available in the autumn just after harvest. As a result an army was best able to gather supplies for a campaign in the late autumn and winter.

The second event affecting the Aztec campaigns was the rainy season. Central Mexico's climatic cycle involves a dry season, stretching from around late September through mid May, followed by a rainy season through the summer. This pattern not only regulated the agricultural season but also affected the feasibility of moving large numbers of men and supplies. Such movements were significantly easier during the dry season, in terms of both the soldiers' physical comfort and the quality of the roads. Dirt roads used by large numbers of men during the rainy season (and for some time thereafter) quickly turned into quagmires. And streams that could be forded during the dry season often became swollen, impassable rivers during the rains.[14]

Sorenson examines the timing of military campaigns in the Book of Mormon to determine when they were held and whether those times corresponded to agricultural and seasonal cycles. He analyzes the timing of Book of Mormon conflicts according to the months in which they are listed. He then correlates a numbered month (such as

14. Ross Hassig, *Aztec Warfare: Imperial Expansion and Political Control* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988), 53.

the "tenth month") to a calendar of named months. He gives his suggestion on pages 167–68, though remarking in the postscript that he would amend these correlations.

The resulting correlation of military campaigns to time of year does suggest that the military campaigns follow the agricultural and climatic cycles of the area in which the Book of Mormon likely occurred—that is, Mesoamerica. Rather than correlate his timing to the Central Mexican calendar that was cited above, he uses the patterns of the Maya area, which are more appropriate to the proposed Book of Mormon climate.

One of the important side issues developed in this discussion of the seasonality of warfare is the comparison of the Mesoamerican model for the Book of Mormon to proposed models in the northeastern United States. In precisely the time periods when the greatest number of military actions would be occurring in the Book of Mormon, the Northeast has the climate least conducive to military campaigns. If a rainy season deterred the Aztec army, one can only imagine the impact of lake effect snows on military campaigns in the Northeast. At the very least, such campaigns in the Northeast might follow the harvests but would scarcely be suited to the nearly naked Lamanites. Note the description of Lamanite warriors in Alma 3:5: "Now the heads of the Lamanites were shorn; and they were naked, save it were skin which was girded about their loins, and also their armor, which was girded about them, and their bows, and their arrows, and their stones, and their slings, and so forth."

"The Political Economy of the Nephites"

The final article in this collection is new and could suffice by itself as a reason to purchase the book. The title of "political economy," unfamiliar to most readers, may mask the importance of this discussion. Sorenson believes that the concepts of the allocation and structure of power and economics may be so different in the ancient world that it would be misleading to speak of "Nephite government" or "Nephite economy"—hence his use of "political economy" (p. 198). This distinction is relevant for the Book of Mormon, however, because

close analysis of both politics and economics in the Book of Mormon shows those concepts to be quite different from the meanings most modern readers would attach to them. The Book of Mormon reflects a very different way of looking at both political structures and economics, particularly the crucial interconnections between them.

Sorenson bases his discussion on three major conceptual theories. His dominant theory arises from political anthropology, a familiarity with a variety of political and economic organizations in populations across the world. The second is a connection to the Old World (see his discussion of kings on pp. 199–202), and the last is the internal description from the Book of Mormon.

Internal description makes the most significant contribution to the article, as it elucidates issues of political economy from an internal perspective. The only objection I have to the article is that it leans too heavily on Old World kingship and does not spend enough time examining the Mesoamerican context of the Nephite political economy. For instance, Sorenson suggests that Benjamin is contrasting himself to "run-of-the-mill rulers" with the contextual implication that these other rulers were dependent on the Old World model (see p. 202). Since any recollection of the Old World kings is dependent on a very small number of people who were subject to kings both of Israelite and of Babylonian investiture, and Benjamin appears over four hundred years later, the mention of other kings is unlikely to refer to those of the Old World. The most likely reference point for Benjamin is to other neighboring kings; in the Mesoamerican locale where Sorenson would place the Book of Mormon, evidence suggests kings with characteristics resembling those to which Benjamin contrasts himself.[15] While the internal digging to find the textual evi-

15. "I say unto you that as I have been suffered to spend my days in your service, even up to this time, and have not sought gold nor silver nor any manner of riches of you . . ." (Mosiah 2:12). In a Mesoamerican context, this is a clear reference to the social distinction of class that was determined by the accumulation of visual trappings of wealth by the elite, who were distinguished by their clothing: "People throughout Mesoamerica wore these currencies as jewelry and clothing to display the wealth and enterprise of their families." Linda Schele and Peter Mathews, *The Code of Kings: The Language of Seven Sacred Maya Temples and Tombs* (New York: Scribner, 1998), 19. It is very likely that this mode of wearing currencies on clothing is the meaning behind the prophetic disdain of "costly apparel" (Alma 1:6).

dence is an important first step, the second stage of comparing the text to its plausible Mesoamerican context is unfortunately missing in this article.

In spite of the lack of explicit connection to a Mesoamerican model, certainly that model is not far from Sorenson's consciousness as he develops his arguments. For instance, he writes that "the concept that formal ownership of (or at least possession of certain legal rights over) lands and other property lay in elite hands is evident in language used in the *Book of Mormon*" (p. 205). The two important distinctions here are the possible separation of ownership and possession, and the notion of a controlling elite. Both of these are directly relevant to a Mesoamerican context in which land ownership meant not a legal ownership of the property but rather a right to the production or yield from the lands. This subtle distinction is evident in the Book of Mormon, in which land is never "owned" in the modern sense. Neither titles nor deeds pass hands. The connection to land is more traditional, and the possessor receives rights to production rather than ownership of the land itself. This model contrasts with nineteenth-century land ownership in the United States.

The discussion of production rights avoids the more Mesoamerican term *tribute,* but the relationships of domination in the Book of Mormon very clearly follow this pattern. Not mentioned in

"Neither have I suffered that ye should be confined in dungeons, nor that ye should make slaves one of another, nor that ye should murder, or plunder, or steal, or commit adultery; nor even have I suffered that ye should commit any manner of wickedness, and have taught you that ye should keep the commandments of the Lord, in all things which he hath commanded you" (Mosiah 2:13). In a Mesoamerican context, we have each of these aspects as part of the catalog of possible events. A type of dungeon is known for the Maya, as is slavery. The plundering and stealing may be easily seen as a reference to conquest for tribute, which was a standard result of Maya warfare. The commission of adultery may be seen in connection with Mesoamerican polygyny (though a more complete analysis of Jacob in this context is required to sustain the connection).

"And even I, myself, have labored with mine own hands that I might serve you, and that ye should not be laden with taxes, and that there should nothing come upon you which was grievous to be borne—and of all these things which I have spoken, ye yourselves are witnesses this day" (Mosiah 2:14). The laboring with his own hands would be a direct contradiction to the way that the elite were supported in the areas with kings. Such kings in other lands would not have been supported by their own labor, but by the tribute labor of their own and conquered people.

the article is the nature of domination by conquest in the Book of Mormon, which is very different from that of nineteenth-century Western civilization models. In the latter case, conquest transferred ownership and political jurisdiction. In the Book of Mormon case, domination by a conqueror frequently does not replace local leadership but simply imposes a tribute on the city (for example, Limhi's people; see Mosiah 7:14–23; 19:15–16, 26–29). This is very much part of the Mesoamerican model of political interactions, which were clearly in the author's thoughts but unfortunately are not mentioned in this particular article.

Sorenson discusses the impact of trade and literacy on the Lamanites on pages 223–25. He suggests that this process rapidly increased their riches and worldly learning. My only objection to this analysis is that it is connected with an event rather late in the Book of Mormon. The importance of trade as an underlying substructure of Nephite and Lamanite culture must have preceded the Amulonites (see Mosiah 24:1–7). The conclusion that trade leads to wealth, and most important, to "worldly wisdom," is clearly correct. Trade connects societies and creates an exchange not only of goods but of concepts attached to those goods. In the Book of Mormon, this process likely begins very early and is the continuing mechanism by which cultural contentions are stirred and enflamed.

Early in the Book of Mormon, Jacob records that his people "began to search much gold and silver, and began to be lifted up somewhat in pride" (Jacob 1:16). This follows, of course, their instruction in working gold and silver, which was abundant in the land (see 2 Nephi 5:15). In the very early economy of this Nephite population, gold and silver could have had very little economic importance since their very abundance would decrease their value. Because Nephi taught his people to work the metals, even the worked metals might not have much intrinsic value if many had learned those skills. The only context in which an increased value of gold and silver as worked materials makes any sense in the Book of Mormon is early trade. The fairly rapid decline of pure Nephite ideals that Jacob decries, and the infusion of ideas clearly accepted by the early Nephites despite their condemnation by father Lehi (such as polygamy in Jacob 2:24–30;

3:5), further suggest an importation of ideas, which is the logical companion of trade. Indeed, it is quite probable that most of the continuing cultural crises of the Nephites throughout the Book of Mormon may have direct roots in the trading economy that linked them to outside ideas conflicting with their own Nephite religion.

Sorenson could also have elaborated on his view of the Nephite political economy in his discussion of the reign of the judges. According to Sorenson, "while in the modified system of rule under the judges the people are said to have 'cast in their voices' (Alma 2:6) to choose the judges who would 'rule' them, this would not have been anything like a 'one-man, one-vote' election but probably was an expression of preference by the senior males who led the various kin groups (lineages) who would have arrived at their decision by consultation within their groups and spoke for their unit" (p. 203). Sorenson does indicate that the conceptual separation of these judges from the previous king-system was not as severe a break as a modern reader might perceive (see p. 202), but he does not continue his analysis of the mechanism of the "voice of the people," leaving it only as the unsupported assertion that it would not be a "one-man, one-vote" election. He is undoubtedly correct in this assertion, and ample evidence in the Book of Mormon reveals that the voice of the people was a functioning mechanism under the kings as well as the judges and that it appears to have a confirmation function as much as, if not more than, a selective one. This understanding is important for the very clear distinction between the Book of Mormon ruling mechanisms and the presumption that the Book of Mormon supports nineteenth-century democracy. It does not. The mechanism is very different, and nothing like a democratic voting society is depicted in the Book of Mormon.

Once again, a likely Mesoamerican model could support much of Sorenson's analysis; however, he neglects to pursue that avenue for his own reasons. Maya cities frequently contain a building that is termed the *popol na* or community/mat house. The *mat* is a Maya symbol of ruling authority, and these *popol na* exist in cities that clearly have ruling kings. Apparently a body of counselors existed in Maya societies and functioned to advise the king and perhaps to exercise control

over him. According to the Popol Vuh (the great "Bible" of the Quiché people), this group of leaders appears to have functioned quite similarly to the judges described in the Book of Mormon.[16]

It will not be surprising if this article does not get the wide reading it deserves, and most modern readers will, unfortunately, be uninterested in the complexities of political economy. Still, this topic clearly underscores the radically different conceptual structures that govern Book of Mormon events. All events have at their root some form of causation, and those in the Book of Mormon are rather consistently driven by a view of the world foreign not only to the modern reader but to any reader of the nineteenth century as well.

Conclusion

As he has in the past, Sorenson carefully opens up new vistas of understanding by reading ever more closely in the Book of Mormon. As good as these articles are, many would be improved if he would relax his self-imposed restriction of examining only the text without seeking links to the outside world. He set the stage for the next phase in Book of Mormon cultural studies when he examined those links in *An Ancient American Setting*. The readings collected here are important, but much more could be added. It is almost as if he is constantly reloading one barrel of a double-barreled shotgun. As a personal plea, please, next time give us both barrels. We can take it.

16. See the brief note in William L. Fash and David S. Stuart, "Dynastic History and Cultural Evolution at Copan, Honduras," in *Classic Maya Political History: Hieroglyphic and Archaeological Evidence*, ed. T. Patrick Culbert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 171.