Unanswered Mormon Scholars

Author(s): Matthew Roper
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Abstract: Review of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism Raised by Mormon Defenders* (1996), by Jerald and Sandra Tanner.

Jerald and Sandra Tanner. *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism Raised by Mormon Defenders*. Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1996. 185 pp. $6.00.

Reviewed by Matthew Roper

Unanswered Mormon Scholars

Answering Mormon Scholars is the sequel to an earlier volume by that name, which received detailed review in the 1994 *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*.[1] After some preliminary observations, I will discuss the propriety of occasional responses to critics of the church, Joseph Smith's role as a seer and translator, the issue of B. H. Roberts's faith in the Book of Mormon, nineteenth-century parallels with the Book of Mormon discussed by the Tanners, and several additional issues of geography, archaeology, and language as they may relate to the Book of Mormon.

Are Mormon Scholars "Anti-anti-Mormon?"

The Tanners complained for years that their writings were unjustly ignored by Latter-day Saint scholars. Beginning in 1991, though, a number of LDS scholars began responding to their anti-Book of Mormon propaganda.[2] The Tanners, clearly befuddled at

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1 Matthew Roper, "A Black Hole That's Not So Black," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 156–203; John A. Tvedtnes, review of *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book "Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon,"* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/2 (1994): 204–49. Longer versions of each of these articles were also made available at the time and can be obtained from the authors or from FARMS.

2 L. Ara Norwood, Matthew Roper, John A. Tvedtnes, reviews of *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 3 (1991): 158–230; Roper, review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books*

their inability to formulate satisfactory responses to these reviews, now complain that those who criticize them are out of step with church leaders. "A Mormon apostle," the Tanners assert, "publicly urged members of the Church *not* to contend with critics of the Church" (p. 2). In October 1982 Elder Marvin J. Ashton delivered a talk in which he advised the Saints to refrain from retaliating against those who mock their religious beliefs, and he encouraged all members of the church to exercise patience and Christian charity when confronted by those who belittle the sacred teachings of the gospel. We should, he advised, "refuse to become "anti-anti-Mormon."[3] A big difference exists, however, between retaliating in anger and responding to fallacious claims. One sets a bad example; the other merely sets the record straight. The Tanners' attempt to twist Elder Ashton's words to mean that members of the church should never respond to falsehoods or

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on the Book of Mormon 4 (1992): 169–215; Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses: A Response to Jerald and Sandra Tanner," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/2 (Fall 1993): 164–93; William J. Hamblin, review of *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon*, by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 250–72; Tom Nibley, "A Look at Jerald and Sandra Tanner's *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon*," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 273–89; Roper, "A Black Hole That's Not So Black"; Tvedtnes, review of *Answering Mormon Scholars;* Roper, "Noah Webster and the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/2 (Fall 1995): 142–6; Tvedtnes and Roper, "'Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha': Shadow or Reality?" *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 326–72.

[3] Marvin J. Ashton, "Pure Religion," *Ensign* (November 1982): 63. Robert and Rosemary Brown have published several books responding to false claims of several anti-Mormon writers. They recently shared an experience with me. Shortly after Elder Ashton gave this talk several of their friends wondered if Elder Ashton was referring to them. Not wanting to go against the counsel of the Brethren, the Browns contacted Elder Ashton and asked if he had reference to them. Elder Ashton's response was "Heavens no!" He then made it clear that he was not condemning those who defend the church or respond to falsehoods. As those who visit Temple Square know, anti-Mormon writers sometimes pass out literature at the gates of Temple Square. Sometimes these critics make demeaning and mocking comments. The Browns were informed that before this talk was delivered, several members had responded to these taunts in anger, by physically attacking one of these critics. This, he explained, was what he meant by becoming "anti-anti-Mormon."

defend the church and LDS beliefs from attack seems desperate and amusing and underscores the weakness of their position.

Fortunately for the church, the Latter-day Saint practice of defending the church, its scripture, and its teachings against the attacks of its enemies has a long and venerable history. In 1831 the apostate Ezra Booth wrote a series of articles published in the *Ohio Star*. These received wide circulation throughout Ohio and elsewhere. In a revelation given to the Prophet Joseph Smith the Lord called on the Prophet and Sidney Rigdon to go on a special mission to both preach the gospel and respond to the falsehoods that were then circulating. "Wherefore," the Lord said, "confound your enemies; call upon them to meet you both in public and in private; and inasmuch as ye are faithful their shame shall be made manifest. Wherefore, let them bring forth their strong reasons against the Lord" (D&C 71:7–8). Early Latter-day Saint missionaries frequently responded to critics of the church. Many of the articles found in early LDS publications such as the *Times and Seasons* and the *Millennial Star* would even cite the criticisms of attackers along with Latter-day Saint defenses of the church. Regarding the importance of correcting falsehoods, Elder Charles W. Penrose wrote,

> It is not necessary to publish everything of a scurrilous character that is said against us, as it would engross too much of our attention to the exclusion of subjects that are more profitable. It is necessary that the Saints should know what is said against them, and that *some one* should show the other side. When the Church is belied there ought to be a refutation of the misstatements.[4]

In an October 1923 conference message, Anthony W. Ivins of the First Presidency read excerpts from an article critical of the church, which contained inaccurate and biased information. After reading from this article he noted,

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4 Charles W. Penrose, "Remarks," 6 October 1891, in *Collected Discourses*, comp. and ed. Brian H. Stuy (Sandy, Utah: BHS, 1988), 2:270–1, emphasis added; see also Doctrine and Covenants 123:1–17.

> To this congregation of Latter-day Saints I suppose it would appear unnecessary—in fact I have heard the word ridiculous used—that attention be paid to such statements as these which I have just quoted, and in fact that is true, but it nevertheless does at times become necessary for the Church to make response to statements of this kind, for there are people, many of them good people, people who love the truth and desire it, who are misled and strongly prejudiced because of statements such as this that I have quoted being made by men in whom they have confidence.[5]

> It is not often that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints pays attention to misrepresentations, but when their doctrines are ridiculed, when they are misrepresented, when they are spoken of with contempt, and when these things are published and sent broadcast to the world, by which men and women follow after falsehoods which are told, it becomes necessary, sometimes, to correct them, and expose the false basis upon which men reached conclusions in regard to the faith of the Latter-day Saints.[6]

Consequently, as others have remarked, "Sometimes it is wise to ignore the attacks of the wicked; at other times it is necessary to meet them, fearlessly and with ability."[7] Those who respond should respond well. "Let us be articulate," advised Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "for while our defense of the kingdom may not stir all hearers, the absence of thoughtful response may cause fledglings among the faithful to falter. What we assert may not be accepted, but unasserted convictions soon become deserted convictions."[8] George MacDonald once observed that "it is often incapacity for

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5 Anthony W. Ivins, in *Conference Report,* October 1923, 140.

6 Anthony W. Ivins, in *Conference Report,* October 1910, 42.

7 Hyrum M. Smith and Janne M. Sjodahl, *The Doctrine and Covenants Containing Revelations Given to Joseph Smith, Jr., the Prophet*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 423.

8 Neal A. Maxwell, "'All Hell Is Moved," in *1977 Devotional Speeches of the Year* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1977), 179.

defending the faith they love which turns men into persecutors."[9] "Happily," notes Elder Maxwell, "defenders beget defenders. Unhappily, dissenters beget dissenters, and doubters beget doubters." Yet, "Some of the latter may be able to be helped."[10] Many people will remember Elder Maxwell's speech at the annual FARMS banquet in 1991, during which he expressed the hope that we not underestimate the significance of what we do as defenders of the faith. He then quoted a well-known statement from Austin Farrer: "Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish."[11] He then expressed appreciation to those who, by defending the church, helped to provide that needed climate.

Book of Mormon Witnesses

The Tanners spend eleven pages essentially repeating an earlier discussion of the Book of Mormon Witnesses (pp. 38–50). I anticipated and responded to most of these arguments in an article published three years ago.[12] The Tanners' recent rebuttal does not so much as mention this article and never addresses the issues I raised there. Accordingly, my arguments still stand.

Was a Bible Used During the Translation of the Book of Mormon?

In the past I have noted an inconsistency in the Tanners' use of early Mormon sources that describe the translation of the Book of Mormon. The Tanners are perfectly willing to cite David Whitmer's or Emma Smith's description of seeing Joseph Smith

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9 George MacDonald, *An Anthology* (New York: Macmillan, 1947), 121.

10 Neal A. Maxwell, "Discipleship and Scholarship," *BYU Studies* 32/3 (1992): 6.

11 Austin Farrer, "The Christian Apologist," in *Light on C. S. Lewis,* ed. Jocelyn Gibb (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1965), 26.

12 Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses," 164–93.

using the seer stone when they want to link him with "magic" and the "occult," yet they arbitrarily dismiss other significant elements of their testimony when those elements contradict their theory of "plagiarism" from the Bible during the dictation of the Book of Mormon. A good example of this can be seen in the authors' recent treatment of Emma Smith's testimony (p. 53). Emma, who was interviewed by her son Joseph Smith III shortly before her death, makes several significant statements that contradict the Tanners' theory of how the Book of Mormon was produced:

> A. . . . In writing for your father I frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he . . . dictating hour after hour with nothing between us.
> Q. Had he not a book or manuscript from which he read, or dictated to you?
> A. *He had neither manuscript nor book to read from.*
> Q. Could he not have had, and you not know it?
> A. If he had anything of the kind he could not have concealed it from me. . . .
> Q. Could not father have dictated the Book of Mormon to you, Oliver Cowdery and the others who wrote for him, after having first written it, or having first read it out of some book?
> A. Joseph Smith . . . could neither write nor dictate a coherent and well-worded letter; let alone dictating a book like the Book of Mormon. And, though I was an active participant in the scenes that transpired . . . it is marvelous to me, "a marvel and a wonder," as much so as to any one else.[13]

The Tanners respond to these statements by saying that Emma's statement is unreliable because she later denied that her husband practiced plural marriage (p. 53). Yet the Tanners obviously accept at least part of Emma's testimony regarding the use of the seer stone. On what historical basis do they accept only this portion and not the other elements she witnessed in relation to the

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13 "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *The Saints' Advocate* 2/4 (October 1879): 51, emphasis added.

dictation? Since the Tanners are already committed to accepting at least part of Emma Smith's testimony regarding the translation, they cannot logically dismiss her testimony regarding the lack of source materials without some sound historical justification. They provide none. Fortunately, the careful historian can compare Emma's testimony with that of others who witnessed the same thing. David Whitmer, for example, who also witnessed much of the dictation, repeatedly affirmed, as did Emma, that the Prophet did not make use of book, notes, or manuscript during the dictation.

> Whitmer emphatically asserts as did Harris and Cowdery, that while Smith was dictating the translation he had no manuscript notes or other means of knowledge save the seer stone and the characters as shown on the plates, he being present and cognizant how it was done.[14]

> We asked him the question: Had Joseph Smith any manuscripts of any kind by him at the time of translating the Book of Mormon that he could read from?
>
> His answer was: "No Sir. We did not know anything about the Spaulding manuscript at that time."[15]

> Father Whitmer, who was present very frequently during the writing of this manuscript affirms that Joseph Smith had no book or manuscript, before him from which he could have read as is asserted by some that he did, he (Whitmer) having every opportunity to know.[16]

The Tanners also dispute the claim of some witnesses that sometimes words were spelled out and sometimes corrected. The authors correctly note that some words in the original manuscript are misspelled. Such references by the witnesses to the dictation most likely refer to the first spelling of names during the process.

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14 Lyndon W. Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, Utah: Grandin Book, 1991), 76.

15 Ibid., 92.

16 Ibid., 139–40.

Textual support for that possibility has been discussed by Royal Skousen.[17]

Joseph Smith and the 1826 Trial

The Tanners want desperately to portray Joseph Smith as a dishonest and disreputable fellow who defrauded others through the use of the seer stone. In support of this argument they cite the evidence discovered by Wesley P. Walters that Joseph Smith was brought to trial at Bainbridge, New York, on charges of being a disorderly person (pp. 57–62).[18] However, they continue to ignore Gordon Madsen's important treatment of the issue, which shows that Joseph Smith was acquitted at that proceeding.[19]

Joseph Smith and "Magic"

Apparently the idea of God's revelation coming by means of stones set apart for divine purposes reminds the Tanners of crystal balls and other "occultic" practices (pp. 56–7). They claim that Mormon scholars have not addressed the implications of such similarities. In fact, several scholars have addressed the issue of

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17 Royal Skousen, "Towards a Critical Edition of the Book of Mormon," *BYU Studies* 30/1 (1990): 52–3.

18 Walters discovered a mitimus and a bill of costs in the basement of the Chenango County Jail, establishing the existence of a legal proceeding against Joseph Smith in 1826. Chenango County historian Mae Smith recalled, "He was not under constant supervision and the Sheriff Joseph Benenati and I learned later that Mr. Walters had taken with him the audits concerning Joseph Smith and possibly more. We were very upset and asked him to return them. He sent us copies but the County Lawyer, James Haynes, had to write him before we got them back. The records are in a secure place now. The last time Mr. Walters came here Sheriff Benenati told him to leave his office and not to return. It is against the law to take records to use for any reason without permission." Mae Smith to Ronald Jackson, 6 February 1986, photocopy in reviewer's possession. For a reflection on the difficulties such practices cause for responsible historians, see Larry C. Porter, "Reinventing Mormonism: To Remake or Redo?" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/2 (1995): 138–43.

19 Gordon Madsen, "Joseph Smith's 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting," *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 91–108.

magic in some detail, although the Tanners continue to ignore their work.[20]

A major problem inherent in the Tanners' argument is that biblical prophets under clear divine authority frequently participated in a variety of practices which under the Tanners' terms would be considered "magical" or "occultic" in nature. "Interpreters generally agree that Deut 18:10–11 provides the most basic and inclusive list of magic terminology in the OT," notes one recent scholar. "However, understandings of these terms frequently differ since it is difficult to determine the precise practices to which the terms refer." This problem is accentuated by the fact that modern translations "frequently project back into biblical times practices seen as 'magical' at the time of the translation."[21] The same is true for post-Reformationist interpreters who anachronistically read back into these Old Testament practices any that they do not consider normative. Such interpretations tell us little about the nature of the practices referred to by biblical writers.

Of particular interest in regard to the translation of the Book of Mormon are biblical divination practices.

> The three divinatory instruments that are regularly associated with the Israelite cultus—lots, Urim and Thummim, and ephod—have a distinct vocabulary associated with them. . . . these terms are used primarily in connection with Israelites, only occasionally of non-Israelites, and almost invariably in a favorable context,

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20 Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic': Methodological Reflections on the Use of a Term," in *"To Be Learned Is Good If. . .,"* ed. Robert L. Millet (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1987), 129–47; Stephen D. Ricks and Daniel C. Peterson, "The Mormon as Magus," *Sunstone* 12/1 (January 1988): 38–9; Stephen D. Ricks, "The Magician as Outsider: The Evidence of the Hebrew Bible," in *New Perspectives on Ancient Judaism*, ed. Paul V. M. Flesher (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1990), 125–34; John Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac, and Jacob," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 46–71, which includes a pointed critique of the Tanners' muddled rhetoric.

21 Joanne K. Kuemmerlin-Mclean, "Magic: Old Testament," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 4:468.

leading one to conclude that these instruments of determining God's will "are acceptable because they are Israelite, while others are rejected because they are not."[22] I recently cited evidence suggesting that Joseph Smith's method of receiving revelation through the interpreters or the seer stone closely resembles current scholarly reconstructions of the biblical use of the Urim and Thummim.[23] In a recent study on the subject, Cornelis Van Dam examined the nature and function of the oracular device known to ancient Israel as the Urim and Thummim.[24] Before this study, many scholars assumed that the Urim and Thummim was simply a lot device that provided only a yes or no answer. On the basis of historical, linguistic, and textual evidence, however, Van Dam rejects the view that portrays the Urim and Thummim as a lot oracle. He marshals numerous passages to support his point (Judges 1:1; 20:18, 23, 27–8; 1 Samuel 10:22; 14:36–7; 22:9–10, 13, 15; 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23–4).[25] Van Dam also shows how phrases similar to *inquire of the Lord* or *inquire of God* (Judges 1:1; 18:5; 20:18, 23, 27–8; 1 Samuel 10:21–2; 14:36–7; 22:10; 23:6; 30:8) indicate the use of the Urim and Thummim.

He further argues that the element of "prophetic inspiration" was involved in the process by which revelation came through the Urim and Thummim (UT): "Thus, when revelation was requested of Yahweh, Yahweh would speak to the high priest or enlighten him and give him the decision that was necessary. If this inspiration was not forthcoming, the high priest would know that he was in no position to make use of the UT and provide divine direction."[26] Similarly, several accounts from Latter-day Saints indicate that Joseph Smith could not translate without the Spirit.[27] Use of the Urim and Thummim, according to Van Dam, involved much more than inspiration, since in some way, "the material object(s) that made up the UT had to be used."[28] Van Dam

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22 Ricks and Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic,'" 134.

23 Matthew Roper, "Revelation and the Urim and Thummim," FARMS Update, *Insights* (December 1995): 2.

24 Cornelis Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim: A Means of Revelation in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997).

25 Ibid., 215–32.

26 Ibid., 221–2.

27 Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews*, 86, 199.

28 Van Dam, *The Urim and Thummim*, 223.

suggests that "a special or miraculous light was somehow involved in the functioning of the UT," possibly through some kind of stone, "in order to verify that the message given by the high priest was from Yahweh." If, when the high priest removed the Urim and Thummim from the ephod there was no special light worked by God, then one would know that divine revelation was not being given.[29]

In another recent article C. Houtman agrees with Van Dam in rejecting the lot theory, but feels that one cannot assign a minor role to the Urim and Thummim in the oracular process. Houtman suggests that the Urim and Thummim was a "precious stone" of some kind such as "crystal" or some other gem.[30] He suggests that it was "an object by which God's purpose with men was made visible or audible to the priest, either by revealing future events in the form of one of more pictures or by announcing it by means of a heavenly messenger, who manifests himself in it."[31] The device could not function without the power of God, however. Houtman argues that in order for the Urim and Thummim to function as a means of revelation it was necessary for the "divine power" of God to be manifest through it. This divine power had "to penetrate into the heart, the intellectual centre of the high priest, in order to enable him to 'read' the will of YHWH from the UT," thus making the high priest "YHWH's real representative and mouth."[32] The Tanners' arguments against Joseph Smith seem very arbitrary since it is not clear how they would reconcile their views of the seer stone with Old Testament practices which, under their own definitions, would be considered "magical." I believe that Stephen Ricks and Daniel Peterson have concisely summarized the issue:

> In the final analysis the designation "magic" or "occult" in the Bible or in the lives of Joseph or his associates has less to do with the nature of the act or

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29 Ibid., 224.

30 C. Houtman, "The Urim and Thummim: A New Suggestion," *Vetus Testamentum* 40/2 (April 1990): 230; see also Cornelis Van Dam, "Urim and Thummim," in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia,* ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1979), 4:958.

31 Houtman, "The Urim and Thummim," 230.

32 Ibid., 231.

> acts—which, based on the instances they cite and their commentary on them, seem to exercise the authors so much—*but the power by which those acts are performed.* There is no clear indication that Joseph, his family, or any others associated with him, believed that the "rod of nature," the seerstone, or any other object they might have used operated except through the power of God. . . .
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> . . . we accept Samuel as prophet and judge, who was able to find things hidden; so too, we believe in and accept the gifts of Joseph, who was known, from an early age, to have the gift of seeing. Just as we accept as divinely authorized the use of lots, the ephod, and the Urim and Thummim in the Bible to determine God's will, we accept too Joseph's use of the Nephite interpreters and the seerstone to know what could not be determined by merely human power. We see magic or the occult in none of these instances. We do not presume to dictate what means of determining God's will are acceptable for a prophet to use, so long as the origin of that inspiration is God. The authors' thesis notwithstanding, it appears to us that they see "magic" in Joseph's activities because they reject him as a prophet, rather than rejecting him as a prophet because they object to his alleged involvement in the "occult."[33]

B. H. Roberts and the Book of Mormon

In 1922 Elder B. H. Roberts prepared several informal studies dealing with potential criticisms that might be raised against the Book of Mormon.[34] One of these, entitled "Book of Mormon

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33 Ricks and Peterson, "Joseph Smith and 'Magic,'" 140.

34 Brigham D. Madsen, ed., *B. H. Roberts: Studies of the Book of Mormon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985). Truman G. Madsen and John W. Welch have treated this work in detail. On the issue of Roberts's testimony, see Truman G. Madsen and John W. Welch, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith in the Book of Mormon?" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985). On contemporary responses to Roberts's questions, see John W. Welch, "Finding Answers to B. H.

Difficulties," dealt with a number of issues relating to language, Book of Mormon animals, weapons, and several other issues relating to archaeology. Roberts undertook these studies as part of a committee assignment to respond to several inquiries. He presented these problems to the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve on 4–5 January 1922 in the hopes of formulating better responses to these questions, but was disappointed at their inability to help him. Over the next several months he completed a second analysis entitled "A Book of Mormon Study," in which he presented certain naturalistic arguments that a potential critic of the church might one day raise and which he felt would be of use to future defenders of the church. In May 1922 he was called to preside over the Eastern States Mission, where he served for five years. After his release in 1927 he wrote up a brief list of similarities between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon entitled "A Parallel." On 24 October 1927, he sent a copy of this brief list to Elder Richard R. Lyman.[35] We find no evidence that he ever returned to the study.

In their recent rebuttal, the Tanners attempt to portray these studies as something on which Roberts secretly labored for years, something which reflected Roberts's true views about the Book of Mormon (pp. 68–84). I will show below that (1) the conclusions expressed in "A Book of Mormon Study" do not reflect Roberts's own conclusions about the Book of Mormon's historicity but do provide certain arguments that a naturalistic critic of the Book of Mormon might raise under strictly naturalistic assumptions; (2) the study, with the exception of the short parallel, was essentially complete by 1922; and (3) while selected statements made by Roberts, cited by the Tanners, portray his dissatisfaction over what he felt were inadequate responses to potential Book of Mormon criticisms, they do not constitute personal doubts over its historicity as the Tanners claim. We will now look at each of these issues in turn.

Roberts's Questions" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985). See also the discussion of this issue by Daniel C. Peterson on pages 69–86 of the present *Review*.

35 B. H. Roberts to Richard R. Lyman, 24 October 1927, in Madsen, *B. H. Roberts*, 59.

Does "A Book of Mormon Study" Reflect Roberts's Own Conclusions?

According to Roberts himself, the document entitled "A Book of Mormon Study" did not and was never intended to reflect or present his own views and conclusions about the Book of Mormon. In a cover letter addressed to President Heber J. Grant, Roberts wrote:

> Since the matter was already so far under my hand, I continued my studies, and submit herewith the record of them. I do not say *my* conclusions, for they are undrawn.
>
> In writing out this my report to you of those studies, I have written it from the viewpoint of an open mind, investigating the facts of the Book of Mormon origin and authorship. Let me say once and for all, so as to avoid what might otherwise call for repeated explanation, that what is herein set forth does not represent any conclusions of *mine*. This report herewith submitted is what it purports to be, namely a "study of Book of Mormon origins," for the information of those who ought to know everything about it *pro et con*, as well as that which has been produced against it, and that which may be produced against it. *I am taking the position* that our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon, and therefore we can look without fear upon all that can be said against it.[36]

It is noteworthy that Roberts contrasts the opinions and conclusions presented in the study with his own. The study represents arguments past critics *had made* and future critics *might make*. Roberts's own feelings, however, are unmistakable: "I am taking the position that our faith is not only unshaken but unshakable in the Book of Mormon, and therefore we can look without fear upon all that can be said against it." He had often expressed and would continue to express his personal views elsewhere until his

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36 B. H. Roberts to Heber J. Grant, 15 March 1923 [1922], in Madsen, *B. H. Roberts*, 57–8, emphasis added.

death in 1933.[37] The view that the questions and statement in the study represent potential criticisms and not Roberts's own conclusions finds further support from the study itself, in which questions and conclusions are phrased in terms of certain assumptions.[38]

> *This* study *supposes* that it is more than likely that the Smith family possessed a copy of this book by Ethan Smith. (155)
>
> All this, it *could be said* by *one disposed to criticize the Book of Mormon* . . . (182)
>
> *Having in mind* now Ethan Smith's book as suggesting outlines of the Book of Mormon . . . (193)
>
> It will be thought by *some* . . . (197)
>
> *The tentative suggestion* of Ethan Smith's book—being the ground plan of the Book of Mormon . . . (197)
>
> The *possibility* of it, *on the theory of a merely human origin for the Book of Mormon,* is quite thinkable. (211)
>
> On the *assumption* that *View of the Hebrews* formed the ground plan of the Book of Mormon . . . (219)
>
> *If* one was free from the notion that the Book of Mormon was of divine origin, and *could* accord it mere human origin, he would say . . . (220)
>
> *Assuming for the sake of the inquiry* that the author of the Book of Mormon was Joseph Smith . . . (226)
>
> *If . . . the view be taken* that the Book of Mormon is merely of human origin . . . (251)
>
> *If it be assumed* that he is the author of it, *then* it could be said . . . (251)

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37 For a preliminary summary of B. H. Roberts's statements about the Book of Mormon during the last ten years of his life, see Truman G. Madsen, comp., "B. H. Roberts's Final Decade: Statements about the Book of Mormon (1921–33)" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1985).

38 Emphasis has been added in the following quotations from Madsen's edition of Roberts's papers in *B. H. Roberts.*

> They are made to indicate what may be fairly regarded as just objects of criticism *under the assumption that the Book of Mormon is of human origin, and that Joseph Smith is its author.* (277)
>
> The upshot of all this would be that *if the Book of Mormon is of merely human origin, and Joseph Smith is its author, then* all these facts here considered would be reflected in the Book of Mormon. (309–10)

The Tanners uncritically cite statements from the study as if they represented Roberts's own views, when, in fact, Roberts specified that they are arguments which *might be* used by those already *predisposed* to view the Book of Mormon as a modern product of Joseph Smith's creative imagination.[39] "Such a question as that may possibly arise some day, and if it does, it would be greatly to the advantage of our future Defenders of the Faith, if they had in hand a thorough digest of the subject matter."[40] By providing an in-house case for the opposition, future defenders of the Book of Mormon would be better prepared to face and respond to attacks and sophistries of future critics.

Dating "A Book of Mormon Study"

The Tanners believe that Roberts continued to work on " A Book of Mormon Study" long after 1922. As evidence for this they note that on 24 October 1927 Robert sent "A Parallel" to Richard R. Lyman. "It undoubtedly took," the Tanners argue, "a great deal of time for Roberts to set up this parallel between the *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon" (p. 81). To the contrary, it can be easily shown that the "Parallel" was not based on any new research, but was essentially extracted from the 1922

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39 While visiting the Tanners' Salt Lake City bookstore with two friends of mine on 9 May 1996, I witnessed an interesting conversation between Sandra Tanner and Louis Midgley. When Midgley tried to explain how assumptions play a role in the way historians and other scholars frame and present their arguments and evidence, she brushed it aside with the comment, "Jerald doesn't think in those terms."

40 Roberts to Lyman, 24 October 1927, in Madsen, *B. H. Roberts*, 60

document.[41] Thus one cannot accurately portray the "Parallel" as a new and vigorous foray into the Ethan Smith material by a Roberts immersed in doubt over the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. It is essentially a rehash of the earlier material already compiled in 1922.

Oddly, the only other piece of evidence mustered by the Tanners to support the idea that Roberts continued to work on the study is the letter which Roberts wrote to Elder Richard Lyman of the Quorum of the Twelve at the time he sent his "Parallel." That letter not only fails to support their claim, but in fact confirms Welch's argument that the study was essentially finished by the spring of 1922, before Roberts took charge of the Eastern States Mission. In 1927 Roberts reviewed his experience in presenting his "Book of Mormon Difficulties." On 24 October 1927 Roberts wrote:

> And the other day I told you, if you remember, that I had continued my investigations and had drawn up a somewhat lengthy report for the First Presidence [*sic*] and the Council of the Twelve. *Then* came my call to the Eastern States and *the matter was dropped*, but my report was drawn up nevertheless together *with a letter that I had intended should accompany it*, but in the hurry of getting away and the impossibility at that time of having my report considered, *I dropped the matter*, and have not yet decided whether I shall present that report to the First Presidency or not.[42]

First, it is clear from the letter to Lyman that Roberts's report, "A Book of Mormon Study," was drawn up *before* his call to the

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41 Specific parallels in Roberts's list in Madsen, *B. H. Roberts*, 323–44, should be compared with similar ones raised in the study. See, for example, the place and title of the books (155); the existence of a book (158); origin of the Indians (156–61); the hidden book revealed (158–60, 215–7); inspired seers and prophets, Urim and Thummim and breastplate (207–8); engraved characters (217–8); barbarous and civilized people (188–90); destruction of Jerusalem (170); Israel (171); Isaiah passages (171–3); role of the gentile nation (174–82); pride and love of riches (211–2); polygamy and Indian virtues (212–4); and Quetzalcoatl (228–36).

42 Roberts to Lyman, 24 October 1927, in Madsen, *B. H. Roberts*, 59, emphasis added.

Eastern States Mission. He received that call on 22 May 1922 and was set apart by President Grant on 29 May.[43] Roberts also says that the matter of the study was *dropped* at the time of his call to the Eastern States Mission. Moreover, as of 24 October 1927 he had made no attempt to present that report to the First Presidency. These facts also find confirmation in a letter Roberts wrote to his daughter Elizabeth on 14 March 1932, ten years after the study was done. Speaking of his document, "A Book of Mormon Study," Roberts explained, "It was from research work I did *before* going to take charge of the Eastern States Mission." As with "A Book of Mormon Study" itself, "the letter of submission to President Grant was made *previous to* leaving the E.S.M."[44] The letter of submission was written at the time the study was completed in the spring of 1922. This means that the document, " A Book of Mormon Study," with the exception of a few minor editorial changes, was completed and set aside in 1922 just as Welch argued.[45]

Second, it is also clear from the letter to Lyman that the cover letter was drawn up at the time the study was completed and that Roberts intended that it should accompany the document. The Tanners, desperate to save a bad argument, now maintain that the letter is "irrelevant" to the issue of Roberts's testimony because it was never sent. Their argument implies that the letter was not sent because Roberts changed his views and became convinced that the Book of Mormon was false. Thus the Tanners dismiss Roberts's cover letter and cite "A Book of Mormon Study" as reflecting Roberts's true views on the historicity of the Book of Mormon. But this is a misleading argument since both the Lyman letter and the letter to Elizabeth tie Roberts's disclaimer to the study. Moreover, to dismiss the disclaimer as not reflecting Roberts's views simply on the basis that it was not sent, while continuing to cite the study as if it did, is also deceptive since "A Book of Mormon Study" was never sent to President Grant either!

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43 Truman G. Madsen, *Defender of the Faith: The B. H. Roberts Story* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 315.

44 B. H. Roberts to Elizabeth, 14 March 1932, in Madsen and Welch, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith," exhibit 8.

45 Madsen and Welch, "Did B. H. Roberts Lose Faith," 1–16.

The Tanners' recent rebuttal points out a careless error I made in a book review published in 1992 (pp. 70–6). On 8 August 1993 I was a guest on Martin Tanner's radio program "Religion on the Line." Just before the end of the program Jerald Tanner drew my attention to that error, in which I cited a portion of Roberts's disclaimer. As I did not have the relevant sources with me at that time, I offered to check it out later. The Tanners, clearly eager to find anything to discredit me, pounce on this mistake as if it were some dark and dirty secret. What their rebuttal does not point out is that I called in to the radio program one week later on 15 August 1993 in order to correct that error publicly. Shortly afterward I also published a correction in print in which I reproduced the entire letter in question, indicating how the error occurred.

> During a recent Salt Lake City radio program, Jerald Tanner suggested that I had misrepresented a statement by B. H. Roberts in which the former Church leader explained the purpose of his unpublished presentation of Book of Mormon criticisms. After checking the citation in my review with the source in question, I realized that I had inadvertently cited a secondary source, when I should have cited the letter itself, a copy of which was readily available. While I regret the mistake, the citation, even as it stands in the review, accurately demonstrates Roberts's position on his unpublished study. . . .
>
> Although the Tanners are familiar with this statement, they have until now remained strangely silent about it. While Roberts's studies have been available in published form since 1985, the Tanners failed to mention Roberts's statement in their 1987 revision of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* In their 1989 work *Major Problems of Mormonism* they are also strangely silent concerning the statement. Even their most recent discussion of B. H. Roberts's studies says nothing about the cover letter which Roberts always intended should accompany the manuscript. Their continuing silence

> regarding evidence for Roberts's continuing belief in the Book of Mormon is inexcusable.[46]

In their recent rebuttal the Tanners note that they have been aware of this letter since 1980, when they initially published Roberts's documents without permission. Since they published Roberts's letter to Heber J. Grant along with the other three documents, they feel that I have been unfair. "We included a photographic reproduction of the two-page letter written by Roberts in our book *Roberts' Manuscripts Revealed*" (p. 69). While the Tanners believe that this somehow vindicates them, it actually makes matters worse. In 1992 I did not have a copy of *Roberts' Manuscripts Revealed* and simply assumed that the authors had only been made aware of the letter in 1985. Now it is clear that the Tanners knew about that document as early as 1980, but have remained silent about it in subsequent publications for sixteen years while publicly proclaiming Roberts's alleged rejection of the Book of Mormon's historicity! I am confident that readers will be able to tell the difference between a careless mistake and the knowing and deliberate suppression of a key historical document which contradicts their questionable thesis.

The Wesley Lloyd Journal

The Tanners argue that an excerpt from the journal of Wesley Lloyd vindicates their claim that Roberts lost his testimony of the Book of Mormon. "It is clear from this journal," they assert, "that B. H. Roberts had grave doubts about the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 69). However, the Tanners uncritically confuse Roberts's understandable frustration over what he felt were superficial and inadequate responses to potential criticisms of the Book of Mormon with serious personal doubts about its historicity and divine authenticity. Lloyd does not claim that Roberts now rejected it. Lloyd never claimed that Roberts ever rejected the Book of Mormon or that he doubted its historicity.

Lloyd reports that Roberts's study "swings to a psychological explanation of the Book of Mormon" (p. 80). Roberts's study is "psychological" in the sense that it portrays the Book of

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46 Roper, "Comments on the Book of Mormon Witnesses," 183–4, 186.

Mormon as the sole product of Joseph Smith's creative mind, as opposed to the Spaulding theory of its origin. Lloyd reports a line of "psychological" argument against the Book of Mormon which attempts to show "that the plates were not objective but subjective with Joseph Smith, that his exceptional imagination qualified him psychologically for the experience . . . and that the plates with the Urim and Thummim were not objective" (p. 80). The psychological argument reported by Lloyd is almost certainly that raised by I. Woodbridge Riley in 1902 in a work with which Roberts was familiar and sometimes cited.[47] Riley was the first twentieth-century critic to advocate a "psychological" explanation of the Book of Mormon. In Roberts's day most members of the church would have been familiar with the Spaulding hypothesis, but few would have been aware of Riley's naturalistic explanation, which would not really take hold until Fawn Brodie's popularization of it in 1945. Riley claimed that Joseph Smith was the sole author of the Book of Mormon and had the creative ability to produce it. Several factors indicate that Lloyd is reporting Roberts's description of a potential nineteenth-century explanation, not his own conclusions about the Book of Mormon's validity or historicity.

1. The argument that "the plates were not objective but subjective with Joseph Smith" and that "the plates and the Urim and Thummim were not objective," parallels Riley's claim that the Three Witnesses' vision of the plates was "subjective hallucination" and was "subjective, not objective."[48] Riley likewise speaks of the Prophet's "subjective 'glass looking'" while translating the plates,[49] and claims that "Joseph's condition, under the influence of his 'Urim and Thummim,' was semi-hypnotic."[50]

2. Roberts had already rejected the "subjective" psychological explanation in 1909.[51] Roberts's primary argument

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47 I. Woodbridge Riley, *The Founder of Mormonism* (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1902).

48 Ibid., 226.

49 Ibid., 204.

50 Ibid., 86.

51 B. H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1909), 3:401–6. See also B. H. Roberts, *Defense of the Faith and the Saints*, vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1907), 42–61.

against this explanation was the testimony of the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon who each handled the plates. Yet the 1922 study never addresses the issue of the witnesses or the objective reality of the plates—a significant omission if the study truly represented Roberts's own conclusions about the Book of Mormon. Obviously it did not.

3. Lloyd never reports or claims that Roberts rejected the Book of Mormon. If Roberts had openly expressed such doubts to Lloyd it seems reasonable that he would have reported it.

4. Lloyd reports that Elder Roberts's inability to formulate satisfactory responses to certain potential Book of Mormon criticisms, "has made Bro Roberts shift his base on the Book of Mormon. Instead of regarding it as the strongest evidence we have of Church Divinity, he regards it as the one which needs the more bolstering" (p. 79). The Tanners emphasize Lloyd's statement that Roberts "shifted his base"; however, one who shifts his base does not abandon the battle but merely takes up a more defensible position until control of the battlefield can be regained. Welch shows how Roberts "shifted his base" by emphasizing the doctrinal evidences for the Book of Mormon as opposed to external evidences such as archaeology or linguistics, with which Roberts had little experience.

5. Incidentally, why would Roberts say that the Book of Mormon needed *more bolstering* if he was already convinced that it was a product of Joseph Smith's creative imagination? Why bother? And why, as Welch observes, would he consider the Doctrine and Covenants revelations to be the "greatest claim for the divinity of the Prophet Joseph" if the revelations of the plates were a simple hallucination? That would be absurd. Obviously he is describing potential problems that critics *might* raise, not explaining his own views of Book of Mormon origins.

6. Since it can be shown that (a) "A Book of Mormon Study" can be solidly dated to 1922, (b) Roberts's cover letter to Heber J. Grant can be dated to the same time as "A Book of Mormon Study," and (c) the study was never intended to reflect Roberts's own conclusions about the Book of Mormon, Roberts's abundant and very specific public statements during his final decade become extremely relevant to the issue of his own faith and testimony of the Book of Mormon. In an earlier review, I cited

several statements made by Roberts over the last decade of his life in which he consistently bore testimony to the Book of Mormon's divinity and historicity. The Tanners' reluctance to deal with this evidence is most illuminating. Words in bold indicate those portions of my argument from the review which the Tanners have omitted in their recent rebuttal.

> A review of Roberts's talks and addresses over the last eleven years of his life shows that he used the Book of Mormon extensively and frequently bore testimony of its divinity. **In October 1923 he called the Book of Mormon "the sublimest message ever delivered to the world." In 1924 he stated that the Book of Mormon helped to provide Latter-day Saints with a foundation "built up of living stones wherein is no darkness or doubt." Roberts actively continued to use the Book of Mormon in his writing and teaching throughout the next nine years. In 1928, after asking if "common knowledge and general discussion in the time and vicinity of Joseph Smith when the Book of Mormon was undergoing production" would have been enough to account for the production of the Nephite record, he responded, "*Emphatically no*." In October 1929, desirous that no one misunderstand his own convictions, Roberts stated, "I hope that if anywhere along the line I have caused any of you to doubt my faith in this work, then let this testimony and my indicated life's work be a correction of it. In November 1930 he asserted that "surer recognition of Jesus being God may not be found in sacred writ [than in the Book of Mormon]." Roberts continued to be impressed by the depth and scope of Book of Mormon doctrinal teachings and thought. Concerning the sacramental prayers in the Book of Mormon, he told the San Francisco Stake in April 1932 that "*this was not the work of an unlettered youth* . . . but evidence of divine inspiration. When this prayer is thoughtfully considered, it gives great weight to [the] claims of the modern prophet."** In April 1933, he described the Book of Mormon as "one of the most valuable books that has ever been

> preserved." **Just weeks before he died, he advised Jack Christensen, *"Ethan Smith played no part in the formation of the Book of Mormon.* You accept Joseph Smith and all the scriptures."**[52]

In their attempt to portray a doubting Roberts, the Tanners have omitted all but the weakest of the statements affirming his testimony of the Book of Mormon. Ironically they claim, "We have never deliberately changed any text to make it fit our conclusions" (p. 45), but it seems to me that such omissions require studied effort. "We did not contest the fact that B. H. Roberts continued to quote the Book of Mormon after he wrote his critical assessment" (p. 78). They did not contest it? In fact, they ignored it altogether, as they have a tendency to do when the evidence contradicts their questionable thesis. This is simply inexcusable. "Although he [Roberts] may have started out merely playing the 'Devil's Advocate,' we feel that he played the role so well that he developed grave doubts about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 78). The evidence the Tanners present in support of this theory simply does not support that conclusion. Their obvious frustration over the evidence for Roberts's testimony of the Book of Mormon's divinity and historicity is understandable, even if their blatant use of distortion is inexcusable. Unfortunately for the Tanners, repetition of an intellectually incoherent argument does not make it true.

Nineteenth-Century Sources

The Tanners' rebuttal discusses several parallels between the Book of Mormon and a book by Josiah Priest, *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed,* which was published in

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52 Roper, review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* 193–4, emphasis added. While the Tanners are clearly aware of Roberts's work *The Truth, the Way, the Life*, they fail to address the implications of Roberts's use of the Book of Mormon in what *he* considered his greatest and most significant work. See John W. Welch, "Introduction," in B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, the Way, the Life: An Elementary Treatise on Theology,* ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Studies, 1994), xxvi–xxvii; John W. Welch, "B. H. Roberts Affirms Book of Mormon Antiquity in Newly Released Manuscript," FARMS Update, *Insights* (November 1993): 2.

1825.[53] The Tanners produce no evidence that Joseph Smith knew of or had read this book before the publication of the Book of Mormon, yet they feel that the existence of parallels alone shows it to have been an influential resource for Joseph Smith. The Tanners note, for example, that the phrase *narrow neck of land* is used by both Josiah Priest and the author of the Book of Mormon. But does so weak a parallel really demonstrate literary dependence? How many ways are there to describe an isthmus, anyway? In his 1828 dictionary, Noah Webster defines the word *neck* as "a long *narrow tract of land* projecting from the main body, or a narrow tract connecting two larger tracts; as the *neck of land* between Boston and Roxbury."[54] Since the Book of Mormon was a translation into the English language, these and similar examples do not amount to much.[55]

The Great Destruction in 3 Nephi

The Tanners suggest that Joseph Smith derived most of the ideas for 3 Nephi 8–9 from either the New Testament or portions of Josiah Priest's book, *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed.* I responded to this claim in an earlier review.[56] As I noted there, neither of these sources explains all the elements found in the Book of Mormon account of the destruction in the New World at the death of Christ. In addition, many of the parallels mentioned by the Tanners between Priest's book and 3 Nephi can also be found in the biblical accounts of the Exodus, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and other biblical events and prophecies. Here I would add that while the parallels referenced by the Tanners show that *some* information about natural disasters *might* have been known to Joseph Smith if he had read the book, they also undermine the argument of many critics that the 3 Nephi event cannot be historical. One of the Tanners'

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53 Josiah Priest, *The Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed* (Albany: Priest, 1825).

54 Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828 ed., s.v. "neck," emphasis added.

55 For other examples of the Tanners' muddled thinking see Roper, "Noah Webster and the Book of Mormon," 142–6.

56 Roper, review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* 187–8.

mentors, M. T. Lamb, called the disaster described in 3 Nephi 8–9 one of the most "foolish and physically impossible" stories ever described.[57] Recent Book of Mormon scholarship, however, suggests that all the elements of this event can be reasonably explained and best understood in the context of an ancient Mesoamerican volcanic disaster.[58]

Bruce Warren has discussed evidence for volcanic activity in Mesoamerica around the time of Christ.[59] Archaeology provides evidence for such volcanic activity in the Valley of Mexico, where the volcano Xitle is believed to have erupted anciently, covering much of the southern portion of the valley.[60] Cummings, the archaeologist who originally excavated at Cuicuilco, believed that Xitle erupted around 5000 B.C.[61] Based on more recent evidence, scholars now know that this disaster occurred nearly 2,000 years ago.[62] At that time the site of Copilco was buried under more than thirty feet of lava, as was much of the nearby site of Cuicuilco. Archaeological evidence from the sites indicates that the lava flow was preceded by a heavy rainfall of ash.[63] Both of these sites are

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57 M. T. Lamb, *The Golden Bible, or, the Book of Mormon: Is It from God?* (New York: Ward & Drummond, 1887), 83.

58 Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 318–23; Russell H. Ball, "An Hypothesis Concerning the Three Days of Darkness among the Nephites," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 107–23; John A. Tvedtnes, "Historical Parallels to the Destruction at the Time of the Crucifixion," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 170–86; James L. Baer, "The Third Nephi Disaster: A Geological View," *Dialogue* 19/1 (1986): 129–32; Bart J. Kowallis, "In the Thirty and Fourth Year: A Geologist's View of the Great Destruction in Third Nephi," forthcoming in *BYU Studies*.

59 Bruce Warren and Thomas S. Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, Utah: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), 40–4. I would like to thank Bruce Warren for providing me with several key sources on this issue.

60 Byron Cummings, "Cuicuilco and the Archaic Culture of Mexico," *University of Arizona Bulletin (Social Science)* 4/8 (15 November 1933): 8–12.

61 Ibid., 14.

62 *Copilco-Cuicuilco: Official Guide del Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropologia e Historia, 1959), 8, 11–2.

63 Ibid., 12, 18. See also Paul B. Sears, "Pollen Profiles and Culture Horizons in the Basin of Mexico," in *The Civilizations of Ancient America: Selected Papers of the XXIXth International Congress of Americanists*, ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), 57.

located on the southwestern end of the Valley of Mexico. About thirty miles northeast is the massive site of Teotihuacan. There a layer of volcanic ash, apparently blown from that eruption, covers structures from the Tzacualli phase (A.D. 1–150). Carbon-14 tests of material directly below the ash layer yielded a date of A.D. 30 ± 80.[64]

Additional evidence for volcanic activity in Mesoamerica near the time of Christ can be found further south in the Tuxtlas region of southern Veracruz, a region many Latter-day Saint scholars associate with the Book of Mormon "land northward." In the 1940s archaeologists Matthew Stirling and Phillip Drucker found that a heavy layer of ash covered what appeared to be Late Preclassic pottery and other material at the site of Tres Zapotes. Michael Coe notes that while this pottery has "strong continuities with the Middle Preclassic, . . . in general most resemblances lie with other Late Preclassic phases of Mesoamerica, such as Chicanel of the lowland Maya area, Chiapa IV and V at Chiapa de Corzo, and terminal Preclassic manifestations in the Valley of Mexico. Olmec and other Middle Preclassic phenomena are either absent or very weak."[65] Coe then notes that "the famous Stela C," found directly below the ash layer in question, "if read in the Goodman-Martinez-Thompson correlation, would read 31 B.C., exactly within the period with which we are concerned."[66] If Coe's argument holds, then this would place the San Martin eruption some time after 31 B.C.

Archaeologist Payson Sheets has published evidence for several major volcanic eruptions further south in El Salvador over several millennia. One of these probably occurred during the late second century A.D. While this is much later than the event described in 3 Nephi, other evidence of earlier volcanic activity in this region has been found. In 1955 Muriel Porter described several sites in El Salvador that were covered by thirty to sixty-five

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64 René Millon and James Bennyhoff, "A Long Architectural Sequence at Teotihuacan," *American Antiquity* 26/4 (April 1961): 519.

65 Michael D. Coe, "Archaeological Synthesis of Southern Veracruz and Tabasco," in *Archaeology of Southern Mesoamerica*, part 2, ed. Gordon R. Willey, Handbook of Middle American Indians, vol. 3 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1965), 694.

66 Ibid., 696.

feet of volcanic ash around the time of Christ.[67] In a more recent work Sheets has published additional evidence for a lesser volcanic eruption in the region of Costa Rica "about the time of Christ."[68] While such evidence is very tentative and preliminary in nature, it does lend plausibility to the account of the destruction in 3 Nephi.

Shakespeare

In an earlier review I responded to the Tanners' claim that the Book of Mormon borrowed a paraphrase of Shakespeare by Josiah Priest. I cited research done by Robert F. Smith showing that Lehi's dying words to Laman and Lemuel parallel similar ideas and phrases common in the ancient world and predating Lehi. The Tanners complain that none of the examples I cite contain "the vital four-word parallel" (p. 85). I did not argue, however, that Lehi was directly dependent on any of these ancient sources any more than I believe Joseph Smith deliberately borrowed the phrase from Shakespeare. My point, as the reader of that article will see, was simply to show that the phrase and the concepts surrounding it were so common anciently as to make the "vital four-word parallel" worthless as proof of modern borrowing. To further illustrate this point we can compare 2 Nephi 1:13–5 with passages taken from the Old Testament.

O that ye would *awake*; *awake* from a *deep sleep*	*Awake, awake*; put on thy strength, O Zion (Isaiah 52:1)
	For the Lord hath poured out upon you the spirit of *deep sleep* (Isaiah 29:10)
Yea, even from the *sleep of hell*	The *sleep of death* (Psalm 13:3)

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67 Muriel N. Porter, "Material Preclasico de San Salvador," *Sobretiro de "Communicaciones" del Instituto Tropical de Investigaciones Científicas de la Universidad de El Salvador* 4/3–4 (July–December 1955): 105–14.

68 Payson D. Sheets and Brian R. McKee, eds., *Archaeology, Volcanism, and Remote Sensing in the Arenal Region, Costa Rica* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 318.

And shake off the awful *chains* by which ye are *bound* which are the chains which bind the children of men	He bringeth out those which are *bound* with *chains:* but the rebellious dwell in a dry land (Psalm 68:6)
That they are *carried away captive* down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe	They that *carried* us *away captive* (Psalm 137:3)
Awake! and *arise* from the *dust* and hear the words of a trembling parent	*Awake*. . . . Shake thyself from the *dust*; *arise*, and sit down (Isaiah 52:1–2)
Whose limbs ye must soon lay down in the cold and *silent grave*	Let them be *silent* in the *grave* (Psalms 31:17)
From *whence* no traveler can *return*	I go *whence* I shall not *return*, even to the land of darkness and the shadow of death (Job 10:21)
	I shall go the way *whence* I shall not *return* (Job 16:22)
A few more *days* and *I go the way of all the earth*	And, behold, this *day I am going the way of all the earth* (Joshua 23:14)
But behold, *the Lord* hath *redeemed my soul from hell*	*But God* will *redeem my soul from* the power of the *grave* (Psalms 49:15)
I have *beheld* his glory	As for me, *I* will *behold* thy *face* in righteousness (Psalms 17:15)
	To *behold* the *beauty* of the Lord (Psalms 27:4)
And I am encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.	For he shall receive me (Psalms 49:15)

Lehi's Desert Journey

In a previous article, I noted that the recent discovery of an ancient place name, *Nehem,* poses difficulties for the Tanners since they would like to dismiss the Book of Mormon and particularly 1 Nephi as a shallow forgery, lacking any significant historical information.[69] Work by recent Latter-day Saint scholars such as Ross Christensen and Warren and Michaela Aston has established that in fact a site with that rare name existed in what is now northern Yemen, at a point where the ancient trade routes would turn eastward.[70] The Tanners' recent rebuttal fails to come to grips with the evidence provided by the Astons. "Actually, there are two different locations which Mormon scholars have set forth as the 'place which was called Nahom.' . . . Nehhm is *over 350 miles* from Al Qunfudhah!" (p. 181). This point, as the Tanners must surely know, is completely irrelevant since Lynn and Hope Hilton's research,[71] to which they refer, was done before the Christensen article or the Astons' more complete analysis. The Hiltons were unaware at the time they did their research that there was in fact a place name from the root *NḤM along the western Arabian trade route. In the absence of such evidence, they simply suggested Al Qunfudhah as a possible location. Obviously, the Hiltons' earlier views must now be superseded by more recent data. Shortly after the Hiltons published their articles, Ross Christensen reported that in 1763 Carsten Niebuhr had published a map of Arabia showing a place called "Nehhm," which Christensen suggested might be equated with the Book of Mormon site.[72] This place name finds confirmation in numerous other maps published since then. Warren and Michaela Aston have

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69 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1990), 12–27.

70 Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi: New Evidence for Lehi's Journey across Arabia to Bountiful* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994).

71 Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, "In Search of Lehi's Trail—Part 1: The Preparation," *Ensign* (September 1976): 32–54, and "In Search of Lehi's Trail—Part 2: The Journey," *Ensign* (October 1976): 34–63; and Lynn M. and Hope A. Hilton, *In Search of Lehi's Trail* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976).

72 Ross T. Christensen, "The Place Called Nahom," *Ensign* 8 (August 1978): 73.

demonstrated that this place name is very rare, occurring only once in the entire Arabian Peninsula.

According to the Tanners, "only three of the five letters in Nehhm agree with the spelling Nahom. The second letter in Nehhm is *e* rather than *a*, and the fourth letter is *h* instead of *o*. The variant spellings of Nehem, Nehm, Nihm, Nahm and Naham, do not really help to solve the problem" (p. 183). But the Tanners' criticism is not valid since, in Semitic languages such as Hebrew or Arabic, it is the *consonants* and not the vowels that have lexical value. The vowels have nothing to do with the meaning of the root. Thus it makes little difference whether the name is spelled *Nehem*, *Nehm*, *Nihm*, *Nahm*, or *Naham*—the root is the same.[73]

The Tanners believe "it would have been very easy for Joseph Smith to write a story about a trip through Arabia" (p. 183). Any old map, they reason, would show the would-be forger that if he followed the eastern shore of the Red Sea this would lead him in a south-southeasterly direction. The Tanners simply assume that such a choice would be inevitable, but why choose that direction anyway? Lehi might also go north or east or west across the Mediterranean.[74] If he had a map, a writer might have chosen to send Lehi's family along a south-southeasterly direction, but it was certainly not the only choice. "The only other important thing Joseph Smith would have to know," the Tanners assert, "is that although Arabia contains a great deal of barren land, there was a more fertile land in the southern portion of the country" (p. 183). As I have already explained, no American geographical sources published before 1830 mention the site Nahom, although we now know that it is an authentic ancient place name, which occurs only once in the entire region, and that in a location

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73 The second *h* in Niebuhr's anomalous rendering *Nehhm* finds no support in any other map of the region; it was apparently based upon a misprint or misreading of the name. All other maps support the basic Hebrew root *NḤM.

74 "Why," asked Daniel P. Kidder in 1842, "were they not directed to the Mediterranean Sea, which was so near Jerusalem, instead of being made to perform the long and perilous journey to the borders of the Red Sea?" Daniel P. Kidder, *Mormonism and the Mormons: A Historical View of the Rise and Progress of the Sect Self-Styled Latter-day Saints* (New York: Lane & Tippett, 1842), 265.

consistent with Nephi's description. Joseph Smith could *not* have learned about Nahom from early nineteenth-century sources.

Suppose for a minute that Joseph might have had access to the works of Jedidiah Morse, as the Tanners suggest. If that were so, he might pick up on the idea of a fertile area somewhere in the south, but he would place that region along the southeastern shore of the Red Sea: "*Arabia Felix*, or the Fruitful Arabia, situated on *the eastern shore of the Red Sea*, and *Arabia Deserta*, or the Desert Arabia, occupying the rest of the country between the Arabian and Persian gulfs."[75] Other geographies would have been equally superficial and misleading: "Arabia Felix, or the Happy Arabia, in the *south-western* extremity, *towards the shores of the Red Sea*."[76] In order to reach the Bountiful region Lehi would have to go east from Nahom, not south, as Morse would lead one to believe. Nahom, the southernmost location mentioned in Nephi's account, is never said to be a fruitful or happy place, but a place of death and mourning at which Lehi's family almost perishes from hunger (1 Nephi 16:39). This does not sound like the Arabia Felix of nineteenth-century geographies.

Even if we were to suppose that Joseph might have learned of a bountiful region on the southeastern shores of the Arabian Peninsula, the Book of Mormon goes further by specifying various characteristics of that region:[77]

1. Bountiful is "nearly eastward" from a place which was called *Nahom* (1 Nephi 17:1).
2. The text implies that the terrain and water sources from Nahom eastward permitted reasonable access from the interior deserts to the coast (1 Nephi 17:1–3).
3. Bountiful was a fertile region (1 Nephi 17:5–6).
4. It was a coastal location (1 Nephi 17:5–6).
5. Fruit and wild honey and possibly other food sources were available (1 Nephi 17:5–6; 18:6).

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75 Jedidiah Morse and Sidney E. Morse, *A New System of Geography, Ancient and Modern* (Boston: Richardson & Lord, 1824), 354, emphasis added.

76 *A System of Geography; or, A Descriptive, Historical, and Philosophical View of the Several Quarters of the World* (Glasgow: Niven, Napier and Khull, 1805), 273, emphasis added.

77 Aston and Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi*, 28–9.

6. The availability of natural fruit (1 Nephi 17:5–6; 18:6) and the bountiful nature of the region suggest the availability of fresh water at this location.

7. Timber was available that could be used to construct a ship (1 Nephi 18:1).

8. A mountain was nearby (1 Nephi 17:7; 18:3).

9. Substantial cliffs, from which Nephi's brothers might attempt to throw him into the sea, are near the ocean (1 Nephi 17:48).

10. Sources of flint (1 Nephi 17:11) and ore (1 Nephi 17:9–10) were available in the region.

11. Suitable wind and ocean currents were available to carry the vessel out into the ocean (1 Nephi 18:8–9).

Nephi provides some very specific information on Lehi's journey, which exceeds what could have been known from nineteenth-century sources antedating the Book of Mormon. The Astons have demonstrated that (1) the Wadi Sayq on the southeastern coast of Oman meets all the textual criteria for the Old World Bountiful, (2) it is the only site in that region which does, and (3) that fertile location is "nearly eastward" from an attested site called Nahom just as Nephi says it was. These characteristics surpass the information available in even the most informed geography books and gazetteers of Joseph Smith's day.

Book of Mormon Names

In a past review I chided the Tanners for failure to address some of the scholarship relating to Book of Mormon names. I find it most significant that many of the names frequently appear in a context that clearly reflects their Old World usage, and I cited several examples I felt were significant.[78] The Tanners, apparently unable to address this issue in a coherent fashion, have simply ignored what I said there (pp. 139–41). In any case, here are several additional examples, discovered by other scholars, which are not easily explainable under the assumption that the Book of Mormon is a shallow forgery.

Jershon. The Book of Mormon name *Jershon* can be traced to a Hebrew root meaning "to inherit." In the Book of Mormon we

78 Roper, review of Tanner, *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* 198–202.

read "Behold, we will give up the land of Jershon, which is on the east by the sea . . . and this land of *Jershon* is the land which we will give unto our brethren for an *inheritance*" (Alma 27:22).

Sheum. "And we began to till the ground, yea, even with all manner of seeds, with seeds of corn, and of wheat, and of barley, and with neas, and with *sheum*" (Mosiah 9:9). *Sheum* is a perfectly good Akkadian cereal name (*še'um*) dating to the third millennium B.C., which in ancient Assyria referred to wheat, but in other regions of the Near East could be applied to other grains. Since the Book of Mormon passage mentions *sheum* in addition to wheat and barley, this suggests that Book of Mormon people who came from the Old World probably applied this term to some species of New World grain. This raises an interesting question for the Tanners, who would simply dismiss the Book of Mormon as a shallow forgery by Joseph Smith. Incidentally, the term *sheum* is not found in early nineteenth-century sources because Akkadian could not be read until 1857, twenty-seven years after the Book of Mormon was published and thirteen years after the death of the Prophet.[79] So if Joseph Smith really made this name up, how did he just happen to choose this peculiar term *sheum* and just happen to use it in an agricultural context? I find it easier to believe that this is an indication of the antiquity of the Book of Mormon record.

Shilum. Alma 11:5–19 describes various monetary units that the Nephites used at one point in their history. Alma 11:16 in our current edition of the Book of Mormon records that one of these units was a "shiblum." However, both the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon and the printer's manuscript indicate that this originally read *shilum*. Significantly, *shilum* is a perfectly good Hebrew word, meaning literally "retribution . . . a fee: recompense, reward." That makes excellent sense in a monetary context.

Nahom. Nephi recorded, "And it came to pass that Ishmael *died*, and was buried in the place which was called *Nahom*. And it came to pass that the daughters of Ishmael did *mourn* exceedingly, because of the loss of their father" (1 Nephi 16:34–5). Bib-

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79 Ernst Doblhofer, *Voices in Stone*, trans. Mervyn Savill (New York: Collier, 1971), 121–48; Cyrus Gordon, *Forgotten Scripts: Their Ongoing Discovery and Decipherment*, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Dorset, 1987), 55–85.

lical scholars suggest that the root *NḤM means to "comfort" or "console." In some forms the word "comes simply to mean 'suffer emotional pain'. The sense 'be comforted' is retained in contexts of mourning for the dead."[80] Damrosch notes that all references to the root *NḤM in the Hebrew Bible are associated with death. "In family settings, it is applied in instances involving death of an immediate family member (parent, sibling, or child); in national settings, it has to do with the survival or impending extermination of an entire people. At heart, *naḥam* means 'to mourn,' to come to terms with a death; these usages are usually translated . . . by the verb 'to comfort,' as when Jacob's children try to comfort their father after the reported death of Joseph."[81] The events in 1 Nephi 16:34–5 fit this context quite well since we are told that Ishmael, a close family member, died and his daughters mourned and murmured.

Alan Goff has written an important article on the meaning of the root *NḤM as it relates to 1 Nephi 16:34–9.[82] Goff was apparently the first to note that the significance of this term may go beyond the obvious context of mourning for the dead. Nephi related,

> And Laman said unto Lemuel and also unto the sons of Ishmael: Behold let us slay our father, and also our brother Nephi. . . . And it came to pass that the Lord was with us, yea, even the voice of the Lord came and did speak many words unto them, and did chasten them exceedingly; and after they were chastened by the voice of the Lord they did turn away their anger, and did repent of their sins, insomuch that the Lord did bless us again with food, that we did not perish. (1 Nephi 16:37, 39)

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80 H. Van Dyke Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of *NḤM*," *Biblica* 56 (1975): 532.

81 David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987), 128–9.

82 Alan Goff, "Mourning, Consolation, and Repentance at Nahom," in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 92–9.

According to one scholar, the root *NḤM can also be "extended to describe the release of emotional tension involved in performing a declared action (executing wrath), or retracting a declared action (such as sin, punishment or blessing)."[83] Damrosch notes that the Hebrew term *naḥam* is sometimes applied to contexts involving "cases of regret or change of heart," frequently

> when the repenter is meditating murder. "Repentance" [or change of heart] then involves either the decision to kill, or conversely, the decision to stop killing. The term can then be used in quite ignoble circumstances, as when Esau comforts himself for the loss of his birthright by deciding to kill Jacob (Gen. 27:42), but usually it is God who repents, either negatively or positively; negatively, by deciding to destroy his people; positively, by commuting a sentence of destruction.[84]

Again, this explanation clearly fits the context of 1 Nephi 16:34–9, where Laman and Lemuel and the sons of Ishmael contemplate the murder of their father Lehi and their brother Nephi, the Lord is angry with them, and after being chastened by the Lord they turn away their anger and repent of their sins. The Lord also apparently turns away his wrath and does not destroy them with hunger. It is interesting, furthermore, that while they had up until this time been traveling southward (1 Nephi 16:13), they now *turn* and travel eastward (1 Nephi 17:1).

Archaeology, Geography, and Language

The Tanners attempt to portray the limited geographical view, espoused by most current Book of Mormon scholars, as inconsistent with the teachings of Latter-day Saint leaders. According to the Tanners, "Joseph Smith and the other early Mormon leaders identified North and South America as the lands of the ancient Nephites and Lamanites. . . . modern scholars have apostatized from the traditional teachings of the church on the subject"

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83 Parunak, "A Semantic Survey of *NḤM*," 532.

84 Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant,* 129.

(p. 95–6). The Tanners then cite several references from early Latter-day Saint writers in support of this claim.

However, aside from the claim that the plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated were found in a hill near Manchester and the general claim that Book of Mormon events occurred somewhere in the Western Hemisphere, no "official" position on Book of Mormon geography exists. In fact, as John Sorenson has recently shown, Latter-day Saint leaders since Joseph Smith's day have entertained a variety of theories regarding Book of Mormon geography.[85]

Joseph Smith himself seems to have speculated on the location of Book of Mormon events and changed his mind several times. Six months after Joseph assumed editorial responsibility for the *Times and Seasons*, an editorial suggested that "Lehi . . . landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien, and improved the country according to the word of the Lord."[86] Several weeks later, the church paper reviewed the book, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, by John Lloyd Stephens. The *Times and Seasons* gave it enthusiastic reviews and, in commenting on the book, the reviewer asserted "Central America, or Guatemala, is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south." Then, based on Alma 22:32, the writer expounded, "The city of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior, and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land." Since according to the Book of Mormon the land of Zarahemla was in the land southward, the above model would exclude the Isthmus of Darien as the narrow neck of land. The only isthmus that would qualify would be the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. The reviewer then speculated that some of the ruins Stephens encountered might be of one of those cities described in the Book of Mormon.[87] Whether Joseph Smith personally endorsed these views or not, these references suggest that even at this early date no established or official church position on Book of Mormon geography existed.

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85 John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 7–35.

86 *Times and Seasons* 3 (15 September 1842): 922.

87 *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 October 1842): 927.

Later statements by church leaders also support this view. In 1890 President George Q. Cannon of the First Presidency noted that some members of the church had asked church leaders to prepare some sort of map detailing where Book of Mormon events occurred. He declared that in the absence of direct revelation on the subject the First Presidency was not prepared even to make suggestions. "The word of the Lord or the translation of other ancient records is required to clear up many points now so obscure." Cannon then suggested that clarification on such points of geography could be gained by "drawing all the information possible from the record which has been translated for our benefit."[88] President Joseph F. Smith was once asked to approve a map which someone had prepared and which purported to show exactly where Lehi and his company landed. He declined, saying that "the Lord had not yet revealed it."[89]

In 1909 B. H. Roberts noted, "The question of Book of Mormon geography is more than ever recognized as an open one by students of the book." He then expressed doubts regarding the authenticity of the so-called "Frederick G. Williams Statement," suggesting the possibility that the previous hemispheric view may have been incorrect since it was based on this questionable statement.[90] According to Roberts,

> this alleged "revelation" has dominated all our thinking, and influenced all our conclusions upon the subject of Book of Mormon geography. Whereas, if this is not a revelation [as he suspected], the physical description relative to the contour of the lands occupied by the Jaredites and Nephites, that being principally that two large bodies of land were joined by a narrow neck of

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88 George Q. Cannon, "The Book of Mormon Geography," *Juvenile Instructor* (1 January 1890): 18–9.

89 Frederick J. Pack, "Route Traveled by Lehi and His Company," *Instructor* (April 1938): 160.

90 Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3:501–2; see also Frederick G. Williams III, "Did Lehi Land in Chile? An Assessment of the Frederick G. Williams Statement" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988).

> land—can be found between Mexico and Yucatan with the isthmus of Tehuantepec between.[91]

By placing the Book of Mormon in a Mesoamerican setting, Roberts suggested "many of our difficulties as to the geography of the Book of Mormon—if not all of them in fact, will have passed away."[92] In 1929 Anthony Ivins of the First Presidency asserted, "There is a great deal of talk about the geography of the Book of Mormon. Where was the land of Zarahemla? Where was the city of Zarahemla? and other geographic matters. *It does not make any difference to us. There has never been anything yet set forth that definitely settles that question.* So the Church says we are just waiting until we discover the truth."[93] Elder James E. Talmage agreed. "It matters not to me just where this city or that camp was located," although he called for further research and cautious speculation.[94] "As far as can be learned," wrote John A. Widtsoe in 1950, "the Prophet Joseph Smith, translator of the book, did not say where, on the American continent, Book of Mormon activities occurred. Perhaps he did not know."[95] Citing the well-known Zelph story, Elder Widtsoe noted that the known account "is not of much value in Book of Mormon geographical studies, since Zelph probably dated from a later time when Nephites and Lamanites had been somewhat dispersed and had wandered over the country."[96]

While we know the hill at which the Prophet Joseph Smith recovered the Nephite record, Elder Widtsoe remarked,

> There is a controversy . . . about the Hill Cumorah—not about the location where the Book of Mormon plates were found, but whether it is the hill under that name near which Nephite events took place. A name,

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91 Roberts, *New Witnesses for God*, 3:502–3.

92 Ibid., 3:503.

93 Anthony W. Ivins, in *Conference Report*, April 1929, 15–6, emphasis added.

94 James E. Talmage, in *Conference Report*, April 1929, 44.

95 John A. Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" *Improvement Era* (July 1950): 547.

96 Ibid. For an important overview of the Zelph incident, see Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," *BYU Studies* 29/2 (1989): 31–56.

> says one, may be applied to more than one hill; and plates containing the records of a people, sacred things, could be moved from place to place by divine help.[97]

He then cited the 1 October 1842 *Times and Seasons* article mentioned above, in which "under the Prophet's editorship Central America was denominated the region of Book of Mormon activities." In light of such information, he hoped that "diligent and prayerful study" might yield further insight.[98]

Is the Isthmus of Tehuantepec Too Wide?

In their attempt to portray the limited geographical view as heretical, the Tanners cite a statement made by Hugh Nibley in 1957 to support their argument that the Tehuantepec model is too wide (p. 99). However, when that statement is read in context, Nibley is not referring to the narrow neck of land, as the Tanners mistakenly assume, but to the *narrow passage* within that more general region.

> Nor is the "narrow passage" the same thing as the much-mentioned "narrow neck of land." A passage is a way through, "an entrance or exit," says the dictionary—a pass. Here it is specifically stated to be such: "the narrow passage which *led* into the land southward" (Mormon 2:29). Now the Isthmus of Panama,

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97 Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" 547. Even in the Book of Mormon, evidence reveals that several sites possessed the same name, as in the case of Manti (Alma 1:15; 16:7) and Onidah (Alma 32:4; 47:5). While the Tanners are critical of those who favor a Mesoamerican location for Cumorah, they fail to address the scriptural basis on which those views are based. For a good summary of this view see Sidney B. Sperry, "Were There Two Cumorahs?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (Spring 1995): 260–8. Moroni wandered for years following the battle at Cumorah and could easily have traveled to the New York region where he then deposited his father's abridgment. "Certainly no adherent of the Middle-American view of Ramah-Cumorah would object to the suggestion that Moroni himself may have called the [New York] hill Cumorah in honor of the one in Middle America. He may have even told the Prophet Joseph Smith about it, but of this we have no proof. We do know, however, that the name Cumorah has been applied to the hill from Joseph Smith's day to this" (ibid., 268). Sperry adopted this view in 1964.

98 Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" 597.

> never less than thirty miles wide, is *not* a "narrow passage" for an army of less than two divisions.[99]

Contrary to the Tanners' interpretation, Nibley's observation regarding this distinction is consistent with Sorenson's model placing the narrow passage along the narrow elevated ridge near the northern coast of the Isthmus.[100] David Palmer correctly noted that Mormon describes the fortified line either "from *the east* to the west sea" (Alma 22:32) or "from the west sea, even unto *the east*" (Helaman 4:7). Since Mormon does not specify that this line extended to the east *sea*, Palmer's suggestion that the day-and-a-half journey was "from some strategic point within the isthmus to the west sea" is reasonable, although not the only interpretation. Even if we assume that "the east" on this line refers to the eastern sea, that point could be as much as 15–20 miles inland, depending on the extent of inundation and where the Bountiful-Desolation fortified point began.

The Tanners complain that Sorenson uses slower estimates of speed when speaking of Limhi's group or the Nephite wars, but longer estimates when discussing the narrow neck of land. We must take into account, however, that groups, especially with small children and flocks, would travel at a much slower pace than unencumbered individuals. The same could be said for armies, although they might be able to move at a fairly rapid pace.[101] Mormon defines this as the speed "for *a* Nephite." Mormon is speaking of an individual, not a group of Nephite*s*. Presumably for a group or for a non-Nephite it might take longer. Moreover, since Mormon is speaking of a fortified line of defense along which communication would be desirable, the term "for a *Nephite*," may refer to the time it would take a messenger or courier to travel that distance. Sorenson documents examples of runners traveling distances of between nine and one hundred miles in a day.[102] Given the terrain along the Isthmus of Tehuantepec we would presume, however, that the speed of a runner or messenger

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99 Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988; 1st ed., 1957), 424–5.

100 Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 42–4.

101 Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 393–7.

102 Ibid., 396.

traveling on foot would be much slower, although this would depend on whether or not established trails were available for such a messenger.

We need not assume, as the Tanners do, that the entire journey was by foot. More than half this distance could have been traveled by water, which would speed up the journey considerably. "Traveling by sea," notes Ross Hassig,

> from Veracruz to Coatzacoalcos, canoes were employed to go up the Coatzacoalcos River to Antigua Malpaso, where land transport was employed for the remaining 12 leagues to Tehuantepec. This route was also employed in traveling between Mexico City and Tehuantepec or Huatulco, for the Mexico City-Veracruz road was the best in New Spain, and water transportation was easier than overland travel.[103]

"The products of the Pacific side, destined for the Gulf coast, are first brought down to this place for embarkation; and occasional cargoes of goods from Vera Cruz ascend the river to this point, from whence they are carried to the Pacific plains on mules."[104] A similar route used in the mid-nineteenth century followed this route to Suchil at the head of the Coatzacoalcos River and from there down to the city of Tehuantepec.[105] Balsa rafts are frequently hewn out of trees and used for transportation along water routes in this region.

> The dexterity with which the Indians manage these balsas (often heavily laden), in passing over terrible rapids and through narrow passages filled with rugged rocks, where even a canoe could not possibly live, is truly surprising. These rafts are rudely constructed from the

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[103] Ross Hassig, *Trade, Tribute, and Transportation: The Sixteenth-Century Political Economy of the Valley of Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 175–6. Hassig provides a map detailing this route.

[104] John J. Williams, *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (New York: Appleton, 1852), 240.

[105] Miguel Covarrubias, *Mexico South: The Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (New York: Knopf, 1947), 168.

> *jonote*, an exceedingly light wood, which grows in great quantities.[106]

Kamar Al-Shimas notes that various kinds of canoes are also used in this region.

> When ascending the river the boat is kept within arm's length of the bank, and fifteen miles with a heavily loaded canoe or *thirty miles* with a light traveling-canoe is accounted a good day's work. In descending the stream, paddles are used, the canoe is kept to the center of the stream to take advantage of the current, and *fifty miles* is *easily* accomplished between daylight and the set of the sun.[107]

It was a journey of a day and a half on this defensive line "from the east to the west sea" (Alma 22:32); however, it was only a day's journey "from the west sea unto the east" (Helaman 3:7). The Tanners assume this is a contradiction, but it makes sense if part of that journey was by water since those traveling eastward would be going downstream and could move much faster with the current than would those journeying upstream.

Population Sizes in the Book of Mormon

Most Book of Mormon scholars accept the idea that other peoples besides the Lehites, Jaredites, and "Mulekites" were present in the Americas in Book of Mormon times. The Tanners inaccurately claim a lack of scriptural support for this view; in fact, they have simply chosen to ignore it.[108] In 1929 Anthony W.

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106 Williams, *The Isthmus of Tehuantepec*, 247.

107 Kamar Al-Shimas, *The Mexican Southland* (Fowler, Ind.: Benton Review Shop, 1922), 149, emphasis added.

108 John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 1–34; John L. Sorenson, "The 'Mulekites,'" *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 6–22. For a cogent discussion of the Book of Mormon population issue by a professional demographer, see James E. Smith, "Nephi's Descendants? Historical Demography and the Book of Mormon," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 255–96.

Ivins of the First Presidency counseled readers of the Book of Mormon,

> We must be careful in the conclusions that we reach. The Book of Mormon teaches the history of three distinct peoples, or two peoples and three different colonies of people, who came from the old world to this continent. *It does not tell us that there was no one here before them. It does not tell us that people did not come after.* And so if discoveries are made which suggest differences in race origins, it can very easily be accounted for, and reasonably, for we do believe that other people came to this continent.[109]

The Tanners claim that no "living General Authority of the Mormon Church" has ever publicly supported the limited geographical view of the Book of Mormon" (p. 106). Of course, the question is largely irrelevant, since most Latter-day Saint leaders tend to focus their time and concern on weightier matters. The Tanners, however, are mistaken in their claim. In 1994 I attended a talk given by Elder Dallin H. Oaks on the subject of "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon." While not endorsing anyone's particular theory, Elder Oaks spoke quite favorably of the limited geographical view. "If one is willing to acknowledge the importance of faith," he said, "and the reality of a realm beyond human understanding, the case of the Book of Mormon has a stronger case to argue" since, as he put it, "the case against the history of the Book of Mormon has to prove a negative." Elder Oaks recalled taking a class at BYU on the Book of Mormon in the 1950s.

> Here I was introduced to the idea that the Book of Mormon is not a history of all of the people who have lived on the continents of North and South America in all ages of the earth. Up to that time, I had assumed that it was. If that were the claim of the Book of Mormon, any piece of historical, archaeological, or linguistic evidence to the contrary would weigh in against the Book

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109 Ivins, in *Conference Report,* April 1929, 15, emphasis added.

> of Mormon, and those who rely exclusively on scholarship would have a promising position to argue.
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> In contrast, if the Book of Mormon only purports to be an account of a few peoples who inhabited a portion of the Americas during a few millennia in the past, the burden of argument changes drastically. It is no longer a question of all versus none; it is a question of some versus none. In other words, in the circumstance I describe, the opponents of historicity must prove that the Book of Mormon has *no* historical validity for *any* peoples who lived in the Americas in a particular time frame, a notoriously difficult exercise.[110]

Naming Animals

In a section entitled "Horses Are Deer?" the Tanners ridicule the idea that the names of animals mentioned in the Book of Mormon text could possibly refer to anything other than their modern scientific classifications (pp. 109–14). They dismiss John Sorenson's approach to the animal question as "a desperate attempt to explain away a serious problem" (p. 109). The Tanners' criticisms reveal an unawareness of the wide disagreement among biblical scholars about the definitions of many of the animal names mentioned in the Hebrew text of the Bible itself. "The identification of the animals in the Bible has given rise to divergent views, some contending that it is possible to identify them in a few cases only. Others, however, hold that this can be done in most instances."[111] According to Edward R. Hope, "In the Old Testament it is extremely difficult to decide with any certainty the animals (or birds) referred to by their Hebrew names. In some cases the range of suggestions is staggering."[112] How do biblical scholars and translators deal with this problem? One method has been to follow precedent of tradition. "The problem with this

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[110] Dallin H. Oaks, "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon" (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 2–3, emphasis added.

[111] Jehuda Feliks, "Animals of the Bible and the Talmud," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 3:19.

[112] Edward R. Hope, "Animals in the Old Testament: Anybody's Guess?" *Bible Translator* 42/1 (January 1991): 128.

approach," Hope notes, "is that it sometimes introduces into the text animals which were not found in Biblical times in the ancient middle east, as far as we know."[113] A second approach consists in associating the animal with the meaning of the Hebrew root for that name. While this can sometimes be helpful it can also be problematic since many animal names are often derived from the sound the animal makes rather than from a description of what it looks like or what it does.[114] In yet another recent approach,

> one would start from animals known to have lived in the area and period as evidenced from the archaeological findings. Then a Hebrew name would be associated with an appropriate animal, bearing in mind the known habitat, characteristics and behaviour of the animal chosen. Another important factor in making the choice would be the relative "prominence" the animal was likely to have had.[115]

While none of these approaches has proved entirely satisfactory in regard to the Bible, they have been and continue to be used by scholars as a reasonable approach to a difficult scriptural question.

The approaches of these scholars to the animal question in the Bible are similar to those suggested by John Sorenson in reference to the Book of Mormon.[116] Although there are other possibilities, Book of Mormon scribes may have applied Old World terms to New World species for which they had no Old World equivalent. This difficulty is often a concern for zoologists and historians who wish to evaluate literary sources from other cultures. According to Lawrence Kiddle,

> The adoption of a new domestic animal into one's own culture causes a linguistic problem of what name to give the newcomer. Four solutions to the problem are common:
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> 1. to give the animal a descriptive name (loan creation);

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113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid., 129.
116 Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting*, 288–99.

> 2. to give the animal the name of a familiar animal which the receiving speakers believe it resembles (loanshift or loan extension);
>
> 3. to combine the foreign name of the animal with a native term that indicates its origin or some other characteristic (loanblend); or,
>
> 4. to adopt, frequently in a distorted form, the foreign name of the animal (loanword).[117]

Kiddle notes that "The first two naming procedures are hard to study because they require an intimate knowledge of the receiving languages in order to comprehend the thought processes of their speakers."[118] This is, of course, extremely relevant in the case of Book of Mormon animal names, which may have similar complexities, since the book purports to be a document translated from another language and deals in part with Old World cultures encountering New World cultures for the first time. What, for example, would Nephi have called a Mesoamerican tapir if he had encountered one? Could he have called it a horse? The tapir is considered by zoologists to be a kind of horse in unevolved form.[119] Although the Central American tapir, the largest of the New World species, can weigh up to 300 kilos,[120] it can move rather quickly at a gallop and can jump vertical fences or walls by

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117 Lawrence B. Kiddle, "Spanish and Portuguese Cattle Terms in Amerindian Languages," in *Italic and Romance: Linguistic Studies in Honor of Ernst Pulgram,* ed. Herbert J. Izzo (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1980), 273. A possible example of the adoption of a loanword may be Moroni's reference to Jaredite "cureloms and cumoms" during the reign of the Jaredite king Emer (Ether 9:19).

118 Ibid., 273–4. "It should be mentioned that at this early period, before the newcomers became better acquainted with the resources of the 'Indies,' many European terms were applied to things which had no exact counterpart in the Old World." H. B. Nicholson, "Montezuma's Zoo," *Pacific Discovery* 8/4 (July-August 1955): 5.

119 Hans Frädrich and Erich Thenius, "Tapirs," in *Grzimek's Animal Life Encyclopedia,* ed. Bernard Grzimek (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972), 20; cf. Carlos Navarrete, "El Hombre danta en una pintura de la costa de Chiapas: una aportación a la iconografía del Preclásico Superior," in *Homenaje a Roman Piña Chan* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, Instituto de Investigaciones Antropológicas, 1987), 229–64.

120 Frädrich and Thenius, "Tapirs," 18–9.

rising on its hind legs and leaping up.[121] Zoologist Hans Krieg notes, "Whenever I saw a tapir, it reminded me of an animal similar to a *horse* or a *donkey*. The movements as well as the shape of the animal, especially the high neck with the small brush mane, even the expression on the face is much more like a horse's."[122] The tapir can also be domesticated quite easily if captured when young.[123] Young tapirs who have lost their mothers are easily tamed and can be fed from a bowl. They like to be petted and will often let children ride on their backs.[124] When the Spanish arrived in the Yucatan, the Maya called European horses and donkeys *tzimin,* meaning "tapir," because, according to one early observer, "they say they resemble them greatly."[125] After the spread of horses, tapir were still called *tzimin-kaax,* which means literally "forest horse."[126] Some observers have felt that the tapir more accurately resembles an ass. In fact, among many native Americans today, the tapir is called *anteburro,* which means "once an ass."[127] In Brazil some farmers have actually used the tapir to pull ploughs, suggesting potential as a draft animal.[128] So tapirs could certainly have been used in ways similar to horses.

Botanical Questions

The Tanners cite Nephi's statement that when his family arrived in the New World they planted the seeds which they had brought from the Old World, "And it came to pass that they did grow exceedingly; wherefore, we were blessed in abundance" (1 Nephi 18:24; see also 16:11; 18:1, 6, 24). The Tanners reason from this passage that these products survived. "One would expect, then, that we would find these plants in abundance in Mesoamerica" (p. 117). One might, but this is not always the case. "We have set them to raising millet," wrote Landa of the

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121 Ibid., 20.

122 Ibid., 19, emphasis added.

123 Al-Shimas, *Mexican Southland,* 112.

124 Frädrich and Thenius, "Tapirs," 29.

125 Ernest Noyes, trans., *Fray Alonso Ponce in Yucatan, 1588* (New Orleans: Tulane University Press, 1932), 308.

126 Ibid., 308 n. 19.

127 Al-Shimas, *Mexican Southland,* 112; Navarrete, "El Hombre," 238.

128 Frädrich and Thenius, "Tapirs," 29.

Yucatan Maya, "and it grows marvelously well and is a good kind of sustenance." Yet apparently no trace of this crop which grew so "marvelously well" has survived.[129] The same may have been the case for Lehi's party, whose crops "did grow exceedingly" in abundance, but could easily have died out after the first generation.

Grains. As Sorenson has shown, a variety of New World grains were known to pre-Columbian peoples, which could easily fit the ambiguous Book of Mormon references to "grain."[130] Two grains, however, which are mentioned by name, barley and wheat, suggest at least two possibilities: (1) The terms *wheat* and *barley* could refer to certain New World grains identified by Old World names, even though they were another species of grain, or (2) they could refer to barley and wheat of a New World variety. We will look at each of these possibilities.

1. "It is a well known fact," writes Hildegard Lewy, a Near Eastern specialist, "that the names of plants and particularly of [grains] are applied in various languages and dialects to different species." Lewy notes the challenge this poses in interpreting references to Assyrian cereals in Near Eastern documents. When doing so, "the meaning of these Old Assyrian terms must be inferred from the Old Assyrian texts alone without regard to their signification in sources from Babylonia and other regions adjacent to Assyria."[131] In the Western Hemisphere, many Spanish names were applied to New World plants following the Conquest because of their apparent similarity to European ones, even though, botanically speaking, these were often of a different species or variety. A similar practice may have occurred when the Nephites or the Jaredites encountered New World culture for the first time.

2. In addition to the above suggestion, Book of Mormon references to "barley" and "wheat" may indeed be to varieties of those species which were found in the New World by Book of

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[129] This is discussed and documented by Sorenson in *An Ancient American Setting*, 139.

[130] John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 338–9.

[131] Hildegard Lewy, "On Some Old Assyrian Cereal Names," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76/4 (October–December 1956): 201.

Mormon peoples. For example, while it has been generally assumed that barley was first introduced to the New World by Europeans after 1492, we now know that pre-Columbian Americans knew of and domesticated barley long before this time. Daniel B. Adams, in describing recent discoveries at the Hohokam site of La Ciudad near Phoenix, Arizona, reports, "Perhaps the most startling evidence of Hohokam agricultural sophistication came last year when salvage archaeologists found preserved grains of what looks like domesticated barley, the first ever found in the New World."[132] John Sorenson, who first brought this fact to the attention of the Latter-day Saint community, has reported additional samples that have turned up in Illinois and Oklahoma.[133]

> So here was a domesticated barley in use in several parts of North America over a long period of time. Crop exchanges between North America and Mesoamerica have been documented by archaeology making it possible that this native barley was known in that tropical southland and conceivably was even cultivated there. The key point is that these unexpected results from botany are recent. More discoveries will surely be made as research continues.[134]

Still, as already mentioned above, an Old World term for wheat may simply have been applied to one of several other New World grains.

Wine

The Tanners believe that Book of Mormon references to "wine" are a problem for the Book of Mormon (p. 118). While the Book of Mormon mentions "wine," that New World beverage is never said to have been made of grapes. The Book of Mormon never claims that grapes were cultivated in the Americas, although grapes were known in the New World. Landa noted that in the

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[132] Daniel B. Adams, "Last Ditch Archaeology," *Science 83* (December 1983): 32. The Book of Mormon never claims that the grains barley or wheat were of an Old World variety.

[133] See Sorenson, "Viva Zapato!" 341, for references.

[134] Ibid., 341–2.

Yucatan, "there are certain wild vines bearing edible grapes; we find many of these on the Cupul coast."[135] The Tanners assume that references to wine in the Book of Mormon must imply grape cultivation, yet this is not necessarily so. Alcoholic beverages do not have to be made from grapes. "There is no reason why the term 'wine' should not be retained to include the many varieties of liquor made by savage or semi-civilized races from the sap of trees. The *latex* of vegetable stems is sufficiently homologous with the juice of fruits, as that of the grape, to be classified with it in a genus [of beverages] distinct from fermented grain."[136]

Various wines made from such things as bananas, pineapples, the palm, and balche were described by early Europeans in Mesoamerica. "About Mexico more than in any other part groweth that excellent tree called *metl* [maguey], which they plant and dress as they do their vines in Europe. . . . From the root of this tree cometh a juice like unto syrup, which being sodden will become sugar. You may make of it wine [*pulque*] and vinegar. The Indians often become drunk with it."[137] In one important study of the subject, La Barre found abundant evidence for the pre-Columbian knowledge and use of a surprising variety of these native American beverages. "There is ample evidence of the wide distribution both in North and in South America of native undistilled alcoholic liquors, or beers and *wines*."[138]

The Tanners note that King Noah and his people planted "vineyards" (Mosiah 11:15). They assume that term refers exclusively to grapes, but this is not necessarily so. As John Tvedtnes has shown, the meaning of *kerem* is not confined to grape vines, but can often refer to other crops as well.[139] Similarly, "wine-presses" need not suggest grapes either, since other fruits and

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135 Friar Diego de Landa, *Yucatan before and after the Conquest,* trans. William Gates (New York: Dover, 1978), 105.

136 A. E. Crawley, "Drinks, Drinking," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics,* ed. James E. Hastings (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1951), 5:73.

137 J. Eric S. Thompson, ed., *Thomas Gage's Travels in the New World* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1958), 76.

138 Weston La Barre, "Native American Beers," *American Anthropologist* 40/2 (April–June 1938): 224, emphasis added.

139 John A. Tvedtnes, "Vineyard or Olive Orchard?" in *The Allegory of the Olive Tree,* ed. Stephen D. Ricks and John W. Welch (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 477–83.

vegetables were squeezed or crushed in making fermented liquors in pre-Columbian times. According to La Barre, the Mexican beverage "*Colonche* is made of the fruit of several species of *Opuntia*. . . . The fruit is peeled and *pressed*, the juice passed through straw sieves, to ferment near a fire, or in the sun."[140] The Huichol, another Mexican tribe, "make a 'wine' from corn-stalks, another from the juice of the *mashed* guayabas fruit, and still another from sotol."[141] Anthropologists unashamedly describe many of these drinks as "wines." Noah did not need grapes to be described as a wine-bibber.

Metals and Reformed Egyptian[142]

Citing several passages from different periods in the Book of Mormon, the Tanners argue that the Nephites had no shortage of gold and other metals to require the use of a "reformed Egyptian" script that would presumably take up less room (Mormon 9:32–3) (pp. 125–7). They cite passages from the days of Nephi and Jarom in the land of Nephi (1 Nephi 18:25; Jarom 1:8), the land of Zarahemla in Alma's day (Alma 1:29), and around A.D. 300, when the Nephites were driven out of their own lands in Mormon's day. Moreover, Mormon compiled his record at a time when his people were fleeing from the Lamanites, and the Gadianton robbers infested the land (Mormon 2:8). Treasures were scarce and resources would have been limited (Helaman 13:20, 31–6; Mormon 1:18). During periods of continual warfare, extensive trade would not have been practical or necessarily possible. It is reasonable to understand how Mormon's supply of ore for additional plates was limited.

Mormon notes that because they had to write in reformed Egyptian their record contained certain imperfections (Mormon 9:33). "If writing in Egyptian was the cause of imperfection in

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140 La Barre, "Native American Beers," 225, emphasis added.

141 Ibid., 230, emphasis added.

142 John Tvedtnes and I have already responded to the issue of the use of Egyptian by Hebrew peoples in Tvedtnes and Roper, "'Joseph Smith's Use of the Apocrypha,'" 328–9. See also John A. Tvedtnes and Stephen D. Ricks, "Jewish and Other Semitic Texts Written in Egyptian Characters," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 156–63.

the record," the Tanners ask, "why would Nephi begin writing the book in Egyptian in the first place and why would Mormon, who engraved most of the plates, follow that practice?" (p. 125). The Tanners mistakenly assume that Nephi wrote in reformed Egyptian, but this is not what Mormon says.

> And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech. And if our plates had been sufficiently large we should have written in Hebrew; but the Hebrew hath been altered by us also; and if we could have written in Hebrew, behold, ye would have had no imperfection in our record. (Mormon 9:32–3)

In other words Nephi originally wrote in some form of Egyptian script; however, as the language and script were handed down from generation to generation they were "reformed" or "altered by us, according to our manner of speech" (Mormon 9:32). The imperfection in language derives not from the original Hebrew and Egyptian, but from the subsequent mixing of these languages with New World languages that occurred during the nearly thousand years of Nephite history.

The Bat Creek Inscription

In 1889 the Smithsonian Institution excavated a hitherto undisturbed burial mound at Bat Creek, Tennessee. This mound disclosed nine skeletons. Directly under the head of one of these skeletons, they found several artifacts, including what appeared to be two copper bracelets, several small pieces of polished wood, and a stone bearing an inscription. In 1971 Cyrus Gordon showed that the script found on the stone was paleo-Hebrew and could be translated "For Judah."[143] In 1972 the Tanners published an appendix to their book *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* in

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143 Cyrus H. Gordon, "The Bat Creek Inscription," in *Book of the Descendants of Doctor Benjamin Lee and Dorothy Gordon* (New Jersey: Ventnor, 1972), 5–18.

which they cited a number of scholars who disagreed with Gordon's interpretations.[144]

In 1988 J. Huston McCulloch discovered that the so-called "copper" bracelets were in fact brass. In support of the claim that the Bat Creek inscription and associated artifacts are modern, the Tanners cite a 1971 statement issued from the Smithsonian Institution claiming, on the basis of the chemical composition of the brass, that the bracelets had to be eighteenth- or nineteenth-century artifacts (p. 134). However, McCulloch showed that this earlier reasoning was faulty. In 1978, P. T. Craddock demonstrated that, contrary to popular belief, this kind of brass was indeed known to the ancient Mediterranean world during the very period in question.[145] Consequently, the chemical composition of the brass bracelets, once assumed to be a modern anachronism, actually supports the notion of antiquity, since it was in use during the first and second centuries A.D. I doubt that the Tanners would have cited the 1971 letter if they had read McCulloch's article with sufficient care. Moreover, radiocarbon tests on the wooden fragments yielded a date of A.D. 427. McCulloch also published a persuasive defense in support of Gordon's original claim that the inscription could be read as paleo-Hebrew.[146] In a review of the Tanners' book in 1992, I cited McCulloch's important article in response to the claim that no Old World pre-Columbian inscriptions have been found in the New World.[147] In the summer of 1993 *Biblical Archaeology Review* published an article by McCulloch in which he summarized his finds.[148] This article was accompanied by a brief and somewhat sarcastic retort by P. Kyle McCarter.[149] McCarter's criticisms of McCulloch were based on a

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144 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Archaeology and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1969), 84–92.

145 P. T. Craddock, "Europe's Earliest Brasses," *MASCA Journal* 1 (December 1978): 4–5.

146 J. Huston McCulloch, "The Bat Creek Inscription: Cherokee or Hebrew?" *Tennessee Anthropologist* 13/2 (1988): 79–123.

147 Roper, review of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality?* 212–3.

148 J. Huston McCulloch, "The Bat Creek Inscription: Did Judean Refugees Escape to Tennessee?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* (July–August1993): 46–53, 82–3.

149 P. Kyle McCarter, "Let's Be Serious about the Bat Creek Stone," *Biblical Archaeological Review* 19/4 (July–August 1993): 54–5, 83.

1991 article by Robert Mainfort and Mary Kwas.[150] The Tanners' recent book cites several excerpts from McCarter's article in order to cast doubt on the inscription's authenticity (p 135). However, the Tanners were unaware that these arguments had been thoroughly refuted by McCulloch.[151] Since the Tanners cite, and apparently accept and wish others to accept, these arguments, I will respond briefly to those claims as quoted in their book.

1. McCarter's claim that the inscription was not paleo-Hebrew was based on Frank Moore Cross's evaluation published by Mainfort and Kwas. McCulloch, however, clearly demonstrates that "Professor Cross makes no less than three elementary and readily documentable errors of Hebrew paleography" in his criticisms of the inscription, which undermine his argument, and that his other criticisms had already been resolved by Gordon.[152]

2. McCarter also claimed that dating on the wood fragments does not establish the antiquity of the stone since the tree from which the wood was taken could have been much older (p. 135). "The tree growth," writes McCulloch, "could well have been several decades, or conceivably even a century or two old, if the wood was taken from the heart of a very old tree, at the time of the burial. But even if we add 200 years to the upper end of the 2σ band, we are still left with a pre-Norse, not to mention pre-Columbian, date for the burial."[153]

3. An additional argument offered by McCarter and apparently favored by the Tanners is that the wood fragments "may well have been contaminated with other materials in the wet environment of the mound" (p. 135). This argument does not hold up either, since, prior to testing, careful steps were taken to eliminate any potential contamination. The wood fragment sample was "given a hot acid wash to eliminate carbonates. It was repeatedly rinsed to neutrality and subsequently given a hot alkali soaking to take out humic acids. After rinsing to neutrality, another acid wash followed and another rinsing to neutrality." Consequently, as

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150 Robert C. Mainfort Jr. and Mary L. Kwas, "The Bat Creek Stone: Judeans in Tennessee?" *Tennessee Anthropologist* 16/1 (Spring 1991): 1–19.

151 J. Huston McCulloch, "The Bat Creek Stone: A Reply to Mainfort and Kwas," *Tennessee Anthropologist* 18/1 (Spring 1993): 1–26.

152 Ibid., 2.

153 Ibid., 12.

McCulloch explains, "Contamination by either calcium carbonate or humic acid from groundwater has therefore already been eliminated as a possibility, to the best of the laboratory's ability."[154]

4. McCarter, who finds the inscription much too close to paleo-Hebrew to have been an accident, but is unwilling to take seriously the possibility that it is genuine, argues that it must have been forged or planted by those who found it. The Tanners, to their credit, admit that McCarter "produces no hard evidence" to support these particular allegations (p. 135). In fact, as McCulloch points out, "there is *absolutely no* indication that the inscription is a forgery, in the first place, other than the circular, and therefore unscientific, argument that being Hebrew, it must surely be fake."[155]

In short, the arguments cited by the Tanners against the antiquity of the inscription simply cannot be sustained on the basis of the evidence. The evidence for the inscription shows: (1) The Hebrew inscription was found in a hitherto undisturbed burial mound that was not opened until the Smithsonian Institution opened it in 1889. (2) The inscription can be read as paleo-Hebrew and is similar to other examples dating to the period of the Second Temple. (3) Wood fragments from the tomb yielded a Carbon-14 date between A.D. 32 and A.D. 769, making it not only pre-Christian but pre-Viking as well. (4) Brass bracelets from the tomb were tested and found to contain a percentage of lead comparable with a form of Roman brass produced only between 45 B.C. and A.D. 100. (5) Based on the above evidence, it is most reasonable to view the inscription as genuine, pre-Columbian, and pre-Viking. "The battle cry of the die-hards," observes Cyrus Gordon, "was that no authentic pre-Columbian example of an Old World script or language has been excavated on American soil; and until such a one is discovered by bona fide archaeologists, the diffusionists do not have a leg to stand on."[156] The apparent authenticity and pre-Columbian nature of the Bat Creek inscription changes this situation significantly because "it does

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154 Ibid., 13.

155 Ibid., 16, emphasis added.

156 Cyrus H. Gordon, "New Directions in the Study of Ancient Middle Eastern Cultures," *Bulletin of the Middle Eastern Cultural Center* 5 (1991): 62.

show that an Atlantic crossing was made ca. A.D. 100 and consequently it can no longer be said that no authentic pre-Columbian text in an Old World script or language has ever been found in the Western Hemisphere." Accordingly,

> We shall have to re-examine the other inscriptions and artifacts found in America, that are possibly of Old World origin. Some are doubtless fakes, but others will turn out to be genuine. Each case will have to be re-evaluated on its own merits. But, here and now, we know that trans-Atlantic crossings were not only possible before Columbus and the Vikings, but did actually take place and we can prove a specific crossing in Imperial Roman times.[157]

Critics and Crows

I find it remarkable that the criticisms raised by enemies of the church have inadvertently had the tendency to bring Latter-day Saints to a deeper understanding and appreciation for the Book of Mormon by highlighting significant elements in it that might otherwise have been ignored. While I find their work to be redundant, frequently superficial, and sometimes misleading, the Tanners do occasionally raise interesting questions, which if carefully and thoughtfully explored suggest new insights into the complexity of the Book of Mormon. One recent example illustrates the case.

In support of their so-called "Black Hole" theory, the Tanners recently argued that the section of the Book of Mormon containing Mormon's abridgment shows little evidence of having been influenced by the teachings on the small plates of Nephi, which the Tanners believe were fabricated after the dictation of Mosiah through Moroni. "The obvious lack of citations to Nephi's words in the last nine books of the Book of Mormon is certainly not consistent with what one would expect to find if the Book of Mormon were a true record." The Tanners believe that this is easily explained by their "Black Hole" theory: "Since the

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157 Ibid., 65.

first 116 pages of Joseph Smith's manuscript were either stolen or lost and Smith did not know exactly what material he would use to replace the missing section, he could not cite anything from Nephi as he wrote the last nine books of the Book of Mormon because there was nothing to quote."[158]

As I examined the Tanners' claim, however, I found over seventy examples to the contrary, showing that Mormon in his abridgment and Nephite prophets such as Alma appear to cite and refer to the writings and teachings of Nephi and Jacob on the small plates.[159] More recently I have discovered that even this is only the tip of the iceberg.[160] I would probably never have thought to consider this possibility had the Tanners not made it an issue. By focusing on what they view as weak elements in the research of Mormon scholars who study the scriptures, the Tanners and other critics inadvertently allow Latter-day Saints to refine their case and more adequately and persuasively defend the kingdom of God. For that I think we can be grateful.

My sentiments about the Tanners' criticisms can perhaps be summarized by an observation once made by Elder Orson Hyde, that even crows, doleful creatures that they are, sometimes do mankind a service by devouring the garbage. Then he drew an analogy with the anti-Mormon critics of his own day.

> He had often thought that there was [a] very great resemblance between the priests of the day and these crows. For they were continually picking up all the dirt, filth, and meanness of the [Mormons?], feasting on it [as] if it was a precious morsel. But offer them any good and sobriety /from/ among the Mormons, they have no appetite and will turn away from it. I think for the same reason the Legislature lets the crows live. We ought to let the priest live, gather and eat up all the filth

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158 Jerald and Sandra Tanner, *Answering Mormon Scholars: A Response to Criticism of the Book "Covering Up the Black Hole in the Book of Mormon,"* vol. 1 (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1994), 52.

159 Roper, "A Hole That's Not So Black," 186–95. Many additional examples are given in the longer version of this article.

160 See my forthcoming article, "The Influence of the Small Plates of Nephi on Mormon's Abridgment of the Nephite Record."

and rubbish from the Mormon people that they may be healthy.[161]

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161 Joseph Smith Journal, 2 April 1843, in Scott H. Faulring, ed., *An American Prophet's Record: The Diaries and Journals of Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 339. Reed Durham once related the following incident. "In the mid-1960s, Sandra Tanner came to see me at the LDS Institute at the University of Utah and said, 'Reed' (we have always been on good terms and called each other by first name), 'I just don't understand you. You know all the stuff that we write and yet you keep firing away with a view that is inconsistent with ours.' I explained to Sandra that I look at revelation as a process and that line upon line a church or a prophet or anyone for that matter can learn and improve. I told her that we all make mistakes and errors and said, 'But Sandra, you look at it differently. If you find one little mistake with a church or a prophet you believe they cannot be of God. I see a process of growing and learning. God sometimes has trouble helping us because of our limitations, not his. Oh sure, he could coerce us, but he doesn't and so we can only progress as fast as our limitations let us.' After listening to me, Sandra then said, 'If I had learned or been taught these concepts from the beginning, things might have been different with me.' It was quite an admission on her part." Telephone conversation with Martin S. Tanner, 12 March 1992, 4:00 P.M. These notes were typed by Martin S. Tanner during the phone call itself.