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Orson Scott Card's "Artifact or Artifice": Where It Stands After Twenty-five Years

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Orson Scott Card's "Artifact or Artifice": Where It Stands After Twenty-five Years

Jeff Lindsay

Abstract: *When Orson Scott Card wrote "The Book of Mormon: Artifact or Artifice?" in 1993, he applied keen skills as an author of fiction to help readers understand how to detect the many hidden assumptions an author brings into a text. Subtle details such as the choice of what to explain or what not to explain to readers can quickly reveal the era and environment of the author. The value of Card's analysis is reconsidered in light of extensive Book of Mormon studies since 1993 and has been found, for the most part, to have withstood the test of time well, like the Book of Mormon itself.*

Twenty-five years ago — long before the founding of The Interpreter Foundation and even predating FARMS's affiliation with BYU by half a decade — a famous name among fiction writers, Orson Scott Card, gave a speech at BYU that provided a novel way of evaluating Book of Mormon claims. In "The Book of Mormon: Artifact or Artifice?" at the 1993 BYU Symposium on Life, the Universe, and Everything,[1] Card applied his literary skills to examine the artifacts of fiction we should find if the Book of Mormon had been fabricated and not merely translated by Joseph Smith.

Upon reading Card's article today, one familiar with Book of Mormon studies may be impressed with how well Card's analysis and conclusions have stood the test of time. Many of the points he made have become more relevant or strengthened by subsequent explorations into the text of the Book of Mormon, the details of its translation and publication,

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1. Orson Scott Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?," *Nauvoo Times*, February 1993, http://www.nauvoo.com/library/card-bookofmormon.html.

the scholarship into the lives of the witnesses, and many new studies relevant to evidence for the plausibility of the Book of Mormon and the meaning of the text.

When Card spoke in early 1993, he did not have the benefit of the recent discoveries related to Lehi's Trail from the work of Warren Aston, who has highlighted the plausibility of numerous details such as the existence and location of an ancient place with a name like Nahom and the existence of a fully plausible site for Bountiful exactly where it should be. [2] He would not have seen the 1999 notice from S. Kent Brown about the discovery of ancient altars in Yemen providing hard archaeological evidence for the rare place name Nahom in the right place and time to be relevant to Lehi's Trail.[3] He did not have the benefit of the field work of George Potter examining the prospects for what was once said to be impossible, the River Laman in the Valley of Lemuel three days south of the beginning of the

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2.   Warren P. Aston and Michaela K. Aston, *In the Footsteps of Lehi* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994); followed by the much more detailed work, Warren P. Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia: The Old World Setting of the Book of Mormon* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris Publishing, 2015). See also Warren Aston, "Across Arabia with Lehi and Sariah: 'Truth Shall Spring out of the Earth,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 8–25, 110–13; Warren P. Aston, "The Origins of the Nihm Tribe of Yemen: A Window into Arabia's Past," *Journal of Arabian Studies: Arabia, the Gulf, and the Red Sea* 4, no. 1 (June 2014): 134–48, https://www.academia.edu/13256024/ The_Origins_of_the_Nihm_Tribe_of_Yemen_A_Window_into_Arabias_Past. Also see Warren P. Aston, "A History of NaHoM," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 51, no. 2 (2012), https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol51/iss2/6 and Warren P. Aston, "The Arabian Bountiful Discovered? Evidence for Nephi's Bountiful," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 4–11, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/ fullscreen/?pub=1397&index=2. Regarding the discovery of Nahom, while it was 1988 when German archaeologists uncovered the three altars bearing the ancient NHM tribal name, it would not be until well after Card's article that these finds would generate a stir in the Latter-day Saint community.

3.   S. Kent Brown, "'The Place Which Was Called Nahom': New Light from Ancient Yemen," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 1 (1999): 66–68, https:// publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/8/1/S00012-50cb97a1641b311New%20 Light.pdf. While the German archaeological team excavated the altars in 1988, Brown's brief 1999 note is believed to be the first publication making a possible connection between the altars and the Book of Mormon place name Nahom. Much further analysis on the altars was later published by Warren Aston in "Newly Found Altars from Nahom," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, 10, no. 2 (2001): 56–61, 71, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/10/2/S00008- 50e5e94d04c218Aston.pdf. See also Aston, *Lehi and Sariah in Arabia* and Aston, "A History of NaHoM."

Red Sea, where Lehi preached to his sons.[4] He didn't have the massive body of evidence from John Sorenson's *Mormon's Codex*[5] or the insights about the Mesoamerican perspectives in the Book of Mormon uncovered by Brant Gardner.[6] He lacked the revolutionary insights from the study of the earliest Book of Mormon texts by Royal Skousen or the analysis of the language of the Book of Mormon by Stanford Carmack.

Card's speech was also before Latter-day Saint scholars became familiar with the work of Scottish researcher Margaret Barker and before she became familiar with the Book of Mormon. Barker has sought to reconstruct the early Jewish religion before the reforms of Josiah and before the major changes of the Second Temple period.[7] Barker was impressed with what she found in the Book of Mormon, for it seemed to reflect an ancient environment and ancient worldviews consistent with her research, and, again, quite foreign to the knowledge available to scholars in Joseph Smith's day.[8]

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4. George Potter and Richard Wellington, *Lehi in the Wilderness: 81 New, Documented Evidences that the Book of Mormon is a True History* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, Inc., 2003). See also Richard Wellington and George Potter, "Lehi's Trail: From the Valley of Lemuel to Nephi's Harbor, " *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15, no. 2 (2006): 26–43, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/15/2/S00007-50bf64ad1b8fe4WellingtonPotter.pdf.

5. John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute, 2013).

6. Brant Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015).

7. Margaret Barker, "What Did King Josiah Reform?" in John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely and Ann H. Seely, eds., *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004), 521–42, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1081&index=16; Margaret Barker, "Joseph Smith and Preexilic Israelite Religion," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 69–82, https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/joseph-smith-and-preexilic-israelite-religion. Also see Margaret Barker, *Temple Mysticism: An Introduction* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2011).

8. Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lemuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 87–99, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-deuteronomist-reforms-and-lehis-family-dynamics-a-social-context-for-the-rebellions-of-laman-and-lemuel/; Kevin Christensen, "Book Review: Temple Mysticism: An Introduction, by Margaret Barker," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 191–99, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/book-review-temple-mysticism-an-introduction-by-margaret-barker/; Kevin Christensen, "The Temple, the Monarchy, and Wisdom: Lehi's World and the Scholarship of Margaret

Much has changed since Card tugged at the text from the perspective of a master of science fiction, but for the most part the added knowledge 25 years later only increases the value of Card's approach. Card looked for telltale threads of modern fiction, revealing instead that the text was of quite a different weave. Card sees it as the tapestry of multiple authors from an era far removed from modern fiction, a work impossible for even a skilled writer of fiction in our day or Joseph's. Using the lens of a science fiction writer, Card reveals patterns woven into the text that defy explanation based on Joseph Smith as author. Here we review some of the patterns and artifacts of authenticity that Card spots, and discuss updated information relevant to several of Card's points for an added perspective.

Voices and Viewpoints of Authors, Ancient and Modern

Card points out that authors write with a vast network of assumptions from their environment coloring the way they perceive and describe events. The environment the author has inherited provides numerous views on life and society that are easily taken for granted without realizing that it may not be this way at other times or in other societies. The environment that influenced the author can often be revealed by examining that which the author recognizes as unusual and in need of explanation in the text versus what the author sees as normal and requiring no explanation.

One of the first points Card mentions to illustrate such subtleties is the contrast between the attitude toward valuable documents showed by Book of Mormon characters and Joseph himself. He mentions Amaleki's statement in Omni 1:25 wherein he justifies his decision to turn over the records he has inherited to King Benjamin:

> Which, by the way, is something that would certainly not be a cultural idea available to Joseph Smith. You don't turn ancient records over to kings in the world of the 1820s in America. Kings would have nothing to do with ancient records. You would turn ancient records over to a <u>scholar.</u> We know that that was Joseph Smith's personal attitude because when he wanted to find support for his translation in order to encourage Martin Harris's continuing support, he sent Harris, *not* to a king or a president or a political leader, but to a scholar.[9]

Barker," in Welch, Seely, and Seely, *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, 449–522, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1081&index=15.

9. Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?."

This is one of many indications of implicit cultural views consistent with the ancient world of the Book of Mormon and highly divergent from Joseph Smith's environment, and a valuable observation by Card. Indeed, the issue of the handling, preservation, and transmission of sacred records in the Book of Mormon has been a fruitful area for additional research since 1993. Consider, for example, John Tvedtnes's book published in 2000, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness unto Light*.[10] Tvedtnes examines the authentic ancient aspects of relevant features in the Book of Mormon such as the use of treasuries to store records, the practice of hiding or sealing ancient records for a future time, the use of stone boxes to preserve records, traditions about records entrusted to the care of angels, mountain repositories, and ancient traditions about glowing stones used for revelation, all showing evidence that the world of the Book of Mormon is highly consistent with ancient Near Eastern practices and traditions.

More recently, a professional archivist, Anita Wells, has noted that the meticulous way in which the Book of Mormon describes its own provenance and that of the various records used in creating the text reveals intricate and realistic details about document handling that cannot be explained as a product of the early 19th century.[11] Wells explains that our modern concepts of record handling and establishing provenance was developed by archivists in Europe long after Joseph Smith's day, and would not become well established in the US until early in the 20th century. This perspective has important implications:

> [T]he archival profession as we understand it now did not exist in Joseph Smith's time. The concept of provenance (a record of ownership to guide claims of authenticity) and chain of custody (documenting that record of ownership) was not identified. The Bible, Joseph's main resource for an example of ancient writing at the time he translated the Book of Mormon, gave very little indication of who wrote it and how its records were copied and transmitted throughout the ages. These ideas were not something anyone in the mid-19th century

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10. John A. Tvedtnes, *The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books: Out of Darkness unto Light* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), https://publications.mi.byu.edu/book/the-book-of-mormon-and-other-hidden-books-out-of-darkness-unto-light/.

11. Anita Wells, "Bare Record: The Nephite Archivist, The Record of Records, and the Book of Mormon Provenance," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 24 (2017): 99–122, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/bare-record-the-nephite-archivist-the-record-of-records-and-the-book-of-mormon-provenance/.

could have known, a working conceptual knowledge of which would allow their incorporation into the Book of Mormon. Provenance is a modern convention used today and developed in the past century to validate claims (notably in art auctions); Mormon made the chain of custody and provenance of his record abundantly clear from millennia prior.[12]

While the Bible provides little guidance on provenance, a variety of ancient scribal practices included giving details on documents and their origins, and the practices we find in the Book of Mormon ring true as products of an ancient culture that cared deeply about records and writing. They ring true today in light of our familiarity with modern archival practices. But they don't reflect Joseph Smith's environment. Intriguingly, Wells cites Card's "Artifact or Artifice" on this point:

> Science fiction author Orson Scott Card explained that written hoaxes are a product of their time, easily unmasked by later scientific understanding. If the Book of Mormon was purely a Joseph Smith creation, how he did or did not include lineage and custodial authorship information should conform to 19th-century manners and ring false to modern readers. Yet the more we learn about archival provenance and chain of custody, the more remarkable it is to discover the precise documentation of such practices in the Book of Mormon.[13]

Turning to Mesoamerica, John L. Sorenson also shows that Book of Mormon practices regarding record keeping are consistent with ancient Mesoamerican traditions,[14] as is also true for the nature of records and writing systems, including the keeping of dates, recording of prophecies, genealogies, keeping of lineage histories, etc.[15] For example, the Quiché Maya had an office of record keeper that was passed from father to son, similar to the Nephites' practice. The records also played an important role as symbols of political and religious authority.[16]

Authorial Interests

Card's keen eye as an author helps us recognize the diverse interests and voices of various authors. Nephi, for example, glosses over details

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12. Ibid., 110.
13. Ibid., 113.
14. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 104–8.
15. Ibid., 184–232.
16. Ibid., 106.

of battles, whereas Mormon tends to give intricate information "but only when telling the story of a heroic captain who is a spiritual as well as a military example."[17] Nephi and Jacob are writing for a different purpose than Mormon and Moroni were, and they naturally focus on different issues. This is natural, that is, for an authentic document with multiple authors. Properly reflecting the complex array of different rhetorical purposes for the various voices of the Book of Mormon would have been a remarkable achievement if Joseph Smith were its author. Further, Mormon's interests, which include an intense focus on military strategy and battle details, are clearly not the interests of Joseph Smith, whose extensive writings over his life show no such interest in the details of military campaigns. It is Card's experience that authors tend to return to the topics that fascinate them, as Mormon does to military matters. It is unlikely that the voice of Mormon is young Joseph drawing upon his non-military environment in the 1820s. Indeed, the numerous aspects of warfare in the Book of Mormon represent an area where the book is on remarkably solid ground as an authentic ancient work, with intricate, realistic details far beyond Joseph's environment, as documented, for example, in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*.[18]

Card's observations on authorial voices and interests anticipate, in part, a significant later contribution to Book of Mormon studies in Grant Hardy's *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide*.[19] By considering the Book of Mormon as literature from real humans, regardless of whether it is fiction or history, Hardy highlights the viewpoints and interests of the multiple men who worked to prepare and edit Book of Mormon records. Hardy did not intend to write an apologetic work, but rather to enhance appreciation of the literary quality of the Book of Mormon through exploring the voices and agendas of Mormon, Moroni, and Nephi, three major editors who shaped the final complex document compiled from numerous sources. However, the result of his work and his ear for different voices in a literary work show that the three editors he examines are best understood as different individuals with

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17. Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?."

18. Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), https://publications.mi.byu.edu/book/warfare-in-the-book-of-mormon/.

19. Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

unique voices and agendas, making Hardy's analysis an unintentionally powerful apologetic work, as Daniel Peterson has noted.[20] Hardy states,

> Under close scrutiny, [the Book of Mormon] appears to be a carefully crafted, integrated work, with multiple narrative levels, an intricate organization, and extensive intratextual phrasal allusions and borrowings. None of this is foreign to fiction, but the circumstances of the book's production are awkward: the more complicated and interconnected the text, the less likely it is that Joseph Smith made it up spontaneously as he dictated the words to his scribes, one time through.[21]

Hardy's observation requires understanding the growing body of evidence about the translation process itself. Royal Skousen's meticulous examination of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon would provide detailed confirmation that the translation process was based on oral dictation to scribes, and from the accounts of multiple witnesses it is clear that it was done without manuscripts as Joseph dictated. Skousen summarizes:

> All of this evidence (from the witnesses' statements, the original manuscript, the printer's manuscript, and from the text itself) is thus consistent with the hypothesis that Joseph Smith could actually see (whether in the interpreters themselves or in his mind's eye) the translated English text — word for word and letter for letter — and that he read off this revealed text to his scribe. Despite Joseph's reading off of the text, one should not assume that this process was automatic or easily done. Joseph had to prepare himself spiritually for this work. Yet the evidence suggests that Joseph was not the author of the Book of Mormon, not even its English language translation, although it was revealed spiritually through him and in his own language.[22]

We now know there were numerous witnesses and remarkably consistent testimony showing that Joseph dictated not only at a rapid

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20. Daniel C. Peterson, "Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide," *Deseret News*, June 24, 2010, https://www.deseretnews.com/article/705384849/Daniel-C-Peterson-Understanding-the-Book-of-Mormon-A-Readers-Guide.html.

21. Hardy, introduction to *Understanding the Book of Mormon*.

22. Royal Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 31, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/7/1/S00005-50be28d378b0e4Skousen.pdf.

pace but without notes, without manuscripts, and apparently without a Bible even when quoting Isaiah or other parts of the Bible.[23] (Indeed, it appears that Joseph did not even have a Bible of his own until after completion of the Book of Mormon translation, when he sent Oliver Cowdery in late 1829 to purchase a Bible so he could begin the work of the inspired translation of the Bible.[24]) It was a miraculous process on the face of it, but the wonders are only magnified when we look at the text in intricate detail. The many witnesses,[25] including at least one non-Latter-day Saint witness,[26] who at various times saw the translation as it took place as well as the witnesses of the plates, also including at least one non-Latter-day Saint witness,[27] create a consistent record in support of what Joseph said about his translation work.

23. See, for example, Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, *From Darkness Unto Light: Joseph Smith's Translation and Publication of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2015), 119–30, and Michael Hubbard MacKay and Gerrit J. Dirkmaat, "Firsthand Witness Accounts of the Translation Process," in *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, ed. Dennis L. Largey, Andrew H. Hedges, John Hilton III, and Jerry Hull, (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 61–79. Also see Jeff Lindsay, "Did Joseph Use a Bible?," *Mormanity Blog*, Oct. 30, 2015, https://mormanity.blogspot.com/2015/10/did-joseph-use-bible.html.

24. Kent P. Jackson, "Joseph Smith's Cooperstown Bible: The Historical Context of the Bible Used in the Joseph Smith Translation," *BYU Studies Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2001): 41–70, https://byustudies.byu.edu/content/joseph-smiths-cooperstown-bible-historical-context-bible-used-joseph-smith-translation.

25. In addition to well-known account of the Three Witnesses and the Eight Witnesses, see also Amy Easton-Flake and Rachel Cope, "A Multiplicity of Witnesses: Women and the Translation Process," in Dennis L. Largey, *et al.*, eds., *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 133–53.

26. One non-Latter-day Saint witness was Michael Morse, Emma's brother-in-law, who gave an interview in 1879, recalling that "when Joseph was translating the Book of Mormon, he, (Morse), had occasion more than once to go into his immediate presence, and saw him engaged at his work of translation. The mode of procedure consisted in Joseph's placing the Seer Stone in the crown of a hat, then putting his face into the hat, so as to entirely cover his face, resting his elbows upon his knees, and then dictating word after word, while the scribe - Emma, John Whitmer, O. Cowdery, or some other, wrote it down." W.W. Blair, letter to the editors, *Saints Herald* 26, no. 12 (June 15, 1879): 191, quoted in Royal Skousen, ed., *The Earliest Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), xiii.

27. The first unintentional witness of the plates was Josiah Stowell, who apparently took the plates out of Joseph's hands as he brought them home. He hefted them and later even stated that he saw a portion of the exposed plates. See Anthony Sweat,

Exposition

Card points out that modern science fiction writers have learned to adjust their writing to subtly reveal large differences between the setting of their fiction and the modern world. Thus, instead of stopping to explain that a door on another world operated in a much different way than doors on Earth, Robert Heinlein famously simply wrote, "The door dilated." That simple statement takes the unusual technology for granted, as one would in that alien environment, and leaves it to the reader to figure out what was happening. Regular fiction, on the other hand, still tends to interrupt the story to explain what is different in a setting for the benefit of contemporary readers. While Heinlein's now widely adopted approach was a step forward in making science fiction more natural, introducing novelty without constantly interrupting the story to explain it, it is still an unnatural artifact, for someone in a world where doors dilated instead of swinging on hinges or rolling on rollers would not bother to say the door dilated as a person left but would simply say "he left." If the door needed to be mentioned at all, one might say "the door opened." If dilating doors are the norm, there would be no reason to mention dilation, just as we don't say "she pivoted the door shut on its dual hinges until the outer latch engaged a locking mechanism" instead of "she closed the door." Card keenly observes that stop-action explanations for the benefit of a modern audience are generally absent in the Book of Mormon, except for the case of explaining the monetary system in Alma 11. In this case, Card observes that the monetary system around 100 BC surely would have changed by Mormon's day, and would be a cultural difference to him that would need explanation to make sense of the story of Zeezrom's tempting Alma with money. Further, the details of how Mormon handles the explanation, Card argues, are exactly what one would expect from Mormon as a writer and not what one would write from the perspective of Joseph's environment. This is an interesting example in which a knowledge of modern science fiction exposition helps us appreciate what happens and doesn't happen in the text of the Book of Mormon. The subtleties of exposition tell us much about who the author was and what they perceive as normal or unusual, and this alone does much to rule out Joseph Smith as a modern author of this ancient text.

"Hefted and Handled: Tangible Interactions with Book of Mormon Objects," in Dennis L. Largey, et al., *The Coming Forth of the Book of Mormon: A Marvelous Work and a Wonder*, 48–49, https://rsc.byu.edu/es/archived/coming-forth-book-mormon/hefted-and-handled-tangible-interactions-book-mormon-objects.

Since Card's speech in 1993, many further insights have strengthened the evidence that the authors of the Book of Mormon took much for granted that would be foreign to Joseph Smith. A few of the many dozens of potential examples include:

- Numerous strange (to us) elements in the story of Ammon and King Lamoni, including the ability of flock-scattering gangsters to wander freely into the court of the king, the offering of a daughter in marriage to the Nephite visitor, the presentation of arms as a testimony to the king, and so forth. Brant Gardner has carefully elucidated the Mesoamerican cultural artifacts reflected in this story in *Traditions of the Fathers.*[28]

- The concept of a hill serving as a place of arms (plausible when one recognizes the importance of obsidian outcroppings as a key source of weaponry in Mesoamerica, as discussed by John L. Sorenson[29]).

- Alma praying *after* he eats at Amulek's home in Alma 8:22, a practice not likely characteristic of Joseph Smith's environment.[30]

- The ability of blood to stain swords, something not part of Joseph's environment but part of a civilization using obsidian embedded in wooden clubs as a sword and weapon of choice.[31]

- The plausible description (from the perspective of immigrants living in the New World) in Alma 7:10 of Christ's birthplace being in Jerusalem (the "land" of Jerusalem) rather than the city of Bethlehem, a statement

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28. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers*, 285–89.

29. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 416–17.

30. Angela M. Crowell and John A. Tvedtnes, "Notes and Communications: The Nephite and Jewish Practice of Blessing God after Eating One's Fill," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 6, no. 2 (1997): 251–54, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/6/2/S00014-50cb7728bbca514TvedtnesCrowell.pdf. See also "Why Did Alma Bless and Thank God After Eating?," *Book of Mormon Central*, June 6, 2016, https://knowhy.bookofmormoncentral.org/content/why-did-alma-bless-and-thank-god-after-eating.

31. William J. Hamblin and A. Brent Merrill, "Swords in the Book of Mormon," in Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 342, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1108&index=15.

given without explanation to overcome the strident objections it has generated ever since. It is inconceivable that someone even mildly familiar with the Bible would make this "blunder" and even more inconceivable that such a blunder would later be supported by newly found evidence showing ancient Jews did in fact view Bethlehem as part of the "land of Jerusalem," a concept not extractable from the Bible.[32]

Neighborhoods, Networks, Economies, Politics, and the Voice of the People

Card makes several salient points about the culture implicit in the Book of Mormon and shows that in several significant though sometimes subtle ways that culture is clearly foreign to what Joseph Smith knew. Indeed, in considering the hints about Nephite and Lamanite society, Card accurately describes the culture inherent to the Book of Mormon as entirely alien to Joseph Smith's world and correctly points out that apparent similarities are superficial and largely due to our imposing modern assumptions and paradigms without carefully reading the text.

Interesting issues of this sort raised by Card include the difference in social and neighborhood relationships, where kinship and lineage were dominant social factors in Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon, in contrast to American society. Card also considers the nature of employment, where the Book of Mormon suggests that agriculture and other economic activities were highly communal or under direction of elites in contrast to the way people pursued employment in Joseph's day. Further, Card was impressed with the "instant cities" that Captain Moroni created. Alma 50 describes Moroni's frenetic city-building activities, including the way he "began a foundation of a city" named

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32. "If Jesus was born in Bethlehem, why does Alma say he would be born at Jerusalem?" *Book of Mormon Central*, February 1, 2018, https://www.bookofmormoncentral.org/qa/if-jesus-was-born-in-bethlehem-why-does-alma-say-he-would-be-born-at-jerusalem. See also Neal Rappleye, "Bethlehem Bulla," *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 14–17 and "Letters of ʿAbdu-Ḫeba of Jerusalem (EA 285–290)," *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 6–13; and "Apocryphon of Jeremiah (4Q385a)," *Nephite History in Context* 2 (December 2017): 1–5, all at https://anditcametopassblog.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/nephitehistoryincontext2.pdf. See also Jeff Lindsay, "Bethlehem vs. the Land of Jerusalem: Is Alma 7:10 a Blunder?," *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), Oct. 27, 2010, https://www.jefflindsay.com/BM_Jerusalem.shtml.

Moroni (Alma 50:13) and also "began the foundation for a city" named Nephihah (Alma 50:14) among other cities that he built in a short period. This seems bizarre if read from the perspective of Joseph's environment but is plausible from a Mesoamerican perspective, as Card argues and as we discuss further below in light of more recent research.

Since 1993 there has been further investigation in the field of Mesoamerican neighborhoods and the relationship between rural households and urban centers. A relevant book from 2012 is *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities*,[33] which begins with a detailed review article by Michael E. Smith and Juliana Novic, "Neighborhoods and Districts in Ancient Mesoamerica,"[34] discussed below. Also of interest in the same volume is the chapter of Gary M. Feinman and Linda M. Nicholas, "Compact Versus Dispersed Settlement in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica: The Role of Neighborhood Organization and Collective Action,"[35] which examines ancient Mesoamerican societies in terms of social structures, looking at the dispersed, agrarian communities and more compact communities, and examining the impact of population density on political structures. Neighborhood ties and structures became especially important in forms of rule more corporate or collective with shared power and "broadened voice," for neighborhoods would be the focal point for such collaborative action. The work of Feinman and Nicholas may be helpful in contemplating what the Book of Mormon may mean when it speaks of the role of "the voice of the people" in decision making and politics.

Smith and Novic in the introductory chapter of the volume discuss the diverse nature of neighborhoods and district organizations in ancient

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33. M. Charlotte Arnauld, Linda R. Manzanilla and Michael E. Smith, eds., *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2012).

34. Michael E. Smith and Juliana Novic, "Neighborhoods and Districts in Ancient Mesoamerica" in Arnauld, Manzanilla, and Smith, *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities*, 1–26, http://www.public.asu.edu/~mesmith9/1-CompleteSet/MES-JN-12-MesoN-BookIntro.pdf.

35. Gary M. Feinman and Linda M. Nicholas, "Compact Versus Dispersed Settlement in Pre-Hispanic Mesoamerica: The Role of Neighborhood Organization and Collective Action," in Arnauld, Manzanilla, and Smith, *Neighborhood as a Social and Spatial Unit in Mesoamerican Cities*, 132–55, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/232715788_Compact_Versus_Dispersed_Settlement_in_Pre-Hispanic_Mesoamerica_The_Role_of_Neighborhood_Organization_and_Collective_Action_Gary_M_Feinman_and_Linda_M_Nicholas.

Mesoamerica, where urban centers were much more sparsely populated than large cities in the Old World:

> Since the publication of Bullard's paper, several archaeologists have discussed Lowland Maya settlement clusters, but without considering their possible role as urban neighborhoods (e.g., Ashmore 1981; Pyburn et al. 1998). The first to associate [Lowland Maya settlement] clusters with neighborhoods was Cynthia Robin (2003: 330–331), who notes that "neighborhood-focused research is perhaps the least investigated direction of Maya household archaeology" (p. 331). Perhaps Mayanists tended to avoid the topic of neighborhoods because that concept was associated with the crowded cities of ancient Mesopotamia or the Islamic world. Yet, the low density tropical cities of the Maya manifest a very different kind of urbanism (Arnauld and Michelet 2004), one that Roland Fletcher (2009) called "low density agrarian based urbanism."[36]

The systems described seem to be compatible with Book of Mormon structures, where nobles and elites still wielded influence at various levels of society, with kings under kings among the Lamanites or lesser judges under higher judges in Nephite society. Nobles and elites wielded influence while also representing somehow and sometimes "the voice of the people."

The low density of urban population resulted in unclear transitions from hamlet or neighborhood to city, allowing for the kind of "instant cities" that impressed Orson Scott Card as another way in which the Book of Mormon revealed a type of society foreign to Joseph Smith. The ability of military commanders to create entire new fortified cities in critical areas is a foreign concept to American society but makes sense in a society accustomed to forming cities from sparsely populated areas based on the model of "low-density agrarian-based urbanism." The low-density areas in a particular region could be unified under control of a military leader or other elite leader to create an instant low-density agrarian-based urban center ("instant city") that might only need some of Moroni's earthen banks for fortification to provide military advantage.

In *Mormon's Codex*, Sorenson has pointed out that the term for "city" in Mesoamerica "was applied on a conceptual, not just a functional basis"[37] and that they "seem to have been planned and designated as such

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36. Smith and Novic, "Neighborhoods and Districts in Ancient Mesoamerica," 11–12.

37. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 298.

from their founding."[38] Sorenson notes the parallel to Alma's "city" of Helam that was designated as such with a population of only about 450 people.[39] Small agrarian gatherings in strategic areas likewise could easily have been turned into "instant cities" by Captain Moroni to support military goals, consistent with Card's observation on a Book of Mormon phenomenon inconsistent with Joseph Smith's environment.

Incidentally, the units of town and village are both mentioned in the Book of Mormon but only twice in Mormon 4 and 5, while the unit of city has about 400 mentions. Joseph's life was spent in villages and towns. In his own history, he writes that he was born in the *town* of Sharon in Vermont (Joseph Smith—History 1:3) and then later moved to Manchester, which he calls a village (Joseph Smith—History 1:51). We also read that Martin Harris was "a resident of Palmyra township" (Joseph Smith—History 1:61). Palmyra had around 600 people when Joseph's family moved there,[40] but thanks in part to the opportunities created by the Erie Canal, its population had grown to about 4,600 by 1825.[41] This township was much larger than Alma's city of Helam and perhaps much larger than the "instant cities" Captain Moroni founded or organized. The Book of Mormon terminology as well as the curious ability to found cities almost instantly is outside of Joseph Smith's environment and culture but consistent with a Mesoamerican city. Further, the concept of "cities" among Native Americans and especially large, advanced cities like Zarahemla can be considered outside of Joseph's environment and outside of the common knowledge of his day, though earlier works from European writers such as Alexander von Humboldt made some aspects of Mesoamerican antiquities known in better educated circles.[42]

As for the apparent similarities to Joseph's culture, Card addresses one of the most common issues pointed to by critics, the selection of judges. Some read "voice of the people" and think of ballot boxes and a highly egalitarian society with separation of powers according to the US Constitution, but this suspiciously modern feature turns out to be based

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38. Ibid., 297–98.

39. Ibid., 295.

40. Donald L. Enders, "'A Snug Log House': A Historical Look at the Joseph Smith Sr., Family Home in Palmyra, New York," *Ensign* (Aug. 1985), https://www.lds.org/ensign/1985/08/a-snug-log-house?lang=eng.

41. Bob Lowe, "A Brief History Of Palmyra," *PalmyraNY.com*, 1998, http://www.palmyrany.com/about/1800.htm.

42. Jeff Lindsay, "Alexander von Humboldt and the Book of Mormon: What Could Joseph Smith Have Gleaned?," *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), last updated Dec. 7, 2017, https://www.jefflindsay.com/bme18.shtml.

on imported assumptions. A more careful reading of the text indicates that something much different than American elections and American democracy took place in Nephite society. Card urges us to look again:

> But in the Book of Mormon, the judge not only judges people but also enforces the law and directs the gathering of taxes and supplies and sending them in support of the armies. Not your normal, traditional role. He enforces traditional law, but when new laws are needed, the judge makes them! Where in American life of his time would Joseph Smith have seen this?
>
> How are these judges selected? We hear of almost no contested elections. On the contrary, judges seem to nominate their successors. With few exceptions, the judge serves until death, and is usually succeeded by a son or brother, or by a member of a family that has previously held the judgeship. Now, except for the Adamses, there were no dynasties in Joseph Smith's America.
>
> The judges actually function as elected kings. The old pattern of government still endured, they just had a different method of choosing the guy in charge. Mormon pointed out the difference, which meant he stressed the election of the judges by the voice of the people, never questioning that authority should stay in only a few aristocratic families and that judges should have monarchical powers. Far from being a mistake in the Book of Mormon, this is one of the places where the Book of Mormon makes it clear that it does not come from 1820s American culture. Even the best of hoaxers would have made the judges far more American.[43]

Brant Gardner's later treatment of the "voice of the people" and the role of judges in the Book of Mormon would show much greater affinity for Mesoamerican concepts than for the democracy of the young United States.[44]

A recent observation related to the reign of judges and the "voice of the people" in the Book of Mormon comes from new evidence that ancient Mesoamerica cultures sometimes had less autocratic and more collective or "democratic" rule. This recent discovery seems to greatly amplify the role of collective rule mentioned above by Feinman and Nicholas.[33] Science writer Lizzie Wade reports:

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43. Card, "The Book of Mormon — Artifact or Artifice?."

44. Brant Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 245–53.

Now, thanks in part to work led by … Richard Blanton, an anthropologist at Purdue University in West Lafayette, Indiana, Tlaxcallan is one of several premodern societies around the world that archaeologists believe were organized collectively, where rulers shared power and commoners had a say in the government that presided over their lives.

These societies were not necessarily full democracies in which citizens cast votes, but they were radically different from the autocratic, inherited rule found — or assumed — in most early societies. Building on Blanton's originally theoretical ideas, archaeologists now say these "collective societies" left telltale traces in their material culture, such as repetitive architecture, an emphasis on public space over palaces, reliance on local production over exotic trade goods, and a narrowing of wealth gaps between elites and commoners.

"Blanton and his colleagues opened up a new way of examining our data," says Rita Wright, an archaeologist at New York University in New York City who studies the 5000-year-old Indus civilization in today's India and Pakistan, which also shows signs of collective rule. "A whole new set of scholarship has emerged about complex societies."

"I think it's a breakthrough," agrees Michael E. Smith, an archaeologist at Arizona State University (ASU) in Tempe. "I've called it the most important work in the archaeology of political organization in the last 20 years." He and others are working to extend Blanton's ideas into a testable method, hoping to identify collective states solely through the objects they left behind.[45]

Blanton's paper has this intriguing abstract:

During the central Mexican late Postclassic period, the Aztec Triple Alliance became the largest and most powerful empire in Mesoamerica. Yet ancient Tlaxcallan (now Tlaxcala, Mexico) resisted incorporation into the empire despite being entirely surrounded by it and despite numerous Aztec military campaigns aimed at the defeat of the Tlaxcaltecas. How did it happen that a relatively small (1,400 km²) polity was able to

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45. Lizzie Wade, "It wasn't just Greece: Archaeologists find early democratic societies in the Americas," *Science* (website), March 15, 2017, http://www.sciencemag.org/news/2017/03/it-wasnt-just-greece-archaeologists-find-early-democratic-societies-americas.

resist a more powerful foe while its neighbors succumbed? We propose a resolution to this historical enigma that, we suggest, has implications for the broader study of social and cultural change, particularly in relation to theories of state formation and collective action. We find it particularly interesting that the Tlaxcaltecas abandoned a key tenet of traditional Nahua political structure in which kingship was vested in members of the nobility, substituting for it government by a council whose members could be recruited from the ranks of commoners. To achieve such a significant deviation from typical Nahua authority structure, the Tlaxcaltecas drew selectively from those aspects of Nahua mythic history and religion that were consistent with a comparatively egalitarian and collective political regime.[46]

We look forward to further research into the intriguing possibilities of collective government in portions of the ancient Americas, including systems that may be closer to Book of Mormon times. Meanwhile, what was once thought to be a dead-giveaway of the Book of Mormon's modern origins, the reign of judges with their reliance on "the voice of the people," upon closer scrutiny is not only radically different than what Joseph knew but now appears to be an authentic ancient artifact (albeit an exceptional one) of Mesoamerica, not a fruit of Joseph's artifice. For future scholars to better understand Book of Mormon "democracy," they would be wise to use a lens focused on ancient Mesoamerica and emerging research on ancient political systems there.

Overlooked Subtleties: A Key to Appraising the Book of Mormon

Based on Card's insights, we can suggest that many subtle details in the Book of Mormon text are easily overlooked precisely because they were overlooked and not explained by its authors.

For example, in Helaman 7 where Nephi prays on a tower in his garden near the road leading to the chief market, there are some intriguing details that have merited scholarly exploration but didn't seem in need of elaboration by Mormon. Here the analysis from Brant Gardner in

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46. Lane F. Fargher, Richard E. Blanton, and Verenice Y. Heredia Espinoza, "Egalitarian Ideology and Political Power in Prehispanic Central Mexico: The Case of Tlaxcallan," *Latin American Antiquity*, 21, no. 3 (September 2010): 227–51, https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/latin-american-antiquity/article/egalitarian-ideology-and-political-power-in-prehispanic-central-mexico-the-case-of-tlaxcalla n/3B1BD8566FF687B30E22F338A30B98E7.

Traditions of the Fathers[47] and earlier analysis from John Sorenson[48] are particularly useful. Mormon doesn't bother to explain that in Nephite culture, there were large cities with multiple markets but that Zarahemla (and perhaps others) had a chief market. He doesn't bother to explain that the Nephites built roads. He doesn't bother to explain that in his role, Nephi needed to be near the heart of the city and thus had a home near a major road, and that this home had a walled enclosure, a garden, and tower perhaps like the characteristic pyramid-shaped towers that private residences sometimes had in Mesoamerica, or that towers played an important role in their society.[49] He doesn't explain that towers existed that were attached to or near private residences[50] and were much lower than the large towers used for public rituals, low enough to make it easy for Nephi to converse with a crowd along the neighboring road. All the interesting background explanation that would be helpful to a modern reader and might naturally be included by a modern writer describing such a scene is left out because it wasn't unusual to Mormon. Even if Joseph somehow had access to precise information about the use of towers in private residences and the existence of chief markets and major roads in large Mesoamerican cities, a modern writer taking advantage of that information would naturally have felt a need to explain the setting directly or through many more details. A fraudulent author developing the story based on specialized knowledge might even emphasize the clever details in his account in preparation for later claiming it as dramatic evidence of authenticity once such information become more generally available to the public. We have none of this in Mormon's brief matter-of-fact account and in Joseph's obliviousness to the relevance of the story to Mesoamerican finds.

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47. Gardner, *Traditions of the Fathers: The Book of Mormon as History* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2015), 279–80.

48. John L. Sorenson, "Nephi's Garden and Chief Market," in John Welch, ed., *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 236–37, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1110&index=68.

49. On the correlations between towers in the Book of Mormon and their prominent role in Mesoamerican society and architecture, see Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 323–27, 491–92. Also see David F. Potter, "Prehispanic Architecture and Sculpture in Central Yucatan," *American Antiquity* 41, no. 4 (Oct. 1976): 430–48, https://www.jstor.org/stable/279010; which mentions that the Mayan lowlands city of Rio Bec had "ornamental towers simulating temple pyramids," though some other lowland cities considered did not.

50. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 491–92.

Mormon's casual mention of Nephi's tower can be compared to other uses of towers in the Book of Mormon. The tower built by King Benjamin, of course, should be well known to Book of Mormon readers. King Benjamin's tower was near the temple (Mosiah 2:7–8). The people of Zeniff in the city of Nephi also had a tower near the temple where Gideon almost slew wicked King Noah (Mosiah 19:5–6). Other references may be easy to miss, such as in Alma 51:20, where the Kingmen, subdued by Captain Moroni, "were compelled to hoist the title of liberty upon their towers, and in their cities, and to take up arms in defence of their country," just as Mosiah had earlier ordered that the title of liberty "be hoisted upon every tower" in the land (Alma 46:36). Here towers implicitly play an important role or at least a highly visible role in their society. Lamanite society also employed towers, for Amalickiah "appointed men to speak unto the Lamanites from their towers, against the Nephites" (Alma 48:1). Other towers were built by Moroni as part of his defensive works (Alma 50:4) and likely were of a different nature than the towers mentioned above. There is also an unexplained reference to the tower of Sherrizah from which men, women, and children were captured and taken captive by the Lamanites (Moroni 9:7).

The men and women of Sherrizah may have fled to a tower as a place of last defense, just as King Noah fled to the tower by the temple when being pursued by Gideon. If these towers were part of a pyramid or a temple on a pyramid, the practice of fleeing there for safety may fit a Mesoamerican context well, as John E. Clark has observed, yet fleeing to a tower for safety when being pursued might not be a common concept in Joseph Smith's environment.[51]

Non-military towers such as those used for covenant making, religious purposes, and publicity do not seem to have been part of Joseph Smith's frontier environment yet are subtly woven into the Book of Mormon in a way consistent with Mesoamerican culture as well

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51. See John E. Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005): 38–49, 71–74, https://publications. mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1383&index=6. Clark cites Fray Diego Durán, *The Aztecs: The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden and Fernando Horcasitas (New York: Orion Press, 1964), 68: "The Tecpanecs, retreating toward their city, intended to use their temple as a last stronghold, but Tlacaelel [an Aztec leader] reached the temple before them and, taking possession of its entrance, ordered one of his men to set it on fire, having made prisoner all those who were within." He also cites Durán, 89: "When we reach Totoltzinco the king of Texcoco will set fire to the temple and the battle will come to an end."

as with some aspects of ancient Near Eastern culture.[52] For example, regarding the relationship between the tower of King Benjamin and related rituals in pre-exilic Judaism, Stephen D. Ricks observes that as one of many aspects of the covenant-making and festival-related aspects of King Benjamin's speech, that:

> In confirming the Old Testament documentation of the use of the dais, the Mishnah also supports the evidence found in the Book of Mormon. Together these illustrate that platforms are (1) located in the temple precinct, (2) associated with the coronation of new kings, (3) used by the king or another leader to read the law to the people, (4) used to offer dedicatory prayers for the temple, and (5) associated with the Festival of Booths. In view of these considerations, one can conclude that Benjamin's tower was more than just a way to communicate to the people — it was part of an Israelite coronation tradition in which the king stands on a platform or pillar at the temple before the people and before God.[53]

The Old Testament evidence supporting these conclusions is not readily extractable from the KJV due to translation difficulties nor clearly available elsewhere in Joseph Smith's environment.

By the way, some critics of Mesoamerica as the New World setting of the Book of Mormon have ridiculed the concept of King Benjamin's building a Mesoamerican-style stone tower in just a day, but the text in

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52. For Old World parallels to the tower built by King Benjamin for his famous speech, which may be described as a covenant-making and coronation ritual, See Terrence L. Szink and John W. Welch, "King Benjamin's Speech in the Context of Ancient Israelite Festivals," in John Welch and Stephen Ricks, eds., *King Benjamin's Speech* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=8; which cites T. Raymond Hobbs, *2 Kings* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 142, who suggests that the object stood on, by, or near the king during a Feast of Tabernacles ceremony was "some kind of column, podium, or platform."(n148) Szink and Welch also refers to ceremonies of enthronement in which the king was lifted on to a platform or pillar to receive homage from the congregation. See also Hugh Nibley, "Assembly and Atonement," Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech*, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=7; which refers to the use of platforms in ancient Babylon for coronation ceremonies. Further see Stephen D. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6," Welch and Ricks, *King Benjamin's Speech*, 233–75, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1087&index=10, especially the discussion of the royal dais used in covenant making in Old Testament times.

53. Ricks, "Kingship, Coronation, and Covenant in Mosiah 1–6."

Mosiah 2:7 does not actually say King Benjamin built the tower in a day, nor does it even say or require that he began its construction *after* the crowd showed up. In stating that "he caused a tower to be erected," it could just as well have been built in anticipation of the coming crowd to prepare a ritual platform for the coronation ceremony and perhaps other ceremonies. The association of towers and temples is known in Mesoamerica, and the role of tall towers was prominent there. The Book of Mormon's implications about the various roles of towers, taken for granted by Mormon, fits well within Mesoamerica and not as well within Joseph's environment.

It's hard to account for the numerous precise parallels to Mesoamerica as merely lucky guesses, but it is equally implausible to posit that a modern writer with an advanced source of knowledge about such things would have described such a foreign setting without at least pointing out the cultural differences to aid modern readers. This problem is related to the problem we have previously pointed out regarding alleged sources (rare European maps of Arabia, for example) that Joseph or his advisors with sufficient resources theoretically might have used to guide the purported fabrication of the story of Lehi's Trail.[54] If one had built-in details about the trail and even a rare place name like Nahom/Nehhem based on detailed maps and other research in order to add evidence of authenticity, why not use more widely known details like the place name Mecca to give local color and plausibility? For the homerun/bulls-eye of Nahom[55] as an ancient name in the right place, why use a potentially verifiable tidbit and then leave it as an easily missed detail mentioned only once and *never discussed again after publication of the Book of Mormon*? If evidence of authenticity was built into the text on purpose, why did it take over a century for the first member of the Church to notice the potential link between Nahom and the ancient site in Yemen that is now a remarkable candidate for Nahom?

The same question applies to almost every form of the growing evidence for plausibility that has been found in the Book of Mormon.

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54. Jeff Lindsay, "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 1 of 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 19 (2016): 153–239, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-1-of-2/; and "Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dream Map: Part 2 of 2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 19 (2016): 247–326, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/joseph-and-the-amazing-technicolor-dream-map-part-2-of-2/.

55. Neal Rappleye and Stephen O. Smoot, "Book of Mormon Minimalists and the NHM Inscriptions: A Response to Dan Vogel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 8 (2014), 157–85, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/book-of-mormon-minimalists-and-the-nhm-inscriptions-a-response-to-dan-vogel/.

If Joseph were deliberately mimicking chiasmus, ancient covenant patterns, psalms of lament, inclusio, and other forms of parallelism, if he were deliberately adding realistic details from his research to make the Book of Mormon accounts seem more realistic, why not call attention to these easily missed elements both with more emphasis in the text and then in subsequent publicity?

Joseph did celebrate the validation of ancient American civilization that came with the 1841 publication of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* by John Lloyd Stephens,[56] with illustrations by Frederick Catherwood. This work introduced many readers to the extensive civilization of the ancient Americas. Clearly Joseph was interested in external evidences for Book of Mormon issues.[57] Had he been aware of impressive evidence from Arabia, it surely would have been mentioned. Were he a fraud, he surely would have arranged for one of his peers to later "discover" the evidence and make the most of it. Built-in evidence makes no sense if the evidence is never noticed or pointed to. This would make the Book of Mormon a most unusual fraud. As a fraud, it would be of a most unusual nature for still other reasons that Card helps us recognize.

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56. John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (London: John Murray, 1841 and New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841), https://books.google.com/books?id=rmEaAAAAYAAJ. For more on the Latter-day Saint reaction, see John L. Sorenson "The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 395, https://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1099&index=19.

57. Neal Rappleye, "'War of Words and Tumult of Opinions': The Battle for Joseph Smith's Words in Book of Mormon Geography," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 37–95, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/war-of-words-and-tumult-of-opinions-the-battle-for-joseph-smiths-words-in-book-of-mormon-geography/; Matthew Roper, "Joseph Smith, Central American Ruins, and the Book of Mormon," in *Approaching Antiquity: Joseph Smith and the Ancient World*, eds. Lincoln H. Blumell, Matthew J. Grey, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2015), 141–62; Matthew Roper, "John Bernhisel's Gift to a Prophet: Incidents of Travel in Central America and the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 207–53, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/john-bernhisels-gift-to-a-prophet-incidents-of-travel-in-central-america-and-the-book-of-mormon/; David C. Handy, "Joseph Smith, John Lloyd Stephens, and the Times and Seasons," *Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum*, 2010, http://www.bmaf.org/articles/smith_stephens_times_seasons__handy; and Jeff Lindsay, "What Could Joseph Have Known About Mesoamerica?," *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), 2011, https://www.jefflindsay.com/bme11.shtml.

A Rarely Attempted Feat, Or, Mormon vs. Ossian

Critics frequently try to defuse respect for the Book of Mormon by suggesting that the purported fraud of Joseph Smith is routinely done with even more impressive results. J.R.R. Tolkien's works such as *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy are commonly cited, showing that it is possible for a writer to concoct a beautiful, complex, and generally consistent "history" involving many places, numerous new names, great battles, political intrigues, and so forth. (But see the recent work of Brad Wilcox, Wendy Baker-Smemoe, Bruce L. Brown, and Sharon Black on the "phonoprint" of names created by Tolkien compared to those found in the Book of Mormon, yielding evidence that Tolkien's names for people from different language groups were created by a single author while those of the Book of Mormon were not.[58]) The fact that Tolkien had advanced education and put in a lifetime of work to produce his polished masterpiece, points often made by Latter-day Saint apologists in response to critics citing Tolkien, is a minor point in light of Card's insight.

Card's experience as a science fiction writer enables him to make a salient observation about the alleged fraud of the Book of Mormon. If it is a fraud, what Joseph did is *rarely attempted* and almost certainly results in obvious failure. What he did, if the Book of Mormon is a fraud, was not simply write a work of fiction set in a different culture and remote time. Many writers stand with Tolkien in being able to write such fiction well, with a product that is clearly fiction written by a single modern author for a modern audience. The Book of Mormon, on the other hand, claims to be written by multiple ancient authors over a long expanse of time within a distant and changing culture. Such a fraud, to have any hope of long-term success, would need to be written from the cultural perspective of the authors in a different culture, not one that explains or indicates what is foreign relative to our modern culture. Such a work must reflect different authorial interests of the various writers and reflect the changes in culture or perspective that occur over time. It is a breathtakingly complex project. Such a work *almost never* attempts to pass itself off as a genuine document from a remote culture and time.

Card then cites an important example where a fraudulent work purportedly from antiquity was passed off as genuine by a modern

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58.   Brad Wilcox, *et al.*, "Comparing Book of Mormon Names with Those Found in J.R.R. Tolkien's Works: An Exploratory Study," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 105–24, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/comparing-book-of-mormon-names-with-those-found-in-j-r-r-tolkiens-works-an-exploratory-study/.

author. The work was a collection of Gaelic poems said to be written by an ancient poet named Ossian. The poems had been "translated" into English by a Scottish politician and writer, James Macpherson. Macpherson's publication was a hit and added to his fame and fortune. He died wealthy enough to buy a spot at Westminster Abby for his tomb. But he did not die without being denounced as a fraud by Samuel Johnson, who also was buried at Westminster Abby (but as a token of respect, not as a result of his wealth).

The poetry of Ossian inspired many influential people including Napoleon, Goethe, Thomas Jefferson, and others. Selma, Alabama, was named after Selma, the home of the Scottish warrior Fingal from the poems of Ossian. The work has had a significant influence in many circles, in spite of concerns about fraud.

The text is available at *Sacred-Texts.com*, where J.B. Hare, the website's founder, summarizes the controversy:

> James Macpherson claimed that Ossian was based on an ancient Gaelic manuscript. There was just one problem. The existence of this manuscript was never established. In fact, unlike Ireland and Wales, there are no dark-age manuscripts of epic poems, tales, and chronicles and so on from Scotland. It isn't that such ancient Scottish poetry and lore didn't exist, it was just purely oral in nature. Not much of it was committed to writing until it was on the verge of extinction. There are Scottish manuscripts and books in existence today which date as far back as the 12th century (some with scraps of poetry in them), but they are principally on subjects such as religion, genealogy, and land grants.

> For this and several other reasons which are dealt with in the Preliminary Discourse *et seq.*, authenticity of the work was widely contested, particularly by Samuel Johnson. A huge (and probably excessive) backlash ensued, and conventional wisdom today brands Ossian as one of the great forgeries of history.

> In fairness, themes, characters and passages of Ossian are based on established Celtic and Scottish folklore. Much of the fourth volume of J.F. Campbell's massive *Popular Tales of the West Highlands* is devoted to tracking down Ossianic fragments in circulation prior to Macpherson or elicited from illiterate Highland peasants who had never heard of *Ossian*.

> Macpherson is today considered the author of this work. The language of composition was probably English: As Campbell determined, Macpherson wasn't even particularly fluent in Gaelic.[59]

What some view as a definitive work on the fraud of Ossian came out after Card's article with the 2009 publication of Thomas M. Curley's *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland*.[60] In summarizing his survey of the Ossian fraud, Curley praises Samuel Johnson for recognizing the nature of the fraud, a conclusion that has withstood the test of time and Curley's own extensive detective work:

> Johnson's sense of the falsity of the *Ossian* works was correct, despite professions to the contrary by some modern scholars. Twenty-eight out of Macpherson's thirty-nine titles — seventy-two percent of all the individual works comprising *Ossian* — have no apparent grounding in genuine Gaelic literature and are therefore entirely his own handiwork. The remaining twenty-eight percent of the titles have but generally loose ties to approximately sixteen Gaelic ballads. Contrary to his assertions, Macpherson was no editor or translator of ancient poetry. He was the author of new, largely invented literature in violation of true history, legitimate Gaelic studies, and valid national identity in Scotland. As Johnson had charged, Macpherson committed literary fabrication.[61]

Macpherson claimed to have original Gaelic manuscripts that he translated. Samuel Johnson, recognizing the many indications of fraud in the translation, demanded that Macpherson present the originals for review. One can easily draw a parallel to Joseph Smith who was also asked to show his golden plates to the world, if such existed. But unlike Joseph Smith and the golden plates, Macpherson provided no extract of copied characters from the manuscripts, sought out no independent scholarly examination of a portion of his translation, had no witnesses to support the existence of the original manuscripts, and had no witnesses of the translation process. Further, with no angel requiring that the original

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59. J.B. Blare, "The Poems of Ossian by James Macpherson [1773]," introductory comments, *Sacred-Texts* (website), last accessed September 26, 2018, http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/ossian/.

60. Thomas M. Curley, *Samuel Johnson, the Ossian Fraud, and the Celtic Revival in Great Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

61. Thomas M. Curley, "The Great Samuel Johnson and His Opposition to Literary Liars," *Bridgewater Review* 28, vol. 2 (Dec. 2009): 8, https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1253&context=br_rev.

document be returned for divine safekeeping, Macpherson lacked any excuse for the failure to let others see the documents he had translated.

Macpherson's fraud is not without evidence of authenticity, for many of the names he uses were ancient Gaelic names that can be found in documents going back several hundred years. But as Curley and others have explained, these are names that could have been picked up from current lore that Macpherson extracted from his wanderings in the British Isles. Curley also explains that there are also 16 authentic Gaelic sources that are used in some way by Macpherson, giving it several small kernels of apparent authenticity. Some have argued that Macpherson was simply taking liberties with the existing poems and still acted largely as a loose translator, but Curley argues that such defenses are unjustified and that the fans of Ossian poetry must confront the fact that the vast majority of it is simply fabricated.

Curley argues that the evidence of fraud is clear cut and easily exposed, and most scholars today may agree. On the other hand, some scholars have sought to revive Macpherson's Ossian, claiming that it is much more authentic than Samuel Johnson recognized. For example, Pail Moulton writes,

> A recent resurgence of research has done much to exonerate Macpherson from accusations of fraud. Research by Howard Gaskill, Fiona Stafford, Derick Thomson, and others have shown that Macpherson's poems were largely authentic, as many of the poems have since been corroborated with other Gaelic sources…. Many of his poems that have been corroborated show that he was often rather liberal in his translations, which was typical for the time. **Most modern scholars in the subject now agree that the majority of his poems are based on genuine, ancient Gaelic poetry,** but that Macpherson's claim he had found a lost epic was overly ambitious.[62]

Moulton's statement about the views of "most modern scholars" needs to be considered cautiously. It might be better said that most scholars recognize there is a touch of genuine Gaelic poetry that Macpherson drew upon, but saying that "the poems are based on genuine, ancient Gaelic poetry" may be misleading. Ultimately, what Macpherson offered his enthusiastic audiences was his invention. Defenders suggest that

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62. Paul F. Moulton, "A Controversy Discarded and 'Ossian' Revealed: An Argument for a Renewed Consideration of 'The Poems of Ossian,'" College Music Symposium, vol. 49/50 (2009/2010), 393, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41225266, (emphasis added).

Macpherson was drawing upon authentic material but applying a great deal of his own creativity to translate in his own style, but this overlooks what Macpherson insisted upon from the beginning: that his translation was "extremely literal" and that the unusual word order in the English was often adjusted to reflect that of the original.[63] But this was artifice, not an artifact of authentic translation. Yola Schmitz describes Macpherson's artifice as *translatese* — the deliberate creation of nonstandard syntax to create the sense of a highly literal translation from a foreign language.[64]

Compared to the Book of Mormon, what Macpherson attempted was not a complex history spanning vast stretches of time and epic migrations from the Old World to the New, but mere poems, and not from a wholly unfamiliar culture but from his own island and from his own country and ancestors though removed by 1500 years. Macpherson had the benefit of being well educated, of being raised in a society familiar with Gaelic tales, with access to abundant sources of relevant information for his project. What Macpherson attempted is quite unlike the feat of, say, having a poorly educated New York farm boy with scant resources write about travel across the Arabian Peninsula or create ancient poetry rooted in ancient Hebrew or describe battles, cities, natural disasters, and other events in an unfamiliar New World setting. What Macpherson attempted was kid stuff compared to the Book of Mormon, and yet his Ossian project failed in spite of some hopeful supporters seeking to overlook its flaws. It was successful enough to add to his wealth, but he had already been vocally denounced as a fraud by Samuel Johnson and remains widely recognized as a fraud who got very much wrong. It has certainly not withstood the test of time. From the beginning, basic questions about the existence of the original documents could not be answered nor could witnesses be provided.

The Book of Mormon was a surprise bolt from the blue from a poorly educated, impoverished farm boy not known to be a bookworm or a writer, unexpectedly announcing he had received an ancient record, then daring to show the plates to numerous people, and then translating it by dictation

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63. James Macpherson, *Fragments of Ancient Poetry, Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Galic or Erse Language* (Edinburgh: G. Hamilton and J. Balfour, 1760), vi, https://books.google.com.hk/books?id=DgheA AAAcAAJ&printsec=frontcover&hl=zh-TW&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad= 0#v=onepage&q&f=false.

64. Yola Schmitz, "Faked Translations: James Macpherson's Ossianic Poetry," in Daniel Becker, Annalisa Fischer, and Yola Schmitz, eds., *Faking, Forging, Counterfeiting: Discredited Practices at the Margins of Mimesis* (Bielefeld, Germany: Transcript Verlag, 2018), 167–80, https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv1wxr9t.13.

at a prodigious rate apparently without the use of any manuscripts. Consider the contrast we find in Macpherson's preparation for his work, as described by Yola Schmitz in her 2017 chapter on the Ossian fraud:

> **Macpherson's upbringing put him in the perfect position.** He was born in Ruthven, in the Scottish Highlands where he was brought up in a Gaelic-speaking community and accustomed to the oral tradition of the bards of the clans. Yet, he also experienced first-hand the serious effects of British oppression. In 1745, the nine-year-old Macpherson witnessed the Jacobite Rising with all its devastating consequences for the collective identity and the heritage of the Scottish clans. In its wake, many customs and traditions, such as the tartan plaid and playing the bag pipes, were prohibited.
>
> However, one of the worst consequences must have been the subsequent ban on using the Scottish Gaelic language. Therefore, Macpherson's forgery can also be considered an attempt to recuperate what was left of the literary tradition of the Highlands and to rehabilitate a people, thought to be uncultured and uncivilised.
>
> These circumstances provided Macpherson with all he needed to produce a successful forgery. **He was an insider of Scottish traditions and, at the same time, he had profited from an academic education. He had not only learned how classic works of poetry were studied but also how they were supposed to be presented.** When the scholars in Aberdeen showed interest in this kind of poetry and offered to sponsor an excursion to the Highlands, Macpherson seized the moment and delivered.[65] [*emphasis added*]

Card's comparison with Macpherson's fraud makes valid points that have only become stronger in light of further research both into the Ossian fraud and into the origins of the Book of Mormon, including the translation process, for which there were multiple credible witnesses.

Macpherson's fraud could also be considered in light of a few other attempted forgeries, including Thomas Chatterton's Rowley papers, purporting to be poems from a 15th-century monk named Rowley. The poems were initially accepted due to a general lack of attention at the time of publication to the details of the English language and its changes over the centuries. Chatterton used antique paper for his poems but was

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65. Yola Schmitz, "Faked Translations," 169.

unable to properly reflect the language of the time he sought to mimic, ensuring that the fraud would be detected.[66]

Failure to appreciate linguistic change over time was a key weakness in the Ossian fraud. Macpherson claimed that the Erse language (ancient Gaelic) of 300 AD had remained pure and unchanged over the centuries, allowing him to read and understand ancient Erse and translate Ossian's poetry into English. In spite of Macpherson's outstanding education, this was a monumental blunder, one easily picked up by critics in his day. Some observed that Gaelic in Scotland showed obvious variability just from one valley to the next. With such obvious change across short distances, how could the language remain unchanged over more than a thousand years?

On the other hand, the challenges of linguistic change over time is an area where the Book of Mormon shines and far surpasses what Macpherson and, presumably, Joseph knew. Linguistic change is implicit as a fact of life in the Book of Mormon narrative. Nephi's scribal work may already be blurring the lines between Egyptian and Hebrew (1 Nephi 1:1–3).[67] We see the Mulekites, immigrants without written records to help maintain their language, have lost much of their language (it had become "corrupted") and need to be taught to understand the Nephite's language after just a few hundred years of separation (Omni 1:17–18), with their rapid linguistic drift presumably accelerated by contact with local peoples in the New World. We see Nephites treasuring their written records as a means of helping them maintain their scriptural language system (Mosiah 1:2–6). We see the Lamanites losing their written language and later needing to be taught the Nephite writing system (Mosiah 24:1–7). And in spite of their written records, centuries later Mormon acknowledges that their Hebrew had been altered (Mormon 9:33) and that their script for recording scriptures, now called "reformed Egyptian," had been altered over time and was unknown except to them (Mormon 9:32, 34). These are realistic views on linguistic change, in contrast to the much less reasonable claims from the highly educated Macpherson.

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66. "Thomas Chatterton and the Rowley Forgeries," University of Delaware Library (website), Special Collection Department, last modified Dec. 21, 2010, http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec/exhibits/forgery/rowley.htm. See also "Thomas Chatterton," *Wikipedia*, last edited October 24, 2018, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Chatterton.

67. Neal Rappleye, "Nephi the Good: A Commentary on 1 Nephi 1:1–3," The *Interpreter Foundation* (blog), January 3, 2014, https://interpreterfoundation.org/nephi-the-good-a-commentary-on-1-nephi-11-3 /.

Mulek: Zarahemla's Deception?

I was impressed with Card's ability as an author and critic to look past the text itself and see the potential for human interpolations in one of the stories recounted in the Book of Mormon, the origins of the Mulekites. Card recognizes the potential for tension between the Nephites and the people of Zarahemla when they met. They have common origins and surely must become allies, but who shall rule? Card, open about his speculation, imagines King Zarahemla feeling at a disadvantage in the "negotiations" with the Nephites, who come with obvious signs of authority and God's favor. In addition to relics such as the sword of Laban, they bear sacred brass plates and other Nephite plates that help preserve their sacred history and their language, while the Mulekites have allowed their language to erode, probably through interaction with other locals over the years. To buttress his claim to the throne, Card proposes that King Zarahemla may have fabricated his claim to authority by stating that he was a descendant of King Zedekiah via a mysterious son, Mulek, unknown to the writers of the Bible.

Interestingly, the Mulekites do not immediately introduce themselves as Mulekites nor does Zarahemla immediately introduce himself as a descendant of Mulek in the description of first contact in Omni. The Mulekites describe themselves as "the people of Zarahemla" (Omni 1:14), and we learn that they came out from Jerusalem at the time that King Zedekiah was carried captive into Babylon. It is only after King Mosiah causes the people to be instructed in the Nephite language (presumably a brief refresher course for a language still rich in cognates) that King Zarahemla claims to have royal heritage himself.

Card's proposal is original and worthy of consideration. It may be accurate, but there is an interesting recent discovery since Card penned his speculation on Zarahemla that needs to be weighed. Recently Jeffrey Chadwick presented evidence of a tantalizing new archaeological find in Jerusalem, a small stamp seal with the inscription "belonging to Malkiyahu, son of the king." There is a plausible case that this belonged to Mulek, son of Zedekiah, and could be a seal for a Book of Mormon personality.[68] Further investigation is needed, but Chadwick's carefully considered approach raises a fascinating possibility.

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68. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 72–83, 117–18, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/12/2/S00008-50be69aad59c87Chadwick.pdf.

Language: A Powerful Cluster of Clues

Card discusses the language of the Book of Mormon, following what has been a widely accepted scholarly paradigm for Joseph's translation that holds that Joseph received mental impressions he then expressed in his own language. This is a very natural approach, especially when one considers the abundant bad grammar of the original manuscript as dictated by Joseph Smith. Members of the Church looking at the original manuscript may be shocked to see what looks like "hick grammar" with phrases like "he went a preaching" and "in them days." Many of these awkward and perhaps even embarrassing grammatical gaffes were quickly corrected during the editorial process.

Card's commentary can be reconsidered in light one of the most extensive works of scholarship related to the Book of Mormon, the lifetime of research conducted by Royal Skousen, resulting in the many recently published volumes of Book of Mormon textual scholarship for the Critical Text Project.[69] This is arguably the most important body of Book of Mormon scholarship to date in which "every page, every sentence, every word, letter, and mark are accounted for" and explored in the landmark project.[70] His work would also lead to publication of *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*,[71] a critical text giving the reader the Book of Mormon text as close as currently possible to what was dictated by Joseph Smith, coupled with notes showing numerous significant changes made in various printings. The details of these works are rich with surprises and insights about the miracle of the Book of Mormon translation process, details that make obvious that the text was dictated orally.[72]

One year after Card's article was published, Skousen published an important article pointing to the complex and seemingly non-standard grammar in the originally dictated text of the Book of Mormon.[73] Skousen noted that the dictated English did not fit Joseph's dialect. Some

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69. For an overview of The Critical Text Project and a list of related books and publications, see "About the Critical Text Project," *The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project*, last accessed September 28, 2018, http://bookofmormoncriticaltext. byustudies.byu.edu/about.

70. Royal Skousen, "Online Access to the Book of Mormon Critical Text Project," *The Book of Mormon Critical Text Project*, http://criticaltext.byustudies. byu.edu/.

71. Skousen, *The Book of Mormon: The Earliest Text*.

72. Skousen, "How Joseph Smith Translated the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," 22–31.

73. Royal Skousen, "The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?" *Journal of Book of Mormon*

of the awkward grammar as dictated could be viewed as Hebraisms, and the rest did not seem to fit any single version of English from any one time and place, raising many questions but also making it clear that calling upon Joseph's dialect was an inadequate explanation for the data.

Several years later, Skousen's ongoing explorations would lead him to a startling new conclusion which he announced in a 2005 issue of the Maxwell Institute's *Insights.* After reviewing three previously reported unexpected conclusions that had been compelled by his investigation in the Critical Text Project, he explained that in the past two years his work had led to a fourth unexpected finding: "The original vocabulary of the Book of Mormon appears to derive from the 1500s and 1600s, not from the 1800s."[74] The era of English Skousen referred to is known as *Early Modern English*, a phase in the evolution of English corresponding roughly to 1500 to 1700 AD, though some scholars use a range of 1470 to 1670 AD. This period includes the time in which the King James Bible was produced (published in 1611), but the KJV Bible is not representative of the entire era. Skousen's article discussed a variety of examples from the text which point to an influence in the translation from English not found in the KJV and more archaic than dialects in the United States. It was a controversial announcement, but one grounded in data and meticulous research.

One of the first discoveries leading Skousen to begin considering the issue of Early Modern English involved consideration of the phrase "pleasing bar of God" in Jacob 6:13 and Moroni 10:34. In context, this represents an unpleasant encounter for the wicked being judged, so why would it be called *pleasing*? In 2004, Skousen published his analysis in light of the nature of the mistakes Oliver Cowdery tended to make upon hearing unfamiliar words during dictation, and speculated that the term Joseph dictated was actually "pleading bar of God."[75] But the "pleading bar" as a legal term in English is archaic and was not in use in Joseph's day. Rather, the "pleading bar" seems to come from English in the early 1600s. Skousen concluded that "the actual translator of the Book of Mormon — either the Lord himself or his translation committee — seems to have been familiar with the term!"[76]

Studies 3, no. 1 (1994): 28–38, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/jbms/3/1/S00003-50c7617fa96a53Skousen.pdf.

74. Royal Skousen, "The Archaic Vocabulary of the Book of Mormon," *Insights: A Window on the Ancient World* 25, no. 5 (2005): 2–6, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/25/5/S00001-25-5.pdf.

75. Royal Skousen, "The Pleading Bar of God," *Insights* 24, no. 4 (2004): 2–3, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/publications/insights/24/4/S00001-24-4.pdf.

76. Ibid.

In light of his ongoing investigation, Skousen would later state that:

> Joseph Smith was literally reading off an already composed English-language text. Taken as a whole, the evidence in the manuscripts and in the language of the earliest text supports the hypothesis that the Book of Mormon was a precise text. I do not consider this conclusion apologetic but instead as one demanded by the evidence.
>
> The opposing viewpoint, that Joseph Smith got ideas and translated them into his own English, cannot be supported by the manuscript and textual evidence. The only substantive argument for this alternative view has been the nonstandard nature of the original text, with its implication that God would never speak ungrammatical English, so the nonstandard usage must be the result of Joseph Smith's putting the ideas he received into his own language. Yet with the recent finding that the original vocabulary of the text appears to date from the 1500s and 1600s (not the 1800s), we now need to consider the possibility that the ungrammaticality of the original text may also date from that earlier period of time, not necessarily from Joseph's own time and place. The evidence basically argues that Joseph Smith was not the author of the Book of Mormon, nor was he actually the translator. Instead, he was the revelator: through him the Lord revealed the English-language text (by means of the interpreters, later called the Urim and Thummim, and the seer stone). Such a view is consistent, I believe, with Joseph's use elsewhere of the verb translate to mean 'transmit' and the noun translation to mean 'transmission' (as in the eighth Article of Faith).[77]

Skousen had thrown out a challenge to others "to consider the possibility that the ungrammaticality of the original text may also date from that earlier period of time, not necessarily from Joseph's own time and place." It was a challenge that would be taken up by a linguist, Stanford Carmack, in a series of publications, primarily in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*. These include the following six publications:

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77. Royal Skousen, "My Testimony of the Book of Mormon, Scholarly and Personal," *Mormon Scholars Testify*, Dec. 2009, https://www.fairmormon.org/testimonies/scholars/royal-skousen.

1. "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar"[78]

Carmack's wide array of examples allows him to make this statement:

> Much of the earliest Book of Mormon language which has been regarded as nonstandard through the years is not. Furthermore, when 150 years' worth of emendations are stripped away, the grammar presents extensive evidence of its Early Modern English character, independent in many cases from the King James Bible.[79]

This article lays the foundation for Carmack's extensive work exploring Early Modern English (EModE) elements in the Book of Mormon. Carmack shows that some of the syntax in the Book of Mormon actually shows clearly pre-KJV elements.

Carmack considers numerous issues and examples. For instance, awkward usages of the word "much," such as *much + afflictions*, *fruits*, *threatenings*, *horses*, *contentions*, or *provisions* do not appear to be from the KJV Bible nor from Joseph's dialect but are found in Early Modern English. Also considered are the relative use of *has* versus *hath*; third-person plural subjects used with archaic third-person singular inflection, as in *Nephi's brethren rebelleth, they dieth*, and *hearts delighteth*; unusual uses of "there was" or "there were"; variation in grammatical mood in the same sentence; the past participle *arriven* used five times in the 1829 Book of Mormon; dative impersonal constructions like *it supposeth me*, *it sorroweth me*, and *it whispereth me*; the phrase *faith **on** the Lord*; and many other apparently non-standard or blatantly erroneous constructions such as *in them days* in Helaman 7:8 and 13:37 ("hick grammar" today but known in acceptable EModE) or *I had smote* in 1 Nephi 4:19, for which we presently require (and now have in the Book of Mormon) *smitten* as the past participle, although *smote* was frequently used as a past participle beginning in the 16th century.

Carmack's article came as a surprise to many readers, greatly amplifying the initial suggestions of Skousen yet also creating significant controversy, as one can gather from the comments posted in response to Carmack's article. But this was just the beginning of the detailed analysis to come.

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78. Stanford Carmack, "A Look at Some 'Nonstandard' Book of Mormon Grammar." *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 11 (2014): 209–62, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/a-look-at-some-nonstandard-book-of-mormon-grammar/.

79. Ibid., 209.

2. *"The Implications of Past-Tense Syntax in the Book of Mormon"*[80]

Carmack here considers the Book of Mormon's unusually high rate of using "did" to convey past tense, as in "Moroni *did arrive* with his army to the land of Bountiful" (Alma 52:18). "The 1829 Book of Mormon contains nearly 2,000 instances of this particular syntax, using it 27% of the time in past-tense contexts. The 1611 King James Bible … employs this syntax less than 2% of the time. While the Book of Mormon's rate is significantly higher than the Bible's, it is close to what is found in other English-language texts written mainly in the mid- to late-1500s. That usage died out in the 1700s."[73]

Carmack also notes how other modern writers mimicking KJV language fail to match the KJV or the Book of Mormon in terms of past tense syntax. Carmack argues that the Book of Mormon's usage makes it unique for its time. In light of the detailed statistics of Book of Mormon past tense syntax, it seems that its syntax is not readily explainable as a product of Joseph Smith's diction nor of Joseph's mimicry of either the Bible or other texts available to him.

3. *"Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster's 1828)"*[81]

Carmack's next paper argues that the archaic language of the Book of Mormon cannot be understood by referring to the 1828 dictionary of Noah Webster but rather requires a much more archaic dictionary.

He adds to his growing body of linguistic data by exploring several additional patterns. One example is "it supposeth me," a rare inverted syntax pattern that occurs four times in the Book of Mormon, each consistent with Early Modern English usage much earlier than the KJV in ways that make it unlikely for Joseph to have picked this up on his own.

> Could Joseph Smith have known about this inverted syntax? I suppose he could have seen it, had he spent time reading Middle English poetry. Was it accessible to him? No. This grammatical structure is exceedingly rare, the embodiment of obsolete usage. Had he ever seen it, he hardly would have recognized it

80. Stanford Carmack, "The Implications of Past-Tense Syntax in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 14 (2015): 119–86, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-implications-of-past-tense-syntax-in-the-book-of-mormon/.

81. Stanford Carmack, "Why the Oxford English Dictionary (and not Webster's 1828)," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 15 (2015): 65–77, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/why-the-oxford-english-dictionary-and-not-websters-1828/.

and been able to transform it.... Yet the text employs inverted syntax with *suppose* appropriately and consistently four times[82]

Along the way, Carmack points out just how complex and interesting the Book of Mormon text is:

> Let me also say at this point that it is wrongheaded to propose Moroni as translator in order to account for "errors" in the text. He may have been involved in the divine translation effort, but to employ him as an explanatory device in order to account for putative errors is misguided. The English-language text is too complex, diverse, and even well-formed to ascribe it to a non-native translation effort. Again, as I have stated in an earlier paper, the BofM is not full of grammatical errors. Rather, it is full of EModE — some of it is typical and pedestrian, some of it is elegant and sophisticated, and some of it is, to our limited or uninformed way of thinking, objectionable and ungrammatical. The BofM also contains touches of modern English and late Middle English. It is not a monolithic text, and we are just beginning to learn about its English language.... I have certainly come to realize that it is not the text of the BofM that is full of errors, but rather our judgments in relation to its grammar.[83]

For those wanting certainty, that's disturbing language. But this smells like an adventure that will lead somewhere. Critics and fans alike should find this challenge worth digging into. Will new insights about the Book of Mormon cause it to go down in flames? Critics may hope so. Carmack, on the other hand, argues that whatever the details are that led to Early Modern English in the Book of Mormon, the heavy strain of complex Early Modern English syntax of the Book of Mormon, once thought to be merely Joseph's bad grammar or a clumsy attempt at imitating the KJV, implies that the Lord "revealed a concrete form of expression (words) to Joseph Smith" and that the text itself is of divine origin. As surprising as this statement is, at the moment it seems to be a fair one in light of a great deal of objective data.

I think the devil is not in these details, but something is, and further work is needed.

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82. Ibid., 76.
83. Ibid., 67–68.

4. "What Command Syntax Tells Us About Book of Mormon Authorship"[84]

One of the particularly interesting details showing apparent Early Modern English influence in the Book of Mormon is the consistently unusual syntax used in expressing commands. These abundant archaic command forms include wordy constructions such as "he *commanded his people that they should maintain* those cities" in Alma 52:4 or "the Father *hath commanded me that I should give unto you this land* for your inheritance" in 3 Nephi 20:14. Carmack makes this argument:

> The variety of command syntax found in the Book of Mormon is very different from what is seen in the King James Bible. Yet it is sophisticated and principled, evincing Early Modern English linguistic competence. Interestingly, the syntactic match between the 1829 text and a prominent text from the late 15th century is surprisingly good. All the evidence indicates that Joseph Smith would not have produced the structures found in the text using the King James Bible as a model, nor from his own language.[85]

Carmack concludes that "[a] linguistically unsophisticated author could not have produced the array of syntactic structures found in the [Book of Mormon]. Deep, native-speaker knowledge of [Early Modern English] was required to achieve the regulated patterns of use found in the [Book of Mormon]."[86]

5. "The More Part of the Book of Mormon Is Early Modern English"[87]

Carmack explores the use of an obsolete construction using "more" to indicate the greater part of something. Carmack shows that awkward usages in the original Book of Mormon text cannot be plausibly explained as mimicry of the KJV Bible and are unlikely to be due to Joseph's own dialect.

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84. Stanford Carmack, "What Command Syntax Tells Us About Book of Mormon Authorship," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 13 (2015): 175–217, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/ what-command-syntax-tells-us-about-book-of-mormon-authorship/.

85. Ibid., 175.

86. Ibid., 215.

87. Stanford Carmack, "The More Part of the Book of Mormon Is Early Modern English," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 33–40, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/ the-more-part-of-the-book-of-mormon-is-early-modern-english/.

6. "Joseph Smith Read the Words"[88]

In this interesting paper, Carmack responds to Orson Scott Card and Brant Gardner regarding the theory that Joseph's translation of the Book of Mormon involved expressing revealed ideas in his own language. They are in good company, Carmack observes, as similar views have been espoused by B. H. Roberts, John A. Widtsoe, Sidney B. Sperry, Daniel H. Ludlow, and Robert L. Millett. However, newly available data about the original text dictated by Joseph show that had he been doing the translation himself, expressing revealed concepts in his own words, then the language and syntax of the Book of Mormon would be much different than it is.

Carmack argues that many words and phrases said to reveal a 19th-century influence, like "mighty change," "song of redeeming love," or "infinite atonement," are actually much older and can be found in the Early Modern period of English.[89]

Carmack emphasizes the Book of Mormon's accurate archaic uses of over 30 words not found in the Bible, nearly all of which are not expected to have been found in Joseph's dialect. Such words are unlikely to have come from Joseph's own vocabulary, making their usage an indication (one of many) that Joseph's "translation" involved receiving specific words, as if he were reading them somehow to his scribe as he dictated. This is a significant argument for "tight control" in the translation process. But there are other strong arguments as well:

> Different types of systematic usage—for example, 16th-century past-tense syntax with *did*; heavy *that*-complementation with verbs like *command*, *cause*, *suffer*, and *desire*; the completely consistent use of the short adverbial form *exceeding* with adjectives; and morphosyntactic patterns and variation involving the {-th} plural (and even the {-s} plural) — only

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88. Stanford Carmack, "Joseph Smith Read the Words," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 41–64, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/joseph-smith-read-the-words/.

89. On the issue of modern origins for "infinite atonement," see Jeff Lindsay, "Plagiarism in the Book of Mormon? Is It Derived from Modern Writings?," *JeffLindsay.com* (blog), last updated Sept. 22, 2017, https://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/FQ_BMProb3.shtml; and "Mercy, Justice, and the Atonement in the Book of Mormon: Modern or Ancient Concepts?," Dec. 26, 2016, https://www.jefflindsay.com/LDSFAQ/mercy.shtml.

match the systematic usage of the Early Modern period and are found throughout the text.[90]

Several other papers drive these points home in various ways, including the unusual usage of *was*,[91] the surprising but characteristically Early Modern English usage of {th} for plural forms,[92] evidence from Joseph's 1832 history regarding his own vocabulary and syntax,[93] and evidence from other writers who sought to imitate the Bible.[94]

Collectively, Skousen and Carmack present a case for strong Early Modern English influence in the Book of Mormon that is not driven by apologetics or any preconceived notions about the Book of Mormon, but driven by extensive objective data. The data present a complex story, for while there are Early Modern English elements from shortly before the KJV era or other parts of the Early Modern English era,[95] there are more modern elements in the Book of Mormon such as its high usage of the very practical English innovation "its." The word is in the KJV, but occurs only once in Leviticus 25:5 and was not present at all in the original 1611 version. The word is found in Shakespeare but did not become frequently used until well after the KJV era. Thus, the strong thread of Early Modern English, not all from one single time frame, is also blended with some modern elements as well as some apparent artifacts from Hebrew or

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90. Carmack, "Joseph Smith Read the Words," 47.

91. Stanford Carmack, "The Case of Plural Was in the Earliest Text," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 109–37, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-case-of-plural%E2%80%89was-in-the-earliest-text/.

92. Stanford Carmack, "The Case of the {-th} Plural in the Earliest Text," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 18 (2016): 79–108, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/the-case-of-the-th-plural-in-the-earliest-text/.

93. Stanford Carmack, "How Joseph Smith's Grammar Differed from Book of Mormon Grammar: Evidence from the 1832 History," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 25 (2017): 239-59, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/how-joseph-smiths-grammar-differed-from-book-of-mormon-grammar-evidence-from-the-1832-history/.

94. Stanford Carmack, "Is the Book of Mormon a Pseudo-Archaic Text?," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 28 (2018): 177–232, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/is-the-book-of-mormon-a-pseudo-archaic-text/.

95. One further example is the use of the non-standard form of "a" before a gerund, as in "a preaching," one of the first awkward grammatical forms I noticed in looking at the Original Manuscript. I would learn that this is also an archaic form with Early Modern English roots. See Jeff Lindsay, "The Debate Over Book of Mormon Translation: Loose or Tight?," *Nauvoo Times*, September 5, 2014, http://www.nauvootimes.com/cgi-bin/nauvoo_column.pl?number=102343&author=jeff-lindsay#.W0ijs359jUo.

Egyptian in the translation, suggesting a complex translation, but a translation with a distinctive Early Modern English influence. In spite of its complexity, the translation is remarkably consistent and points to origins outside of Joseph Smith's environment, however and why ever Early Modern English was selected for much of the syntax of the book.

Further Language Issues

Other research on language involves the issue of the language of the Book of Mormon on the golden plates. One of the most puzzling statements in the Book of Mormon — something that makes no sense in light of common knowledge in Joseph's day — is Nephi's statement in the opening verses to alert the reader that he wrote using "the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians" (1 Nephi 1:2). This was perplexing to readers in Joseph's day and ours. Numerous theories have been proposed regarding what this might mean.[65] While there is still room for debate regarding what Nephi meant, it is clear there is something that seemed obvious in Nephi's day that is not obvious to us and has not been explained adequately for our intellectual curiosity. It's the kind of issue that often occurs in legitimate texts from a foreign culture and not as an artifact of modern fiction for modern readers. Further, the concept of Hebrew scribes using Egyptian in any way — often cited as a ridiculous weakness in the Book of Mormon — has become much more plausible in light of archaeological evidence long after the Book of Mormon was published. Neal Rappleye, for example, is able to make a strong case that Nephi was using Egyptian and that this is consistent with an ancient scribal tradition that would not have been known in Joseph's day. Remarkably consistent with Card's approach, Rappleye points out why Nephi may have felt a need to explain what he was doing — an explanation that is quite logical when viewed from the perspective of an ancient author yet puzzling to us today:

> It is reasonable to suggest that Nephi's language is part of a centuries-old and widespread scribal tradition in Judah of writing in hieratic Egyptian. Nephi calls it "the language of my father" (1 Nephi 1:2), and evidence suggests that rather than being perpetuated by the state for bureaucratic interests, this tradition was passed on within the family. By Nephi's day, the hieratic script was often intermixed with Hebrew script, incorporating Hebrew word orders and scribal habits, thus differing from Egyptian as it was written in Egypt. Calabro calls it a "Judahite variety of Egyptian script"; Wimmer calls

it "*Palästiniches Hieratisch*" ("Palestinian Hieratic"). Both of these seem functionally equivalent to Nephi's "learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians."…

Within this context, it is not likely that Nephi's writing was Hebrew language in an Egyptian script. The awkwardness of such an arrangement was long ago pointed out by Hugh Nibley. Now, we know this is not how hieratic was being used in Nephi's day. Since Calabro specifically notices what could be called Hebraisms (Hebrew word orders) in the hieratic writing, the presence of Hebraisms not typically found in Egyptian — as the *Egyptians* write — is insufficient evidence to assert that the underlying language is Hebrew as opposed to Nephi's statement that it is Egyptian. Indeed, the most natural interpretation of Nephi's statement is that he was writing Egyptian the way the Jews had learned to write it, that is, according to their own, independent, scribal tradition, which had some natural syncretism with Hebrew but was nonetheless Egyptian…

That Nephi specifies his writing is according to "the learning of the Jews" indicates that he has some awareness that there are differences in how the Egyptians themselves write and use their language. He may be referring to the differences in script, in word order, in the incorporation of some Hebrew linguistic elements, or most likely all of the above. The awareness of these differences could come only from having some contact with "pure" Egyptian scribal practices, as Wimmer's findings suggest. This awareness of Egyptian according to the "learning of the Egyptians," to adapt Nephi's phrase, could explain why Nephi makes a statement about his language at all: familiar with both traditions of Egyptian writing, Nephi may have felt a need to specify that his was the Judahite variety. Readers of the Egyptian variety would probably still be able to read the Palestinian hieratic but may have struggled. Perhaps Nephi was hoping to help such potential readers avoid confusion from the Hebraized elements of his Egyptian writing by telling them up front that this was the Judahite variety of hieratic.

The context created from late preexilic scribal practice in Judah allows for a sensible interpretation of 1 Nephi 1:2 that resolves its ambiguity. The data allow us to see just what the

"language of the Egyptians," according to "the learning of the Jews," actually consisted of and interpret Nephi's statement accordingly. No such explanatory context can reasonably be fashioned out of Joseph Smith's world, where the reaction of contemporaries indicates that the phrase was as perplexing to readers then as it is now.[96]

If Rappleye is correct, this view raises questions about some of the many apparent Hebrew wordplays in the Book of Mormon that may need to be reconsidered, although there is still the possibility of such Hebraic elements having been incorporated into the text in spite of it (or parts of it) being primarily in Egyptian.

In any case, the issue of Hebrew scribes working with Egyptian language has long been mocked by Book of Mormon critics but now seems to be another case where the implausible Book of Mormon is turning the tide on its critics as we learn more about the ancient world and break past easy but errant assumptions about what the book is telling us. It is also another case where detailed examination of foreign cultural phenomena such as scribal practices in ancient Palestine and Egypt help us reconstruct the assumptions built into Nephi's brief explanation and fill in gaps for a modern audience.

A fraudulent work of fiction is not likely to present puzzles that yield such rewards upon further investigation, nor would a modern work give an explanation that only make things worse for the modern reader by raising serious puzzles that would only become clear through detailed research. Consideration of what Nephi felt a need to explain again reveals that we are dealing with something far outside of Joseph's environment. We are dealing with an ancient voice from the dust, an authentic and complex record worthy of respect and thoughtful analysis on every page.

A Surge in Semitic Wordplays, Especially Related to Names

While the debate continues on the nature of the underlying language(s) and script(s) that were on the golden plates, there are noteworthy hints of a significant influence of Hebrew due to numerous apparent instances of artful and intentional Hebraic wordplays, especially in the names presented in the Book of Mormon. A great body of analysis on this issue has come to light only in the past decade, particularly through the extensive work of

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96. Neal Rappleye, "Learning Nephi's Language: Creating a Context for 1 Nephi 1:2," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 16 (2015): 151-59, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/learning-nephis-language-creating-a-context-for-1-nephi-12/.

Matthew Bowen as compiled in his 2018 book, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture.*[97] Bowen's detailed work shows that when a variety of Book of Mormon names are considered in light of their plausible Hebrew form, clever and pervasive wordplays appear in the way these names are used.

The name Alma, for example, now known to be an authentic ancient Jewish man's name (after so many decades of mockery from critics for Joseph's "blunder" of not recognizing Alma as a common Latin female name),[98] is introduced with an apparent wordplay on the Hebrew name: given that the name Alma can mean "young man" in Hebrew, the statement that Alma "was a young man" suggests a knowing wordplay in Mosiah 17:2. A wordplay with the Hebrew root *ʿlm*, "to hide," to be "hidden" or "concealed," may also occur in the story of Alma being "hidden" and "concealed" while writing the words of Abinadi and "privately" teaching those who would listen. The abundance of wordplays involving his name in Mosiah 17–18 "accentuates his importance as a prophetic figure and founder of the later Nephite church."[99]

Finding wordplays, like other Hebraic elements including Hebrew poetical elements, in an English translation faces the obvious problem of lacking the text in the original language from which one might more fully evaluate the nature of the literary device. However, with names in particular,

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97. Matthew Bowen, *Name as Key-Word: Collected Essays on Onomastic Wordplay and the Temple in Mormon Scripture* (Orem, UT: Interpreter Foundation and Salt Lake City: Ehorn Books, 2018). These essays draw upon information previously published by Bowen in *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* (https://www.mormoninterpreter.com).

98. Paul Hoskisson, "What's in a Name? Alma as a Hebrew Name," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7, no. 1 (1998): 72–73, https://publications.mi.byu.edu/pdf-control.php/publications/jbms/7/1/S00011-50be297b720ea9Hoskisson.pdf. See also John Tvedtnes, "Hebrew Names in the Book of Mormon" (Presentation, Thirteenth World Congress of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel, August 2001), https://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/tvedtnes-HebrewNames.pdf; and Terrence L. Szink, "The Personal Name 'Alma' at Ebla," *Religious Educator* 1, no. 1 (2000): 53–56, https://rsc.byu.edu/es/archived/volume-1-number-1-2000/personal-name-alma-ebla.

99. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, lii–liii and 91–100. See also Matthew L. Bowen, "Alma — Young Man, Hidden Prophet," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 343–53, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/alma-young-man-hidden-prophet/; and Matthew L. Bowen, "'He Did Go About Secretly': Additional Thoughts on the Literary Use of Alma's Name," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 27 (2017): 197–212, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/he-did-go-about-secretly-additional-thoughts-on-the-literary-use-of-almas-name/.

there is a reasonable chance that evidence of a wordplay can survive translation if the name is transliterated well and if the associated text has been translated well. An example is the name Jesus in Matthew 1:21: "thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." In spite of the Hebrew having been written in Greek and then translated in English, and in spite of not having the original Aramaic or Hebrew words that were actually spoken in Matthew 1, we can still see a connection between the name of Jesus and the Hebrew word *yosia* meaning "to save."

Still, even when working with the original language, an apparent wordplay may be unintended and arise from chance. However, when the wordplay relates well to the text or has explanatory power, and when the wordplay is applied more than once or in creative, artful ways, the probability of intent is higher. Bowen makes the case for most of his finds that multiple factors point to intentional and clever wordplays rather than mere chance. Wordplays involving Book of Mormon names in Bowen's book (which also considers some newly proposed Biblical wordplays) include the following:

- Nephi's name. Proposed to be from Egyptian *nfr* meaning good or goodly, Nephi appears to have multiple meaningful connections to the word "good" in the text, beginning with Nephi's declaration at the very beginning of our text that "I, Nephi, having been born of goodly parents…." Bowen suggests this relationship is at play in both the opening and closing chapters of Nephi's writings, forming an "inclusio" that appropriately brackets his two-book work,?? and underscores his mission of helping readers know the goodness of God and helping them to choose do good and follow Christ.[100]

- The name Mary, related to the Egyptian root *mr(i)*, "love," "desire," or "wish." It is only after seeing Mary in vision that Nephi recognizes the significance of the tree he saw in his vision: "it is the **love of God** which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the **most desirable** above all things" (1 Nephi 11:22). Other possible wordplays with other occurrences of the name Mary are also discussed.[101]

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100. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, 1–15.
101. Ibid., 17–47.

- Mormon's name and the related place name, the Waters of Mormon, for which Mormon appears to show awareness of a relationship to the same root as Mary for the first syllable, apparently resulting in creative links with the words "desire" and "love."[102]

- The name Joseph, which involves evidence of particularly extensive and creative wordplays related to a Hebrew root meaning "gather," "assemble," etc., and a root meaning "to add" or "increase." These wordplays are primarily made using an ancient Hebrew literary technique known as Gezera Shawa, in which two scriptural passages are brought together based on a shared word in both passages, thereby adding to or reinterpreting the meaning in a creative way. After Bowen's book went into print, he published another study investigating a further set of wordplays related to the name Joseph.[103] There Bowen makes the case that Nephi's heavy application of the Isaianic use of *yāsap* ("to add, to proceed") in 2 Nephi 25–30 is "a direct and thematic allusion" to a latter-day Joseph who would have a role in in bringing forth additional scripture. "This additional scripture would enable the meek to 'increase,' just as Isaiah and Nephi had prophesied."[73]

- The name Benjamin, which is also used artfully with Gezera Shawa by Benjamin himself. In the covenant-making context of King Benjamin's speech, he seeks to make his people become sons and daughters of God (Mosiah 5:17), with language drawing upon language in 2 Samuel 7:14 which employs the Hebrew *leben* ("for a son"), and also Psalm 2:7 and Deuteronomy 14:1–2, employing the Hebrew word *ben* ("son") or *banim* ("children"). Those who accept the Lord will be at the "right hand" (Hebrew *yamin*) of God (Mosiah 5:9)[104], possibly invoking Psalm 110:1. The verses that Benjamin brings together shows further usage

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102. Ibid., 24–47.

103. Matthew L. Bowen, "'And the Meek Also Shall Increase': The Verb YĀSAP in Isaiah 29 and Nephi's Prophetic Allusions to the Name Joseph in 2 Nephi 25–30," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 30 (2018): 5–42, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/and-the-meek-also-shall-increase-the-verb-yasap-in-isaiah-29-and-nephis-prophetic-allusions-to-the-name-joseph-in-2-nephi-25-30/.

104. Bowen, *Name as Key-Word*, 49–68.

of Gezera Shawa resulting in a clever wordplay on his own name that emphasizes that through making and keeping the covenant with God, Benjamin's people can become sons and daughters of God and be enthroned at his right hand, each becoming "a Benjamin."

- The name Judah and the Jews, with Judah being related to Hebrew roots which can mean "to offer praise out of a feeling of gratitude" or to "praise," "thank," or "acknowledge." In his chapter, "'What Thank They the Jews?,'" Bowen shows how Nephi applies these meanings as he urges the future Gentiles to be grateful to the Jews for the scriptures they have preserved for the world and to resist the temptation to despise and persecute the Jews (2 Nephi 29:3–6). "What thank they the Jews?" in 2 Nephi 29:4, the Lord's condemning question of future anti-Semitic Gentiles, appears to provide a direct wordplay between the words for "Jews" and "thank." To say that the Jews have helped bring forth "salvation" to the Gentiles (also 2 Nephi 29:4) may also be a wordplay on the name of Jesus. Bowen also observes that Nephi's closing words which call upon us to "respect the words of the Jews" (2 Nephi 33:14) further underscores the revealed message shared in 2 Nephi 29.[105] Bowen also notes that the Book of Mormon offers the strongest condemnation of anti-Semitism found anywhere in the scriptures.[106] How appropriate that it would be done with Hebraic wordplays.

- The names Enos and Jacob, as used by Enos to relate his experiences to those of his ancestor Jacob in Genesis 32–33. Enos appears to employ a Hebraic wordplay between the name Jacob and "wrestle" in addition to a wordplay on his own name.[107]

- Abish, a woman servant among the Lamanites whose name is given, strangely, while most Book of Mormon women go unnamed. In this case, however, her name fits the story with a straightforward wordplay, and also fits an important theological agenda. "Abish" can mean "Father is a man," an apt name for a woman who, in the same verse that names her, is said to have been secretly

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105. Ibid., 69–81.
106. Ibid., liii.
107. Ibid., 83–90.

converted due to a "remarkable vision of her father." But since names beginning with "Ab-" in the Old Testament often make a reference to God, "Father is a man" has a very appropriate reference to the nature of God, particularly Christ. Ammon was seeking to teach the Lamanites who the Great Spirit was and how Christ would come to earth as a mortal to redeem all mankind. The name Abish is meaningful in more than one way in this account, and we can be grateful that it was included.[108]

- The place names Zarahemla and Jershon. Jershon was one of the first potential wordplays noted in the Book of Mormon, with an easily discernible relationship to the Hebrew word "inheritance," the perfect name for the land that was given as a land of "inheritance" to the newly converted and exiled Anti-Nephi-Lehites fleeing their Lamanite homelands and again later to the newly converted Zoramites. But Bowen reveals more in the literary devices involving Jershon, including multiple instances in which the Book of Mormon reveals an awareness of the Hebrew meaning of Jershon, coupled with the artful intertwining of Jershon wordplays with wordplays on the name Zarahemla, proposed as taken from "seed of compassion" or "seed of pity" in Hebrew. Bowen shows that both names provide us with valuable test cases for the Book of Mormon, reflecting repeated and apparently deliberate wordplays that are consistent with ancient Hebrew literary methods and highly unlikely to have been the result of blind luck in a farm boy's random ramblings.[109]

- The names Zoram and Rameumpton. Both names share a common syllable that in Hebrew can describe something that is "high" or "lifted up." These names may be involved in wordplays in descriptions of the Zoramites and their peculiar, prideful religious practices involving standing on an elevated tower or stand called the "Rameumptom" from which they boasted of their elite status. Similar wordplays may have been used in Alma's counsel to his son Shiblon and in Mormon's description of the corrupt chief judges Cezoram and Seezoram, both with Zoram-derived names,

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108. Ibid., 101–18.
109. Ibid., 119–40.

to emphasize that the proud and wicked Nephites had become lifted up like the Zoramites.[110]

- The name Aminadab, which Bowen sees as a Semitic/ Hebrew name meaning "my kinsman is willing" or "my people are willing." Aminadab is the Nephite dissenter among the Lamanites who helps them recognize what is occurring during a miraculous event in Helaman 5 in which the Nephite brothers and prophets Lehi and Nephi are spared in a Lamanite prison. Aminadab, remembering his religious roots, tells the terrified Lamanites that "You must repent, and cry unto the voice, even until ye shall have faith in Christ" (Helaman 5:41). They are converted and their witness leads to many more converts. Mormon, in concluding this story, notes that it was the "willingness" of the Lamanite people that led to their conversion (Helaman 6:36).

There are many more wordplays that have been proposed for various passages in the Book of Mormon, but Bowen's focus on the significance of names appears to be especially fruitful and generally plausible, and frequently brings out added meaning or answers meaningful questions about the text. In most of these cases, it would be difficult to ascribe the wordplays identified to just chance and clever argumentation, though false positives in general cannot be completely ruled out. As Bowen observes, whether the text was written in Hebrew or Egyptian, the underlying meanings of names and relevant wordplays drawing upon Hebrew roots could have been recognized by readers familiar with the brass plates and the Nephites' (evolving) spoken language with its Hebrew origins, reducing the impact of uncertainty on the written language on the relevance of wordplays based on names with recognized meaning in Hebrew or Egyptian. In spite of such uncertainties, Bowen's work leaves us with a much richer appreciation of the genuinely ancient literary nature of the Book of Mormon, filled with gems that are being noticed only now, nearly two centuries after the Book of Mormon was dictated by a young man who had not yet studied Hebrew and could not have studied Egyptian. The literary strength of the Book of Mormon as an ancient text has become even more impressive since Orson Scott card discussed its strengths.

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110. Ibid., 141–75. See also Matthew L. Bowen, "'See That Ye Are Not Lifted Up': The Name Zoram and Its Paronomastic Pejoration," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 19 (2016): 109–43, https://www.mormoninterpreter.com/ see-that-ye-are-not-lifted-up-the-name-zoram-and-its-paronomastic-pejoration/.

Summary

With the presentation and publication of "Artifact or Artifice" a quarter century ago, Card gave us valuable tools for detecting hidden assumptions that reveal the era in which fiction was created. His approach can help us look past the text itself and the assumptions we may have been importing into a text or story to consider other possibilities. Such tugging at the text of the Book of Mormon brought fruitful insights in 1993. Twenty-five years later, most of his initial findings still appear valid or even strengthened. His own assumptions about Joseph Smith's language, commonly made by many readers, have been strongly challenged by emerging work on the nature of the translation and the dictated text, but even if Card's views on this one point end up being overturned, the result only further confirms Card's overall thesis, that the Book of Mormon is an artifact of an environment foreign to Joseph Smith's setting and mind.

"Artifact or Artifice?" has withstood the test of time well, like the Book of Mormon, although some details discussed by Card require updated understanding in light of intriguing new data. The question "artifact or artifice?" remains a vital and increasingly fascinating one that readers should pose as they read the Book of Mormon deeply, dropping superficial assumptions, to more fully encounter the numerous surprises and even wonders in the text.

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