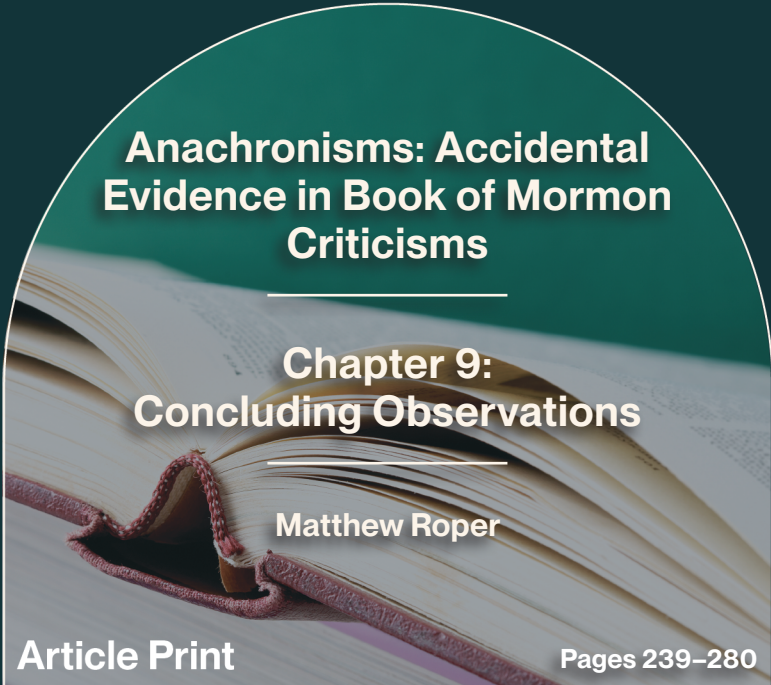


# Interpreter

**A Journal of Latter-day Saint  
Faith and Scholarship**



## **Anachronisms: Accidental Evidence in Book of Mormon Criticisms**

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### **Chapter 9: Concluding Observations**

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**Matthew Roper**

**Article Print**

**Pages 239–280**



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ISSN 2372-1227 (print)  
ISSN 2372-126X (online)

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# Anachronisms: Accidental Evidence in Book of Mormon Criticisms

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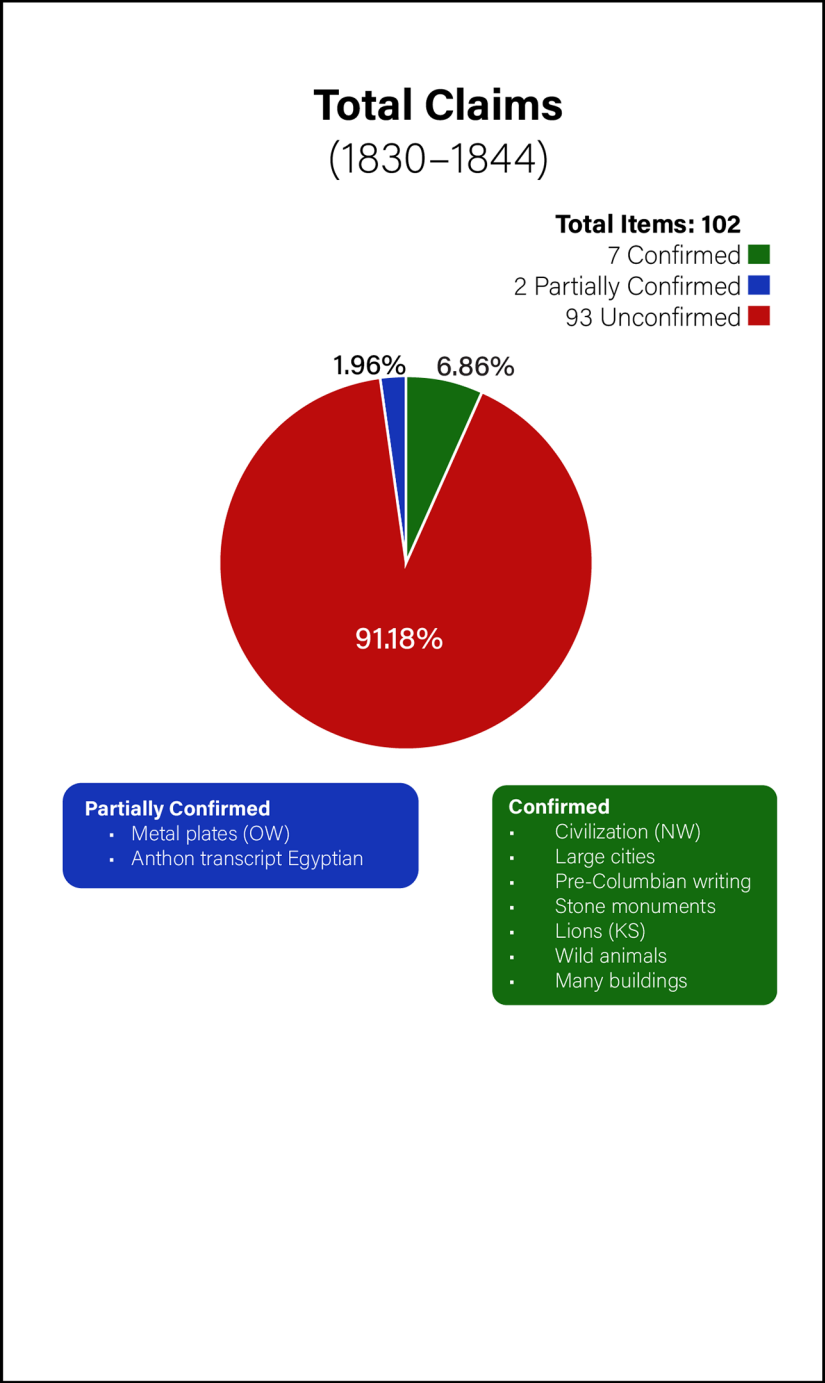
Matthew Roper

**[Editor's Note:** *We are pleased to present chapter 9 from a book entitled Anachronisms: Accidental Evidence in Book of Mormon Criticisms. It is presented in serialized form in this volume of Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship. This is immediately followed by a selected bibliography for the book.*]

## Chapter 9: Concluding Observations

**D**uring the fourteen years of the first phase (1830–1844), 102 items in the Book of Mormon were alleged to be anachronistic. By the end of that period, seven of these had been confirmed as accurate textual features, two had been partially confirmed, while ninety-three remained unconfirmed (see figures 64 and 65). By the end of the second phase (1845–1965), a period of 120 years, the total number of claimed anachronisms had increased to 168, of which thirty-six were confirmed as accurate textual features, ten were partially confirmed, and 122 were unconfirmed (see figures 66 and 67). During the last fifty-eight years, which constitute the third phase (1966–2024), the total number of claimed anachronisms increased to 226, of which 174 have been confirmed as accurate cultural, historical, or linguistic features, thirty-one partially confirmed, and twenty-one unconfirmed (see figures 68 and 69).





**Figure 64.** Total Book of Mormon anachronism claims (1830–1844).



## Total Claims (1830–1844, continued)

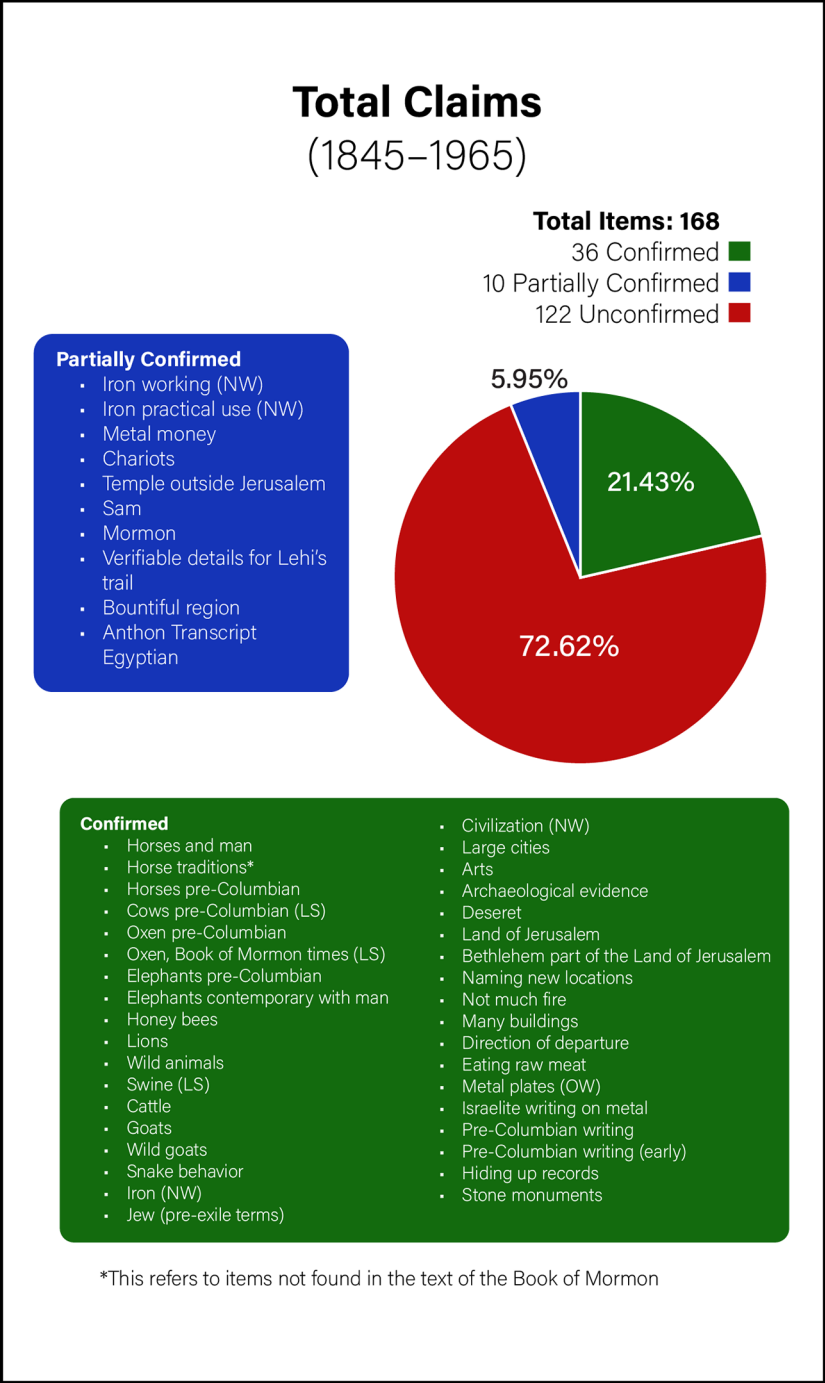
### Unconfirmed

- Horses pre-Columbian
- Asses pre-Columbian
- Cows pre-Columbian
- Oxen pre-Columbian
- Horses, Book of Mormon times
- Asses, Book of Mormon times
- Oxen, Book of Mormon times
- Cows, Book of Mormon times
- Goats
- Wild goats
- Fortifications
- Armies
- Swords (NW)
- Steel swords (OW)
- Scimitars (NW)
- Javelins
- Spears
- Bow and arrow (early)
- Slings
- Large armies
- Large army casualties
- Millions of war deaths
- Wars of extermination
- Post decapitations, movement/breathing
- Rations
- Steel (CW)
- Steel (NW)
- Forges/furnaces (NW)
- Gold money
- Silver money
- Sacrifice outside temple
- 600 year chronology
- Israelite feasts, customs, festival
- Killing Laban justified
- Temple outside Jerusalem
- Non-Levitical priests
- Book of Mormon cities identified
- Glass (OW)
- Brass (NW)
- Arts
- Native traditions\*
- Heliocentric astronomy
- Archaeological evidence
- Machinery
- Geographical correlations
- Navigations
- Sam
- Josh
- Gid
- Gadianton
- Abbreviated (hypocoristic) names
- Sheum
- Neas
- Ziff
- Money names
- Rameumptum
- Onidah
- Com
- Kim
- Nephi
- Moroni
- Mormon
- Irreantum
- Land of Jerusalem
- Bethlehem part of the Land of Jerusalem
- Three day journey
- River flowed into Red Sea
- Not much fire
- Direction of departure
- Eating raw meat
- Bountiful region
- Length of Jaredite voyage
- Pre-Columbian sea crossings
- Jews writing in Egyptian
- Scripture in Egyptian
- Israelite writing on metal
- Metal plates (NW)
- Hiding up records
- Destruction account implausible
- Sunken cities
- Great tempest
- Destruction by fire
- Whirlwind
- Buildings fail
- Thick darkness
- Darkness that can be felt
- Three days of darkness
- Inability to light fire
- Earth carried up
- Earth closing up
- Destruction at times of Christ
- Day, night, and day

\*This refers to items not found in the text of the Book of Mormon

**Figure 65.** Total Book of Mormon anachronism claims (1830–1844, continued).







## Total Claims (1845–1965, continued)

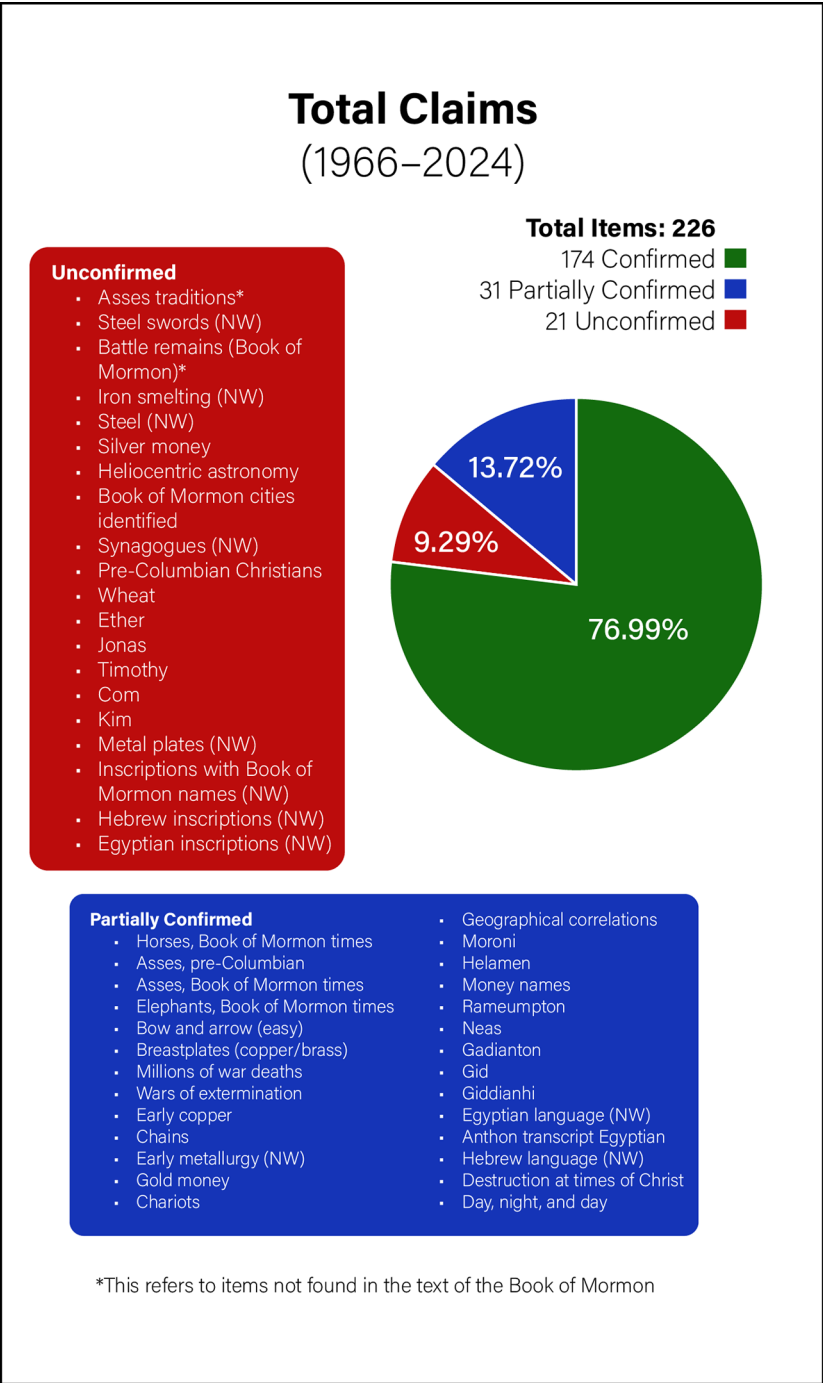
### Unconfirmed

- Asses pre-Columbian
- Asses traditions\*
- Asses, Book of Mormon times
- Oxen, Book of Mormon times
- Cows, Book of Mormon times
- Elephants, Book of Mormon times
- Sheep, pre-Columbian
- Cattle
- Swine
- Flocks and herds
- Fortifications
- Armor
- Swords (NW)
- Steel swords (OW)
- Steel swords (NW)
- Scimitars (NW)
- Scimitars (OW)
- Javelins
- Spears
- Bow and arrow (early)
- Bow of fine steel (OW)
- Slings
- Large armies
- Large army casualties
- Millions of war deaths
- Wars of extermination
- Post decapitations, movement/breathing
- Warfare
- Wars of conquest
- Shields
- Arm shields
- Breastplates
- Breastplates (copper/brass)
- Armies
- Pre-arranged battles
- Rations
- Raiders and plunderers
- Steel (OW)
- Steel (NW)
- Brass (NW)
- Iron smelting (NW)
- Forges/furnaces (NW)
- Silver money
- Early copper
- Sacrifice outside temple
- Pre-Columbian Christians
- 600 year chronology
- Israelite feasts, customs, festival
- Killing Laban justified
- Seantum's confession
- Non-Levitical priests
- Synagogues by 600 BC (OW)
- Book of Mormon cities identified
- Glass (OW)
- Native traditions\*
- Heliocentric astronomy
- Early cement
- Silk
- Linen
- Wheat
- Barley
- Machinery
- Geographical correlations
- Navigation
- Josh
- Gid
- Gadianton
- Abbreviated (hypocoristic names)
- Sheum
- Neas
- Ziff
- Money names
- Rameumptum
- Onidah
- Com
- Kim
- Nephi
- Alma
- Moroni
- Irreanum
- Jarom
- Zarahemla
- Zeniff
- Omni
- Mosiah
- Helaman
- Ether
- Anti
- Three day journey
- Eastward turn
- River in a valley
- River flowed into Red Sea
- Timber
- Ore
- Ocean route
- Length of Jaredite voyage
- Pre-Columbian sea crossings
- Jews writing in Egyptian
- Scripture in Egyptian
- Scripture on metal
- Metal plates (NW)
- Reformed Egyptian (OW)
- Egyptian language (NW)
- Hebrew language (NW)
- Hebrew transcription (NW)
- Inscriptions with Book of Mormon names (NW)
- Inscriptions with Book of Mormon texts (NW)
- Destruction account implausible
- Sunken cities
- Great tempest
- Destruction by fire
- Whirlind
- Earthquake
- Buildings fall
- Thick darkness
- Darkness that can be felt
- Three days of darkness
- Inability to light fire
- Earth carried up
- Earth closing up
- Day, night, and day

\*This refers to items not found in the text of the Book of Mormon

**Figure 67.** Total Book of Mormon anachronism claims (1845–1965, continued).







# Total Claims

(1966–2024, continued)

## Confirmed

- Horses pre-Columbian
- Horse traditions\*
- Horses and man
- Cows pre-Columbian (LS)
- Oxen pre-Columbian (LS)
- Oxen, Book of Mormon times
- Elephants pre-Columbian
- Elephants contemporary with man
- Swine
- Cattle
- Sheep
- Flocks/herds
- Honey bees
- Lions
- Wild animals
- Moths
- Dragons
- Chickens
- Dogs
- Snake behavior
- Fortifications
- Warfare
- Wars of conquest
- Armor
- Swords (NW)
- Swords (NW early)
- Steel swords (OW)
- Scimitars (NW)
- Scimitars (OW)
- Daggers
- Battle axes
- Javelins
- Spears
- Quivers
- Shields
- Arm shields
- Large armies
- Large army casualties
- Fainting, loss of blood
- Pre-arranged battles
- Post decapitation, movement, breathing
- Trumpets
- Ladders
- Tents
- Rations
- Raiders and plunderers
- Steel (OW)
- Iron working (NW)
- Iron practical use (NW)
- Abundance of ores (copper, gold, silver, iron)
- Metal money
- Jew (pre-exile term)
- Sacrifice outside temple
- Israelite feasts, customs festival
- 600 year chronology
- Killing Laban justified
- Seantum's confession
- Temples outside Jerusalem
- Non-Levitical priests
- Synagogues by 600 BC (OW)
- Native traditions\*
- Civilization (NW)
- Large cities
- Temples (NW)
- Kings
- Palaces
- Prisons
- Glass (OW)
- Art
- Lunar calendar
- Early cement
- Archaeological evidence
- Navigation
- Roads
- Lawyers
- Judges
- Tools to hoe
- Pruning tools
- Tools to plow
- Sickles
- Buildings
- Barley
- Corn
- Grapes
- Wine
- Salt
- Highways
- Tilling tools
- Pearls
- Silk
- Linen
- Grain
- Tools to thrash
- Sam
- Josh
- Mormon
- Deseret
- Liahona
- Irreantum
- Shazor
- Jarom
- Abbreviated (hypocoristic names)
- Sheum
- Hebrew name (non-biblical)
- Onidah
- Nephi
- Alma
- Egyptian names
- Zarahemla
- Omni
- Mosiah
- Anti
- Land of Jerusalem
- Bethlehem, part of the land of Jerusalem
- Three day journey
- Verifiable details of Lehi's trail
- Eastward turn
- River in a valley
- Not much fire
- River flowed into Red Sea
- Naming new locations
- Direction
- Much fruit
- Eating raw meat
- Bountiful region
- Wild honey
- Timber
- Ore
- Bellows
- Mountain at Bountiful
- Ocean route
- Length of Jaredite voyage
- Pre-Columbian sea crossings
- Scripture in Egyptian
- Metal plates (OW)
- Pre-Columbian writing
- Pre-Columbian writing (early)
- Reformed Egyptian (OW)
- Inscriptions with names of Book of Mormon places (OW)
- Israelite writing on metal
- Hiding up records
- Stone Monuments
- Jews writing in Egyptian
- Destruction account implausible
- Sunken cities
- Great tempest
- Destruction by fire
- Whirlwind
- Earthquake
- Earthquakes in Mesoamerica
- Buildings fall
- Thick darkness
- Scripture on metal
- Darkness that can be felt
- Three days of darkness
- Inability to light fire
- Earth carried up
- Earth closing
- Leprosy
- Mahinery
- Spinning tools
- Early brass (OW)
- Brass (NW)
- Iron (NW)

**Figure 69.** Total Book of Mormon anachronism claims (1966–2024, continued).



Notably, while the number of alleged anachronisms increased during each of the three periods, so did the number of confirmations. Not only did they increase, but they increased exponentially. Whereas 90.2% of the items remained unconfirmed in 1844, today that figure has dropped to a meager 9.29%. Thus, the key finding of this study is that, over time, allegedly problematic features of the Book of Mormon text have strongly trended towards confirmation or partial confirmation, especially in the past fifty-eight years.

The results of this survey elicit several brief observations. First, I would stress that this data only represents an evaluation of the status of anachronisms as framed by critics and does not consider other kinds of evidence that might conceivably be marshaled for or against the claims of the Book of Mormon. It provides a useful, albeit limited, picture of evidence. It also should be understood that there has been little attempt to address how anachronisms may measure up against specific interpretive models of the geography of the text, something far beyond the scope of this study. Future researchers may perhaps wish to explore more specific applications of this approach as they pursue potential future correlations of the text with ancient civilizations. My purpose in this survey is less ambitious—that is, to highlight how the currents of arguments about anachronisms have shifted since 1830.

Second, it should be abundantly clear that perceived anachronisms are susceptible to refutation over time as new information is made available through additional research, interpretation, and discoveries. Kenneth Kitchen, in speaking of archaeology and the Bible, warns against the tendency of some readers to say,

“we did not find it, so it never existed!” instead of the more proper formulation: “evidence is currently lacking; we may have missed it or it may have left no trace; particularly when 5 percent of a mound is dug, leaving 95 percent or more untouched, unknown, and so, not in evidence.”<sup>1</sup>

Similar caution should be taken when discussing the Book of Mormon.

Third, items that may seem problematic in the Book of Mormon can often generate good questions that lead to fresh research, new discoveries, and textual insights. As Hugh Nibley noted,

Long experience has shown that the Latter-day Saints only become aware of the nature and genius of their modern scriptures when relentless and obstreperous criticism from the outside forces them to take a closer look at what they



have, with the usual result of putting those scriptures in a much stronger position than they were before.<sup>2</sup>

What at first appear to be “negative items,” writes archaeologist John E. Clark, “may prove to be positive ones in hiding. ‘Missing’ evidence focuses further research, but it lacks compelling logical force in arguments because it represents the absence of information rather than secure evidence.”<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, certain kinds of questions require specific types of tools and information to answer. Anyone can generate questions or express doubt or disbelief. Getting reliable answers, on the other hand, often requires that we do rigorous work and research to investigate the truth.

Fourth, when believers in the Book of Mormon’s authenticity examine its many so-called anachronisms with a view of their trajectory over time, it can encourage them to approach challenging questions that remain with greater optimism and patience. As Clark puts it,

deficiencies of negative evidence persist, for the most part, but they should not distract attention from the scores of other unusual items mentioned in the book which have been confirmed through archaeology—nor from the possibility that missing evidence may someday be found.<sup>4</sup>

The evidence presented in this book is consistent with his conclusion that while many questions remain “today, current science is more supportive because many claims made in the book have been substantiated,” and “as seen by science, the Book of Mormon is stronger today than it was in 1830, 1844, 1950, or even 2000, so I expect it will continue to become stronger in the future.”<sup>5</sup>

Finally, the confirmation of many items that were once considered problematic can encourage current and future readers of the Book of Mormon to take its historical claims seriously. If the text truly is authentic and ancient—which I certainly believe to be so—then the deepest and most complete understanding of its content will only come as readers diligently assess the book in light of its ancient historical contexts in both the Old and New Worlds. If the current trend holds, many more exciting and faith-promoting discoveries may be right around the corner. Only time will tell, but in this particular area, time seems to favor the Book of Mormon.





**Matthew Roper** is a researcher and writer for Scripture Central. He received a Bachelors degree and an MA in Sociology from Brigham Young University. He compiled and was responsible for the Harold B. Lee Library's electronic collection Nineteenth Century Publications about the Book of Mormon 1829–1844. He has published in Literary and Linguistic Computing, BYU Studies Quarterly, Mormon Studies Review, Interpreter, and the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies.

## Notes

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2. Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Abraham* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2010), 40.
3. John E. Clark, "Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins," *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 94, [scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3732&context=byusq](https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3732&context=byusq).
4. Clark, "Archaeological Trends," 95.
5. Clark, "Archaeological Trends," 95.



## Selected Bibliography

**T**his bibliography provides a selection of some of the sources — general and relevant to each chapter — that I have found useful in the compilation of this work. It is not exhaustive, but merely intended to provide the interested reader a convenient list of resources should they wish to pursue further study of so-called anachronisms in the Book of Mormon.

I first examine general resources relative to anachronisms, and then provide a section for resources specific to each chapter in the book.

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