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Text and History—Part 2: The Case Against the Book of Mormon (An Open Letter to Jeremy Runnells)

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TEXT AND HISTORY—PART 2:

THE CASE AGAINST THE BOOK OF MORMON

(AN OPEN LETTER TO JEREMY RUNNELLS)

Dear Jeremy Runnells,

I hope you have had time to read my [previous letter](#). If not, I suggest you go back and finish it before you start reading this one—it is going to be important to have the background I provided there. More importantly, though, I hope you are not letting my letters distract you too much from your family life. I hope your wife and kids are doing well. In my previous letter, I promised a part 2 where I talk about your case against the Book of Mormon. So, here I am again, to share with you some of my thoughts on the subjects you talk about. Before I do, though, there are again some methodological issues I would like to go over.

Layers of a Text

There are two important concepts that I mentioned in my previous letter that I need to flesh out a little more here before I continue: (1) The text *must* be tested in its putative historical context, and (2) that the fact that the text is a *translation* must be kept in mind. These are important principles because a text can, and often does when dealing with ancient texts, have multiple *layers*. Baruch Halpern, an important thinker on history and the biblical texts, uses an analogy with a map of Europe to make this point.¹ He points out that a map of Europe has many cities and highways on it, but not all of these cities and highways were built at the same time. Some were built in the Middle-Ages, others earlier still, while others were built in more modern times. Even a single city could have buildings and streets from both earlier and later times. Halpern explains, “it is the job of the historian to determine when each town, highway, and so on, was added [to the map].”² Meanwhile, “Negative fundamentalists,” as Halpern calls those who completely reject the historicity of the Bible, “date the whole map by its latest elements. Because the map reflects a view from the twentieth century, they argue, it cannot be used to get at earlier times.”³

As illustrated by Halpern, to focus only on the *latest elements* of a text is a fundamental mistake. Such evidence can only confirm the existence of the last layer in the text, but it cannot prove that earlier layers do not exist. Hence, to trace the different layers, one must go as far back in time as the evidence allows, and start from there moving forward. The earliest layer should, logically, never be earlier than the putative historical setting given in the text. Thus, to get at the *origins* of a text, one must start where the text starts.

¹ Baruch Halpern, *The First Historians: The Hebrew Bible and History* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988), 4.

² Halpern, *The First Historians*, 4, brackets mine.

³ Halpern, *The First Historians*, 4.

Biblical texts have a long and complicated transmission history, and untangling the different layers to get at the earliest form of a text is very, very complicated. In addition to that, different editions and translations sometimes have a “lineage,” that is, a different transmission history. In the case of some ancient texts, the transmission history includes translations into other languages, for which original materials are not extant. The *Apocalypse of Abraham*, for example, is only available to us in Medieval Slavonic, and yet most scholars believe it was transmitted through a Greek translation of the original Hebrew, neither of which are extant.⁴ Through careful analysis scholars strive to uncover each of these layers.

The Book of Mormon has a transmission history as well, although it is, for the most part, much simpler than that of the Bible’s. For the Small Plates portion, it simply comes to us from:

- Original Authors›Joseph Smith’s translation.

The Large Plates compiled by Mormon are a little more complicated:

- Original Authors›Mormon’s abridgment›Joseph Smith’s translation.

The book of Ether has the most complicated transmission history of all the text:

- Original Authors›Ether’s abridgement›Mosiah₂’s translation›Moroni’s abridgment.

Each stage in the transmission process leaves a *layer* behind. It is true that for the most part, the presence of these layers, and issues they create, are not discussed in Church often, or might be “unpalatable to the average Chapel Mormon,” as you say about one such issue, but that does not excuse you or me for ignoring them if we want to take the relationship between the text and history seriously.

The translation into English in the late 1820s creates a translation layer in the text, a layer we already know exists. C. Wilfred Griggs points out, “any modern language source material which the translator found useful or helpful in his translating efforts cannot be used *ipso facto* as evidence against the authenticity of his work.”⁵ Hence, digging around in the 19th century can never settle the question of historicity. It completely fails to detect any potentially earlier layers in the text, and absent that it is impossible to tell whether the evidence uncovered is evidence of composition, or merely relics of the translation layer.

Tradition and Interpretation

I talked a little in my last letter about how important interpretation is. No text, and no fact, can simply “speak for itself,” or not be interpreted. Interpretation is important, and so simply counting the “facts” that are agreed to or disagree with (as you do with your “donut charts”

⁴ Alexander Kulik, *Retroverting Slavonic Pseudepigrapha: Toward the Original of the Apocalypse of Abraham* (Atlanta, Georgia: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

⁵ C. Wilfred Griggs, “The Book of Mormon As an Ancient Book,” *BYU Studies* 22/3 (Summer 1982): 261.

while responding to FairMormon) while ignoring how interpretations differ, and who offers stronger, more compelling, interpretations, is misleading.

Tradition, or what is taught over the course of several generations, is merely entrenched interpretation, and often needs to be legitimately questioned or examined on its merits as a sound interpretation of the data. No good biblical scholar who is genuinely interested in understanding how the text relates to history would saddle their interpretations with thousands of years of interpretation from Jewish rabbis and Christian clerics. Even Evangelical scholars like K.A. Kitchen and James K. Hoffmeier, who argue strongly for a greater relationship between text and history than most scholars, strenuously question and challenge traditional Christian readings of the text, opting for better, stronger interpretations of the data.⁶

Once again, I see no reason the Book of Mormon should be treated differently as a text. Appeals to tradition are, in fact, a logical fallacy, as are appeals to popularity (such as what “most average Mormons” would think). Rather than filter the primary source through generations of interpretation, I am interested in going to the text itself to seek fresh interpretations. The goal should be the strongest interpretations that best account for all the evidence—both ancient and modern.

In my last letter, I drew attention to several convergences between 1 Nephi and the ancient Near East, particularly to evidence from around 600 BC or the middle of the first millennium BC. Knowing, then, that there is an ancient layer to the text, how should we interpret the kind of data you produce to argue against the Book of Mormon? Shedding the shackles of tradition, what is the strongest interpretation that accounts for all the external data? I’ll briefly review these topics in this letter.

The 19th Century Layer

Several of the arguments you raise potentially tell us something about the translation layer from the 19th century. I’ll briefly review these and their implications for understanding the relationship between the text and history.

1. The Book of Mormon vs. the King James Version vs. the Joseph Smith Translation: There is a clear relationship between the Book of Mormon and the King James Version of the Bible. Sorting out that relationship is not a simple task.⁷ This comes as no surprise, really. First, it was quite popular at the time to imitate the King James language in order to imbue a text with a

⁶ K.A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003); James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); James K. Hoffmeier, *Ancient Israel in Sinai: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Wilderness Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

⁷ Brant A. Gardner, *The Gift and Power: Translating the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2011), 192–195.

sense of authority.⁸ You yourself point out other examples of this (the *Late War* and *First Book of Napoleon*). Given those circumstances, is it any surprise the Book of Mormon translation does the same?

More than just imitating it, however, parts of the Book of Mormon copy it. Since parts of the Book of Mormon quote versions of the same ancient texts translated in the KJV, however, it is no surprise that the KJV would be leaned on as the most influential translation of those texts. You express concerns specifically about errors in the KJV being carried over into the Book of Mormon translation. It is true that many of the errors get perpetuated by the Book of Mormon. It is worth pointing out that in some cases, perceived “errors” actually represent lexical shifts in the English language over the last 200–400 years.⁹ My own personal hunch is that when the underlying text of the KJV was the same as that of the underlying text of the Book of Mormon, the same translation language was used so that we would not have to haggle over the question of whether *differences* represent a different underlying text, or a different translation of the same underlying text.¹⁰ Regardless of why they are there, they can only serve as evidence of the Book of Mormon’s translation being heavily dependent on the KJV.

A similar explanation could be used for the *italicized words*. Why they are there in the text, word for word, is really not complicated. They are added in the first place by translators because they are *necessary* in English. While there is some leeway, in general, changing them also changes the meaning of the passage. So, again, in a culture where the KJV is heavily influential, it should come as no surprise that when translating the same or similar passages, Joseph Smith proves dependant on that text.

As for differences between the Book of Mormon and the Joseph Smith Translation, such concerns rest on several assumptions about the JST that I am not interested in going into right now. My present interest is in defending the Book of Mormon, and the legitimacy of the JST as an independent translation has no bearing on the legitimacy of the Book of Mormon. I will say, however, that these arguments appear inconsistent, since on the one hand you are chiding the Book of Mormon for being too *dependent* on an earlier translation (KJV). On the other hand, you complain that the JST is too *independent* of an earlier translation (the Book of Mormon).

What you neglect to discuss is that in many cases, changes to the KJV of the Book of Mormon appear to have some support in ancient manuscripts.¹¹ The original manuscript of the Book of Mormon also does not follow the KJV chapter divisions, but actually breaks the text into more coherent units.¹² The text of Alma 7:11 appears to be an entirely independent (and better)

⁸ Eran Shalev, “Written in the Style of Antiquity: Pseudo-Biblicism and the Early American Republic, 1770–1830” *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 79/4 (December 2010): 800–826.

⁹ John A. Tvedtnes, “Isaiah in the Bible and the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 170–171.

¹⁰ I owe thanks to Ben McGuire for this idea.

¹¹ John A. Tvedtnes, “The Isaiah Variants in the Book of Mormon,” (Provo, UT: FARMS Study Aid, 1981).

¹² Royal Skousen, “Textual Variants in the Isaiah Quotations in the Book of Mormon,” in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 378–379.

translation of Isaiah 53:4.¹³ Sorting out the relationship between the passages in common with the KJV and the Book of Mormon needs to take these into account.

2. The Geography of Joseph Smith's World vs. the Book of Mormon: I've personally never been very impressed with the Vernal Holley map. Holley uses a limited amount of data from two different, much wider, data sets to make his comparison. His map does not accurately represent the internal geography of the Book of Mormon, something you concede in response to FairMormon. However, you go on to argue that since the Book of Mormon is fictional, it need not match-up exactly. Joseph Smith could just wing it from time-to-time, or make geographic mistakes. The first problem this runs into is that such an argument lacks any real explanatory power, but instead serves as an *ad hoc* and unfalsifiable explanation. It allows you to take anything similar as a parallel while anything dissimilar as Joseph either making a mistake or being creative. Not exactly a rigorous methodology.

The second problem is that throughout literally *hundreds* (John L. Sorenson counts over 600)¹⁴ of references to geography, scattered throughout the text, there is substantial consistency.¹⁵ If Joseph Smith is basing this on a template of his own surrounding region, but then making all kinds of mistakes or occasionally gets creative, then he did a rather remarkable job of keeping those *ad hoc* changes straight in his head. But then, he seems to have forgotten this marvelously consistent geographic picture that he had in his head later in life: taking statements he made (or that are attributed to him) about Book of Mormon geography, they neither match Holley's map, nor the actual geography of the Book of Mormon.¹⁶ In fact, in your response to FairMomon, you maintain that, "Joseph Smith believed in a hemispheric model," which would make no sense if he just made it up with a geography like that of Holley's in mind.

It really is not simply that Holley's map does not situate some of the lands in the right place. It is that the Book of Mormon's geography, when all 600+ references are taken into account, simply cannot be describing this region at all. The greater land of (Lehi-)Nephi, for example, should be bounded by seas on the both the east and the west sides (Alma 22:27). Yet such a configuration is entirely impossible in the Great Lakes region. (And, I hasten to add that you are mistaken

¹³ Thomas A. Wayment, "The Hebrew Text of Alma 7:11," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 98–103.

¹⁴ John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013), 17, 119.

¹⁵ John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000).

¹⁶ John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 269: "The statements in the Book of Mormon describe a land of limited extent (a few hundred miles long) that had certain specific physical features (in configuration, topography, bodies of water, climate, and geology). Analyses of the text of the scripture in the last six decades have made this clear. Those characteristics fit remarkably well with the geography of Mesoamerica. Yet later statements by Joseph and his early associates reveal that he supposed that the entire Western Hemisphere had been occupied by Nephites and Lamanites. In other words, his personal interpretation of the book's geography differed in some respects from what the record itself stipulates. If we were to suppose, with many of Smith's critics, that he somehow wrote the Book of Mormon out of his own mind and knowledge, it is difficult to see how he would have interpreted this aspect of his 'own literary work' inconsistently" cf. similar statements on pp. 267–268.

about the land of first inheritance, which is part of the land of Nephi—Alma 22:28 does in fact say that it was in the West, by the seashore.) Beyond the superficial correlation between a handful of names, in what ways is this actually like the geography of the Book of Mormon? How much does the topography actually fit that described in the Book of Mormon?

You may be able to conveniently explain every difference as a mistake or as Joseph Smith’s artistic license—or willy nilly move Alma from West Virginia to New York, because that is where you could find one—but the less and less it is actually tied to geography and the more and more it becomes just a set of selectively listed names on a map, the weaker this evidence becomes.

Contrast this with the geographic convergences of I Nephi, discussed in my previous letter. For the most part, the names themselves are not the issue—it is the fact that the geography *itself* converges. In the one case where we have a name (Nahom/Nihm), it also correlates in several other details. What’s more, it is the only NHM name in the Book of Mormon, and the only NHM name in all of Arabia.¹⁷ If Book of Mormon names were randomly redistributed—and if Joseph Smith made the book up, then its location in the text is just random, since there is no compelling reason for him to choose that name here—it would have a 1 in 337 chance of being where it is in the text. So the fact that it converges with a real place with a similar name is highly significant.

More rigorous studies of the New World geography have, in my opinion, proven more impressive convergence with Mesoamerica than with Joseph Smith’s geographic environs.¹⁸ Yes, there is still considerable debate on this topic, but multiple, differing interpretations does not mean there is no correct interpretation. After having examined several different proposed geographies, I have concluded that Sorenson’s Mesoamerican correlation is the strongest, because it is the most methodologically sound, has the greatest explanatory power, incorporates the most details from the text, and requires very few adjustments from the detailed, internal reconstruction. It is true that some have raised the issue of directions, but that can be sorted out on the basis of rigorous reading of the text, sound anthropological principles, and the widely attested differences between the ways various cultures conceptualize directions.¹⁹

Despite the directions problem, Mesoamerica proves a better correlation to the text than Holley’s map does. It incorporates more of the textual data than Holley’s map, and it does not require *ad hoc*, unfalsifiable adjustments to defend it. Hence, I tend to agree with John E. Clark’s conclusion:

¹⁷ 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): 182–184.

¹⁸ John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985); Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*.

¹⁹ Brant A. Gardner, “From the East to the West: The Problem of Directions in the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 3 (2013): 119–153.

The Book of Mormon account is remarkably consistent throughout.... We notice that the configuration of lands, seas, mountains, and other natural features in Mesoamerica are a tight fit with the internal requirements of the text. It is important to stress that finding any sector in the Americas that fits Book of Mormon specifications requires dealing with hundreds of mutually dependent variables. So rather than counting a credible geography as one correspondence, it actually counts for several hundred. The probability of guessing reams of details all correctly is zero.²⁰

3. Cumorah/Comoros + Moroni/Moroni: I am not all that interested in the debate over whether Joseph Smith read Captain Kidd's stories, or if any of them mention Comoros and Moroni. This is just yet another superficial word similarity. In your response to FairMormon, you insinuate that it is like the Nahom/Nihm correlation, but if you read my first letter thoughtfully, you'll see that it is nothing like that. Nahom and Nihm *converge* in several details, plus they are in proper geographic relationships with several other places that converge in both the text and the real world geography. Comoros and Moroni are just names on a map, or in stories, that offer no real explanatory power for how those names are used in the text. On the other hand, an actual hill in Mesoamerica seems to converge in detail with the hill Cumorah in the Book of Mormon, and is in proper relationship to several other geographical convergences.²¹ As with the discussion of Holley's map, I find this more compelling than a random parallel in a couple of names. The convergences with antiquity and real world geography render these sorts of parallels meaningless.

4. View of the Hebrews/The Late War/The First Book of Napoleon: You provide a long list of parallels between *View of the Hebrews* and the Book of Mormon, and discuss similarities between *The Late War between the United States and Great Britain*, and *The First Book of Napoleon*.

You seem a little annoyed by FairMormon's characterizing your list of 34 parallels (for *View of the Hebrews*) as only "some" parallels. But, considering the size of the Book of Mormon, that really is a pretty paltry list. I mustered 13 multifaceted convergences for 1 Nephi *alone*, and I was using restraint. And parallels are much weaker links than convergences are. Benjamin McGuire has spent a lot of time studying how "parallel hunting" works, and discusses the pitfalls to this approach at length.²² You commit many of the pitfalls he discusses in that paper, including the use of the side-by-side table, which makes several superficial parallels look really impressive all lined up. In responding to FairMormon, you say, "There are always 'unparallels' between any two books in the world – unless one was copied verbatim from the other." You do not seem to realize that there are always *parallels* between any two books in the world—especially when the

²⁰ John E. Clark, "Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/2 (2005): 47–48.

²¹ David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Springville, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1999).

²² Benjamin L. McGuire, "Finding Parallels: Some Cautions and Criticisms," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 5 (2013): 1–104.

parallels are reduced to such generic topics as “Discusses the United States,” “Encounter ‘seas’ and ‘many waters,’” “Religion a Motivating Factor,” or “Pride Denounced.”

You seem to want some kind of detailed response to each of the parallels from FairMormon, yet you yourself do not provide any kind of detailed analysis of the parallels. Can you show that under sustained analysis and comparison, the parallels all hold up as strong parallels? I personally do not feel compelled to analyze each and every parallel when you have not even provided such an analysis for your own position.

The *Late War*, you say is “stunning” in how much it reads like the Book of Mormon. But this only goes to show that, as discussed above, the KJV was influential on writing of the time. No reason that cannot be manifest in a *translation*. The parallels here are not any more impressive than those for *View of the Hebrews*. The same can be said for the *First Book of Napoleon*. McGuire has directly responded to these.²³ Again, I am not going to offer extensive analysis of them when you do not even do so in support of your position.

Jeff Lindsay’s parody claiming that the Book of Mormon was plagiarized from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*, published in 1855, illustrates just how easy it is to produce a bunch of seemingly similar parallels between two texts.²⁴ Clearly, there is no real relationship between *Leaves of Grass* and the Book of Mormon. This should serve as a cautionary tale regarding the haphazard method of parallel hunting.

Now, you argue that the evidence supports the notion that Joseph Smith (& Co.) plagiarized from many sources. What you never offer is any kind of coherent explanation as to how Joseph Smith took this amalgam of sources and put them all together into a rather seamless narrative. Can you propose a hypothesis on how this was done which is coherent and *testable*? To me, the fact that several different sources are proposed as the source of the Book of Mormon or some part of it—with new ones being added all the time—many of which have overlapping, mutually exclusive parallels to the Book of Mormon, simply serves as evidence of how easy it is to find parallels between almost any two texts if you decide to look for them.

Parallels *can* be used properly to elucidate relationships between different texts, or a text and a historical setting. But, when they are superficial and offer no real means of explaining the content of the text, they are not very significant. As such, if you really want to make your case with the parallels you have presented, you’ll need to provide some greater analysis to show how they actually serve to *explain* the text. Oh, and you’ll still need to deal with the convergences with the ancient world.

²³ Benjamin L. McGuire, “The Late War Against the Book of Mormon,” *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 7 (2013): 323–355.

²⁴ Jeff Lindsay, “Was the Book of Mormon Plagiarized from Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass*?” <http://www.jefflindsay.com/bomsource.shtml> (accessed August 20, 2014).

As it stands, none of the parallels you produce are very compelling in light of the methodology that has been discussed, and the ancient evidence that was added to the conversation in my first letter. These convergences created the historical datum for the book as an ancient text. In that light, the random, loose sets of parallels from various 19th century sources, which offer no real explanatory power, become quite easy to interpret as just the kinds of coincidences that can be shown to happen (as Lindsay and McGuire have demonstrated). Some of your data has the potential to tell us about the translation layer, but most of it does not even do that.

The Pre-Columbian America Layer

Other things you bring up can potentially tell us something about the pre-Columbian American layer of the text. I'll take the time to comment on these as well.

I. Anachronisms: Let's take a minute to be clear about *what* an anachronism actually is: "A person or thing which seems to belong to a different time or period of time."²⁵ So, yes, there are some anachronisms in the Book of Mormon. Here is the rub, however: anachronisms do not go away if you move the *origins* of the text into the 19th century. Instead, all the evidence that is best explained by the ancient context becomes anachronous. That is, that evidence is suddenly present in a text from the wrong era. So, the question that really needs to be asked is which paradigm can better account for the anachronisms it creates? Logically, a later text cannot incorporate elements from an earlier period (that were unknown at the later time). However, an earlier text *can be* edited or redacted to have things from a later period added. This is yet another reason why, as discussed above, one must date the *origins* of a text by the *earliest* evidence, not the latest.

I've discussed the possibilities for accounting for anachronisms elsewhere.²⁶ While I cannot necessarily settle all the questions surrounding anachronisms, I think the convergences with the ancient world more than justify explaining them in some other way. What you call "word games" in your response to FairMormon are in fact real issues with real translations. The use of the name *Red Sea*, for example, is technically anachronous. It occurs nowhere in the Hebrew Bible. It was adopted in the Septuagint, because that is what *they* called that sea at the time of translation, and the Vulgate followed the Greek, and the King James translators followed the Latin. Several other *translator's anachronisms* can be found in the KJV. This helps us date the translation, but tells us nothing about the original text.

Loan-shifting is also a known and common phenomena for people in Nephi's and Lehi's situation. In fact, many of the names you use to refer to various American species (such as *elk*, *robin*, *buffalo*,

²⁵ Wiktionary, s.v. "anachronisms," <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/anachronism> (accessed August 20, 2014).

²⁶ Neal Rappleye, "Anachronisms and Expectations: Assessing the Role of Anachronisms in the Debate over Book of Mormon Authenticity," *Studio et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2013/08/anachronisms-and-expectations-assessing.html> (accessed August 20, 2014).

or speaking of plants, *corn*) are loan-shifted terms from European species, applied to the American species by early European settlers.

Also, despite your bravado in dismissing the chart used by FairMormon, there is a *trend* slowly diminishing the list of anachronisms. John E. Clark, a well-respected Mesoamericanist, and Matt Roper, actually compiled a list of criticisms testable by archaeology from anti-Mormon's starting in 1829. They took a random sample of 60 them, compared them against the data available in 1842, and then again to the data in 2005.²⁷ This is where the charts come from. Matt Roper calls the anachronisms that have been eliminated “howlers,” and has a growing list of them on his blog.²⁸

By changing some of the criticisms in your chart, you are actually obfuscating the issue, because it is no longer based on a random sample, and no longer compared against the earlier period to detect the *trend*, nor even based on criticisms that can definitely be traced back to when the book was first published, which was the intent. What's more, many of the items listed on your chart are based on interpretations of the text (such as “submarines” or “coins”) that are questionable (though I'll opt not to go into that right now).

As for what there is or isn't evidence for, I think I'll trust Clark's competency with the archaeological data over yours. My reason for doing so is for more than just the fact that he has a PhD and has been digging, publishing, and researching in Mesoamerica for decades. On the items in the chart you go into detail on, you get a lot wrong. Take steel swords, for example. The claim, from the 19th century sources, was that there was no steel or steel swords in the *Old World* (like Laban's sword) not the New. And, in fact, steel swords have been found in and around ancient Israel that date to Nephi's time and before.²⁹ And, I would suggest you read the “Out of the Dust: All that Glitters is Not... Steel” article a little more carefully. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, the author, does indeed explain that a previous article was mistaken in calling a dagger “steel.” But, Chadwick still explains:

In ancient Israel, the process of hardening iron into steel appears to have its origin in the 7th century BC (late in Iron Age II). This is the very period in which Lehi and Nephi lived. So Nephi's mention of “steel” in his narrative is quite plausible in archaeological terms. And, in fact, steel artifacts from this same period have been found in Israel, *most notably a steel sword* that was found near Jericho during the 1980s. The Jericho sword may

²⁷ John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and the Book of Mormon Origins,” in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2006), 83–104.

²⁸ Matt Roper, “Howlers Index,” *Ether's Cave: A Place for Book of Mormon Research*, http://etherscave.blogspot.com/p/blog-page_20.html (accessed August 21, 2014).

²⁹ Matt Roper, “Laban's Sword of ‘Most Precious Steel’ (Howlers #5),” *Ether's Cave: A Place for Book of Mormon Research*, <http://etherscave.blogspot.com/2013/06/labans-sword-of-most-precious-steel.html> (accessed August 20, 2014).

be considered a remarkable parallel to the steel sword of Laban mentioned by Nephi (see 1 Nephi 4:9).³⁰

So the steel sword box should, in fact, be green. The brass plates also come from the Old World, and such plates are in fact attested in the Old World, as discussed in my first letter. Ultimately, I am more impressed with Clark's work on this than yours.

2. DNA Evidence: I am a history major because things like biology generally go way over my head. But when I started studying issues with the Book of Mormon, I knew at some point I would have to try to understand the DNA issues. I still remember the first time I tried to read something on DNA and the Book of Mormon. I could barely understand anything it was saying. So, I decided to set the DNA issue aside for awhile. Eventually, I found some good primers that were written at a level I could understand, and those gave me a foundation to use while tackling and trying to understand the more complicated papers. I still struggle to understand some aspects of it, but Ugo Perego has been gracious enough to entertain my questions and patiently explain the science to me in understandable ways. At present, I just do not see a solid case to be made against the Book of Mormon using DNA.³¹

In your response to FairMormon you insist that "170+ year Mormon teaching" was not based on an assumption. Again, I remind you that I am not interested in saddling the Book of Mormon with generations of tradition, regardless of who it came from. You may personally struggle with the idea that several prophets and apostles were mistaken for a long time, but it does not really bother me. I reject the hemispheric model for Book of Mormon geography, and the idea that Lehi's Clan are the exclusive ancestors of all Native Americans because I feel that sound textual analysis and interpretation forces us to reject those conclusions.³² Can you engage that analysis rather than lean on tradition?

While I do not feel bound by any long-held tradition, it does seem worth pointing out that there really is *not* a unanimous 170+ year consensus on this topic, as you imply. Several Latter-day Saints, including leaders from both the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve, have expressed views about the limited scope of Book of Mormon geography, and about the Book of Mormon peoples being among others in the Americas. Matt Roper has traced the intellectual tradition for limited geography and "others" in the land both all the way back to the 1840s.³³

³⁰ Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Out of the Dust: All That Glitters Is Not ... Steel," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 15/1 (2006): 67, emphasis added.

³¹ The best summary is probably "Book of Mormon and DNA Studies," <https://www.lds.org/topics/book-of-mormon-and-dna-studies?lang-eng&query=DNA> (accessed August 21, 2014).

³² John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992); John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1 (1992): 1–34.

³³ Matthew Roper, "Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 225–276; Matthew Roper, "Nephi's Neighbors: Book of Mormon Peoples and Pre-Columbian Populations," in *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research*, ed. Daniel C. Peterson (Provo, Utah: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008), 185–218.

Neal A. Maxwell, for example, once explained, “peoples of the Book of Mormon were not on the center stage of secular history. Instead, theirs was a comparatively little theater.”³⁴

The assertion that these ideas “only ever came after DNA sequencing in the 1990s and 2000s proved that Lehi and his offspring were not the only inhabitants of the Americas after all,” is demonstrably false. Read Roper’s work on this topic. These ideas had long been circulating before the DNA issue was raised, and were pretty universally accepted among Latter-day Saint scholars, and had even been published in the *Ensign*,³⁵ by the time DNA was ever an issue. As such, DNA arguments hinging on a hemispheric view were straw men from the start. I don’t care what the tradition is, responsible scholars and scientists who wish to engage questions related to the authenticity of a document should engage the most rigorous interpretations of that text, and the Book of Mormon is no different.

Eventually you get around to quoting Simon Southerton’s blogpost, “Could Generations of Lamanite DNA Just Disappear?” but the very title misrepresents the issue. The question is not whether all the DNA that some of those called “Lamanites” had has disappeared. The question is whether the DNA of a small, founding colony, would have survived into the present day after generations of intermixing with a host population. Even with Autosomal DNA, it will never be able to be demonstrated that Lehi’s family was here. There is still the fact that most of the Native American population—and their DNA with them—died shortly after European conquest. Then there is the fact that DNA *can* disappear. Everyone, in fact, has ancestors whose DNA eventually failed to get passed on.³⁶ On top of that, Ugo Perego has pointed out, on multiple occasions, “Based on the molecular clocks currently used by the scientific community, it would be nearly impossible to distinguish a Eurasian lineage that arrived 2,600 years ago from those brought by Europeans after the discovery of America’s double continent, simply because there would not have been enough time for these lineages to differentiate enough to allow discernment of pre-Columbian from post-Columbian admixture.”³⁷ As such, even if Lehi’s DNA were detected, it would probably be mistaken for post-Columbian admixture.

³⁴ Neal A. Maxwell, “The Book of Mormon: A Great Answer to ‘The Great Question’,” in *First Nephi: The Doctrinal Foundation*, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1988), 9.

³⁵ John L. Sorenson, “Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture—Part 1,” *Ensign* (September 1984): 26–37; John L. Sorenson, “Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture—Part 2,” *Ensign* (October 1984): 12–23.

³⁶ “How Many Genetic Ancestors Do I Have?” *The Co-op Lab: Population and Evolutionary Genetics, UC Davis*, <http://gcbias.org/2013/11/11/how-does-your-number-of-genetic-ancestors-grow-back-over-time/> (accessed August 21, 2014). “We are much more than the DNA of our ancestors. Most of their DNA disappeared by chance and yet they still contributed to our very existence. Likewise, Lehi’s family does not need to have DNA surviving to our days to be among the ancestors of all modern Native Americans. Someone can have thousands of descendants, all of which would not carry a single genetic base of that particular ancestor.” (Ugo A. Perego to Neal Rappleye, email, May 14, 2014.)

³⁷ Ugo A. Perego, “The Book of Mormon and the Origin of Native Americans from a Maternally Inherited DNA Standpoint,” *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 216. I have confirmed with him in private conversations that this is still the case, even with autosomal DNA.

Regarding the Neanderthal case, Southerton seems to overlook an important fact. The authors of the study explain,

We detect gene flow from Neandertals into modern humans but *no reciprocal gene flow from modern humans into Neandertals*. Although *gene flow between different populations need not be bidirectional*, it has been shown that when a colonizing population (such as anatomically modern humans) encounters a resident population (such as Neandertals), even a small number of breeding events along the wave front of expansion into new territory can result in substantial introduction of genes into the colonizing population as introduced alleles can “surf” to high frequency as the population expands. As a consequence, *detectable gene flow is predicted to almost always be from the resident population into the colonizing population, even if gene flow also occurred in the other direction*.³⁸

This is true, “Although... gene flow in the reverse direction may also have occurred.”³⁹ The implications this has for DNA and the Book of Mormon are important. First, they clearly state that “gene flow between different populations need not be bidirectional.” Thus, there is no reason to assume that the Lehiite colony’s genes would have flowed into the host population. Even if it did, however, based on the above explanation, it would likely be undetectable. Lehi and his family were the *colonizing population* and the people already here would have been the *resident population*. As such, our expectation would be that the natives propagated their DNA into the Lehiites genes, *but not the other way around*. Perego explains,

What they are saying is that new groups have a great disadvantage with regard to DNA survival to future generations when meeting and mating with a population that has been already “selected” for that particular environment. The genes of the small group of Lehi’s in a place where millions of other people have already been established there for thousands of years did not stand a chance to make it to the present day.⁴⁰

Needless to say, it seems to me that Southerton is vastly overstating the evidence here.

I would just like to add one last note on this topic. Even with the absence of DNA evidence, all or nearly all Native Americans are likely to be descendants of Lehi; “Lamanites,” if you will. Population genetics has shown that if we trace our lineage back 2000–3000 years, *nearly everyone living then* is a common ancestor for *nearly everyone living now*. This is not provable by DNA, but is supported by the very best statistical models. As such, if Lehi and his family really lived somewhere in the Americas around 2600 years ago, by now everyone with Native American

³⁸ R.E. Green et al. “A Draft Sequence of the Neandertal Genome,” *Science* 328 (May 2010): 721, punctuation altered, emphasis mine. I thank Ugo Perego for drawing my attention to this.

³⁹ Green et al. “A Draft Sequence of the Neandertal Genome,” fig. 6 caption.

⁴⁰ Ugo Perego to Neal Rappleye, Facebook PM, July 4, 2013.

ancestry probably has him as an ancestor.⁴¹ Ugo Perego once told me, “Lehi’s family does not need to have DNA surviving to our days to be among the ancestors of all modern Native Americans. Someone can have thousands of descendants, all of which would not carry a single genetic base of that particular ancestor.”⁴² So, while it is only tradition, and not the text, that asserts all Native Americans are “Lamanites,” there nonetheless is likely some truth to the view that all, or nearly all, Native Americans are descended from Book of Mormon peoples, although not *exclusively* so.

3. Archaeology: Your brief section on archaeology mostly slams “unofficial apologists” who are set up in opposition to the “prophets.” As I said before, sound method requires that the text not be saddled with traditions but be consulted and engaged directly. Can you actually engage the textual-based arguments made in favor of the Limited Geography Theory, and demonstrate its flaws according to the text?

In your letter you use the story of Thomas Stuart Ferguson. I’ve written before on how it is problematic to constantly use his story while also ignoring the many more with superior credentials who have maintained faith.⁴³ In addition to those who have published on the Book of Mormon, there are at least 10 more who are currently working for major universities or Mesoamerican research institutions that do believe in the historicity of the Book of Mormon, but have not published on the topic.⁴⁴

In your response to FairMormon I notice you draw on an informal survey of a handful of experts. Out of curiosity, what was done to ascertain how much these scholars actually know about the Book of Mormon (other than the fact that it exists, and is a story about people living in America)? Have any of them read Sorenson’s, or Clark’s, or Brant Gardner’s⁴⁵ work on the subject? If so, where can I read their analysis of the arguments (I am sincerely interested)? Sorenson personally doubts that any professionals have bothered to pay attention to his work on the Book of Mormon, although some, like Michael Coe, have been very impressed with his other scholarship.⁴⁶ When two things are being compared, qualified experts are those who have expertise in *both* things being compared, not just one.

⁴¹ Gregory L. Smith, “Often in Error, Seldom in Doubt: Rod Meldrum and Book of Mormon DNA,” *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 86–88; Matthew Roper, “Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy,” *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 159–163.

⁴² Ugo A. Perego to Neal Rappleye, email, May 14, 2014.

⁴³ Neal Rappleye, “Book of Mormon Archaeology and Agenda-Driven Narratives,” *Studio et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2013/11/book-of-mormon-archaeology-and-agenda.html> (accessed August 20, 2014).

⁴⁴ Mark Wright, personal communication August 7, 2014.

⁴⁵ Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2007–2008).

⁴⁶ Neal Rappleye, “On the Credibility of Mormon Scholars,” *Studio Et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2014/02/on-credibility-of-mormon-scholars.html> (accessed August 21, 2014).

Frankly, your discussion of this topic betrays very little understanding of both the limitations of archaeology, especially in pre-Columbian Mesoamerica, and also the work that has been done on the Book of Mormon and archaeology. Kevin Christensen addressed the problems in your comparison to the Roman Empire in Great Britain quite well.⁴⁷ Small groups do not show up in the archaeological record. Sorenson has talked about how Lehi's small band would have experienced major culture shock, and probably would not have carried over much of Old World material culture.⁴⁸ While it is true that Nephites and Lamanites eventually become large groups; by the time they were large enough to be detected in the archaeological record, there is simply no telling what their material culture would be like.⁴⁹

There are major limitations on archaeology in Mesoamerica, as well. Mark Wright wrote a recent article summing up the current state of Mesoamerican archaeology.⁵⁰ He explains:

Literally thousands of archaeological sites dot the Mesoamerican landscape, the vast majority of which we know virtually nothing about, other than their locations. In the Maya area alone are approximately six thousand known sites, of which fewer than fifty have undergone systematic archaeological excavation.... Archaeologists estimate that less than 1 percent of ancient Mesoamerican ruins have been uncovered and studied, leaving much yet to learn.⁵¹

Most of those that have been excavated, according to Wright, are from what Mesoamerican scholars call the "Classic Era/Period," which generally post-dates the Book of Mormon (ca. AD 250–AD 900; compare that to the Nephites, ca. 600 BC–AD 400). While there is about a 150 year overlap, this is deceiving since we only have much detail on a 10–15 year period (the final battles) within that timeframe. So, first important point is that out of thousands of known ancient sites (to say nothing of what may be awaiting discovery), less than 1% of them have been studied in detail.

Next, Wright comments specifically on the question of names.

⁴⁷ Kevin Christensen, "Eye of the Beholder, Law of the Harvest: Observations on the Inevitable Consequences of the Different Investigative Approaches of Jeremy Runnells and Jeff Lindsay," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture* 10 (2014): 209–210.

⁴⁸ Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 33–34: "Both parties [Mulekites and Lehites] were composed of people with only limited skills in the overall culture of the land of Judah, as would be the case with any fractional segment of the population extracted from a complex society. For example, it is doubtful that any of them knew anything substantive about pottery making (a commercial activity in their homeland) or constructing major public buildings. In addition, they arrived culturally impoverished especially in technology, by their arduous journeys.... For Lehi's group, there was additional selectivity as Nephi, a major gatekeeper for such culture as he bequeathed to his descendants, consciously rejected many of the elitist and cultic aspects of Judah's normative Iron Age culture (2 Nephi 25:1–2)."

⁴⁹ Neal Rappleye, "A Note on Archaeology and the Book of Mormon," *Studio Et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2013/09/a-note-on-archaeology-and-book-of-mormon.html> (accessed August 20, 2014).

⁵⁰ Mark Alan Wright, "The Cultural Tapestry of Mesoamerica," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 4–21.

⁵¹ Wright, "The Cultural Tapestry," 6.

We do not know the ancient names of the vast majority of ancient Mesoamerican cities. We have deciphered the original names of a handful of the great Classic-period Maya cities, but precious few monuments with legible inscriptions that would enable us to determine the original names of the sites survive.... The vast majority of site names are modern designations, however, often relying on Spanish or local indigenous languages to describe an attribute of the site.⁵²

In personal correspondence I had with Wright a few months ago, he indicated that only 12 of the 6,000 Maya sites are known by their pre-Columbian name, and bear in mind again that those few are only from the Classic period. To that, Wright also comments on Mesoamerican linguistic data more generally. Despite the fact that Mesoamerica offers more linguistic data than any other region of ancient America, there remains what Wright calls a “paucity of ancient linguistic data.” He explains further:

Fourteen pre-Columbian scripts are currently known, but most of them have resisted decipherment. Exciting recent advancements have allowed us to understand Aztec writing for the first time, although the majority of their writing is simply composed of the names of individuals or cities. The most fully developed script—and the one that can be read with the greatest confidence—is that of the Classic period Maya (although 10–20 percent of their glyphs are still undeciphered).⁵³

The Aztecs are way too late for Book of Mormon times (arriving in Mesoamerica ca. AD 1200), so again we are talking about data that is just too late to have direct bearing on the Book of Mormon.

So, in short, we know very little, and most what we do know is too late to have any bearing on the Book of Mormon. Yet, you are very clear about your expectations:

If the Book of Mormon is historical and the geography, for example, is real, then it is not unreasonable for Mormon scholars to put together – based on the data – of a potential location of one single Book of Mormon land. It is not unreasonable to then publish for peer-review this data in a non-Mormon journal that is not BYU-controlled. It is not unreasonable to have other archaeologists, anthropologists, and other experts to peer review the data. This is the scientific process which was used to find the lost city of Troy. This is the same scientific process that can lead to the discovery of Zarahemla. Unfortunately for the Church and its apologists, decades of vigorous archaeological and anthropological research has yielded *nothing*.

Despite the lack of data which I mentioned, however, what you demand here *has* happened. The “potential location” of several Book of Mormon places has been identified by the same processes scholars have used to identify Troy. Yes, again, there is some debate, but your own stipulations

⁵² Wright, “The Cultural Tapestry,” 6–7.

⁵³ Wright, “The Cultural Tapestry,” 10.

allow us to just stick with Sorenson here—he is the only one who has properly followed the kind of methods used to identify Troy, etc. In particular, I think the evidence for Kaminaljuyu and Santa Rosa (the surrounding lands) as the cities of Nephi and Zarahemla (and their surrounding lands), respectively, is quite compelling.⁵⁴ In fact, in light of the convergences that have been shown for these areas and others, and the limitations already mentioned above, Clark is willing to say this:

The logical challenges with the first assertion, that no “cities have been located,” are more subtle. Book of Mormon cities have been found, they are well known, and their artifacts grace the finest museums. They are merely masked by archaeological labels such as “Maya,” “Olmec,” and so on. The problem, then, is not that Book of Mormon artifacts have not been found, only that they have not been recognized for what they are. Again, if we stumbled onto Zarahemla, how would we know? The difficulty is not with evidence but with epistemology.⁵⁵

Yet, for you, because such arguments have not been published in a non-Mormon peer-reviewed venue, they are simply rejected—no actual analysis of the evidence itself required.

You make these kinds of demands (for non-LDS peer review) frequently in your response to FairMormon, so I’m going to take some time to talk about that. But, just to wrap up the archaeology section first, what is telling is that your entire argument about archaeology is an argument from silence. Given how much we still don’t know about Mesoamerica at the right time, it seems quite pre-mature to reach such definite conclusions about what is and is not *known* about pre-Columbian Mesoamerica. Clark, again, explains the weakness of your position:

Given current means of verification, positive evidence is here to stay, but negative items may prove to be positive ones in hiding. “Missing” evidence focuses further research, but it lacks the compelling logical force in arguments because it represents the absence of information rather than secure evidence.⁵⁶

Regardless of what the evidence for the Book of Mormon in the America’s is, there is a host of positive evidence situating the text of 1 Nephi in its Old World setting. This was explained in my first letter, as was the logic which *requires* that the American part of the text also be historical. It seems more reasonable, then, that any perceived lack of evidence is due to either the lack of data in general, or simply a lack of careful considerations of the evidence that has been offered.

Peer-Review

⁵⁴ Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex*, 545–578, 581–594.

⁵⁵ Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” 42.

⁵⁶ Clark, “Archaeological Trends and the Book of Mormon Origins,” 94.

Throughout your response to FairMormon you make incessant demands for not just *peer-reviewed* sources, but non-Mormon controlled peer-reviewed sources. I must confess I detect some hypocrisy in this regard, as you are constantly drawing on the non-peer-reviewed work. Chris and Duane Johnson’s work has never undergone peer-review. Neither has Rick Grunder’s. Simon Southerton’s “must read” blog posts are not peer-reviewed. I’m just picking out a few of your sources in the Book of Mormon section, here, but I could go on. If you are going to demand that *only* non-LDS peer-review sources are valid, then it seems fair to insist that you provide *only* peer-reviewed sources not written by ex-Mormons or cultural Mormons. Could you still build your case on such a standard?

Of course, I would never actually make that demand of you. I only ask that you drop the hypocritical demands for such sources from those Latter-day Saints who engage you. Can you instead engage the data and analysis they provide, rather than implicitly question their credentials? As it is, your demand is a subtle form of the *ad hominem* fallacy, as it questions the merits of the arguments solely on the grounds of who published it, and where it is published.

Still, there is a substantive body of scholarly works written by Latter-day Saints in non-LDS venues which have a direct bearing on the arguments that are made for the Book of Mormon. In some cases, they have published directly on the Book of Mormon in non-LDS venues. I’m currently working on collecting a full bibliography of such publications. Here are a few examples:

- Warren P. Aston, “The Origins of the Nihm Tribe of Yemen: A Window into Arabia’s Past,” *Journal of Arabian Studies* 4/1 (June 2014): 134–148. (Aston makes all the same arguments he makes in LDS venues, just not mentioning the Book of Mormon.)
- John A. Tvedtnes, “Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 195–196.
- John A. Tvedtnes, “Names of People: Book of Mormon,” in *Encyclopedia of Hebrew Language and Linguistics*, 4 vols., ed. Geoffrey Khan (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013), 787–788.
- G. Brice Scheelje, Paul J. Fields, Matthew Roper, and Gregory L. Snow, “Extended Nearest Shrunken Centroid Classification: a New Method for Open-Set Authorship Attribution of texts of Varying Sizes,” *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 26/1 (2011): 71–88. (Discusses Book of Mormon “wordprinting.”)
- Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- John L. Sorenson, “A Complex of Ritual and Ideology Shared by Mesoamerica and the Ancient Near East,” *Sino-Platonic Papers*, no. 195 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, Department of East Asian Languages, 2009).
- John W. Welch, *The Sermon on the Mount in the Light of the Temple* (London: Ashgate, 2009). (The argument presented here was originally developed through Welch’s reading of the Sermon at the Temple in 3 Nephi.)

- William J. Hamblin, *Warfare in the Ancient Near East to 1600 BC* (New York: Routledge, 2006). (Hamblin has used his expertise in ancient warfare to argue the Book of Mormon is ancient.)
- John L. Sorenson, and Carl L. Johannessen, “Biological Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages,” in *Contact and Exchange in the Ancient World*, Victor H. Mair, ed. (Honolulu, Hawai‘i: University of Hawai‘i, 2006), 238–297. (Michael Coe has highly praised this work by Sorenson and Johannessen.)
- Grant Hardy, ed., *The Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Edition* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003). (Appendices draw heavily on “classic-FARMS” scholarship.)
- Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Warren P. Aston “Some Notes on the Tribal Origins of NHM,” paper presented at the Seminar for Arabian Studies held at Cambridge University, July 22, 1995. (Actually mentions the Book of Mormon connection in this paper.)
- John W. Welch, “Reflections on Postulates: Power and Ancient Laws—A Response to Moshe Greenberg,” in *Religion and Law: Biblical, Jewish & Islamic Perspectives*, ed. John W. Welch, Edwin Firmage, and Bernard Weiss (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 113–126. (Welch has used his expertise in ancient law to argue the Book of Mormon is ancient.)
- John W. Welch, “Chiasmus in the Book of Mormon,” in *Chiasmus in Antiquity: Structures, Analyses, Exegesis*, ed. John W. Welch (Hildesheim: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981), 198–210.
- H. Curtis Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes—Their Implications for Library History,” *Journal of Library History* 16/1 (Winter 1981): 48–70.
- John L. Sorenson, “A Mesoamerican Chronology: April 1977,” *Katunob* 9 (February 1977): 41–55. (His chronological work plays a significant role in his comparisons to the Book of Mormon.)
- John L. Sorenson, “A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica,” *Katunob* 9 (March 1976): 1–8; reprinted in *Metallurgy in Ancient Mexico* (Greeley, Colo.: University of Northern Colorado, Museum of Anthropology, 1982). (Metal and Metallurgy, as you know, are hot topics on the Book of Mormon anachronisms debate.)
- John L. Sorenson, “The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in *Man Across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, ed. Carroll Riley et al. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 219–240. (UT is one of the leading schools and publishers for Mesoamerican studies.)
- Ugo A. Perego has contributed to several studies of Native American DNA and population genetics, listed online [here](#).

This is just a small sample from a much larger bibliography that is still growing. While Latter-day Saint scholars may be wrong about all kinds of things, many of the ideas that undergird their

apologetic for the Book of Mormon have been taken seriously by the larger academic community when articulated in ways not directly connected to the Book of Mormon (and in some cases, even when connected directly to the Book of Mormon). I would suggest that, rather than hypocritically insist that all pro-LDS sources be vetted by non-Mormons (would you require that all non-LDS work on the Book of Mormon be vetted by believing LDS?), you engage the data and interpretations they have presented.

Conclusion

I realize that I have not actually answered all of your questions, at least not in a way that is likely to satisfy you. I am sorry about that. While I would love to have all the answers as much as you do, such a perfect knowledge is not forth coming in this life. Not even the leading scholars in world have all the answers to the questions about their topics of study. I simply do not see why I should expect the Book of Mormon—as a topic to study—should be any different. God wants us to walk by faith, and as such there must always be unanswered questions. I'm sorry if that is difficult for you, or if you simply cannot handle that.

It is not necessary, however, to get all our questions answered in order to have good, scholarly reasons for accepting the Book of Mormon as ancient and historical. The convergences I discussed in my first letter, and the many more I had to gloss over, provide sufficient grounding of the text in the ancient world. I have yet to see a compelling explanation for these convergences, as required to overturn such evidence. With the grounding these convergences supply, it is not necessary to have all the answers about how the text relates to the King James Bible or other ways that 19th century language influenced the translation. Nor is it required to have all the answers as to how and where it fits in the still emerging picture of ancient American archaeology, or what happened to Lehi's DNA. Speaking as his fictional character Dr. Schwulst, Hugh Nibley once explained, "In the study of ancient things...it is just the fantastic and incongruous which opens the door to discovery—never forget that. In scholarship, as in science, every paradox and anomaly is really a broad hint that new knowledge is awaiting us if we will only go after it."⁵⁷ These anomalies give us interesting questions to pursue, but they cannot invalidate the positive evidence that converges with the Book of Mormon text. Any interpretation of them must account for the evidence tying the text to the ancient world.

Of course, even with such convergences, it will always require some faith to believe in the Book of Mormon. I think there are good reasons to have faith in the Book of Mormon, but that ultimately can only support my own testimony, not yours or anyone else's. Faith is a choice that only you can make for yourself. Whatever you choose, I wish you the best, and hope you can live a happy and fulfilling life.

Wishing the best to you and your family.

⁵⁷ Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert/The World of the Jaredites/There Were Jaredites* (Provo, UT: FARMS/Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 1988), 365–366.

Sincerely,

Neal Rappleye

PS: I would note that, of course, I have agreed with you on many points, as FairMormon did. I hope you understand now, after my discussion on the importance of method and interpretation, that simply listing a set of “facts” that are agreed and disagreed to, does not really give an accurate indication of how much two parties agree. My interpretation, along with FairMormon’s, of those facts which we agree upon is vastly different, and it is different because I also try to account for several facts which you never discuss. The result is that our conclusions are the complete opposite of yours—it is ultimately a 100% disagreement. What needs to be addressed is which interpretation is really more compelling; which interpretation really accounts for all the data best? In other words, which interpretation has greater explanatory power? If you choose to respond, I hope you will try to address these topics.

PPS: I have noticed a tendency in your online behavior to feel compelled to respond to pretty much anyone who responds to your letter. I realize that this kind of burden can be tiring. I am sincerely sorry if you feel so compelled to respond to me and it proves distracting from your other obligations. I hope you understand that I do not expect a response, nor do I think I have “won” if you don’t respond. Please, spend time with your kids before you take time to engage me in a lengthy debate! If you do choose to respond, however, I have a personal request. It is not something that I can force you to do, of course, so you can choose to ignore this if you wish. But, I’ve noticed that you tend to get a lot of help from eager friends on Facebook, Reddit, and possibly other places. While I understand that this can ease the burden this places on you as you try to fulfill other obligations, I respectfully request that any response be written without this aid. I do not have a similar support system, and I also have many other obligations, such as work, school, and family. Plus, other research projects related to Mormon apologetics. It is easy to write substantial responses when you have the kind of help you receive from others. But I would, if I chose to respond, have to engage that all by myself. As such, I make this request merely as a means of keeping any potential future exchange between you and me as fair and equitable as possible. Thanks.