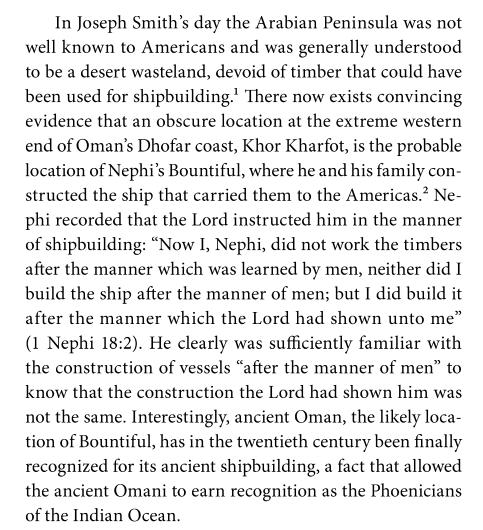# By Objective Measures: Old Wine into Old Bottles

By Objective Measures: Old Wine into Old Bottles

Noel B. Reynolds

Over the last two decades, scholars have found new ways of bringing analytical tools and models from multiple disciplines to bear on studies of the Book of Mormon. This range of studies makes it possible to assess the validity of intuitively plausible arguments that were leveled against Joseph Smith's account of the divine origin of the Book of Mormon. Whereas the critics explain the Book of Mormon in terms of nineteenth-century origins, I assemble below eleven examples in which the application of careful and scientifically current scholarly research reverses those intuitions and argues strongly for ancient origins. These examples have come from such diverse fields of study and lines of investigation as the history of shipbuilding in ancient Arabia, demographic reconstructions of ancient populations, literary authorship, new discoveries in ancient Near Eastern literature, biblical literary devices,

the history of warfare in the ancient world, and American political thought.

Shipbuilding in Ancient Arabia

Shipbuilding

In Joseph Smith's day the Arabian Peninsula was not well known to Americans and was generally understood to be a desert wasteland, devoid of timber that could have been used for shipbuilding.[1] There now exists convincing evidence that an obscure location at the extreme western end of Oman's Dhofar coast, Khor Kharfot, is the probable location of Nephi's Bountiful, where he and his family constructed the ship that carried them to the Americas.[2] Nephi recorded that the Lord instructed him in the manner of shipbuilding: "Now I, Nephi, did not work the timbers after the manner which was learned by men, neither did I build the ship after the manner of men; but I did build it after the manner which the Lord had shown unto me" (1 Nephi 18:2). He clearly was sufficiently familiar with the construction of vessels "after the manner of men" to know that the construction the Lord had shown him was not the same. Interestingly, ancient Oman, the likely location of Bountiful, has in the twentieth century been finally recognized for its ancient shipbuilding, a fact that allowed the ancient Omani to earn recognition as the Phoenicians of the Indian Ocean.

Oman, with its borders on the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean, is relatively geographically isolated, and its history, according to archaeologist Michael Rice, is "most notably a record of Oman's marriage with the sea." He continues: "Her people have always been energetic and courageous seamen, probably from the earliest times. Oman's ships are distinctive and her sailors were foremost
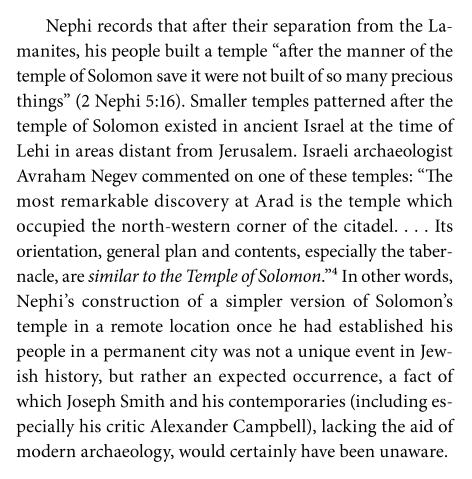
among the seamen of Islam."[3] As early as 3000 B.C., evidence exists of Omani contact with other cultures in the Gulf region, and early records speak of the ships of Magan, an ancient place-name usually associated with Oman. Ancient Oman played an important role in early trade routes and, along with the city of Dilmun (probably situated on Bahrain Island to the north of Oman), served as an international center for trade by sea. Long before 600 B.C., their trade linked India, Persia, Mesopotamia, Africa, Egypt, and eventually China. In ancient times it was the natural location to build and launch a ship for a journey eastward into the Indian Ocean.

The Omani used a distinctive ship, the "sewn boat," which, though of very ancient origin, is still used by modern Omani. These sewn boats, also called "booms," are completely stitched together, without using nails; approximately 56,000 meters of coconut hair rope are required to sew together one complete ship. Using these vessels, the Omani have maintained trade between Mesopotamia, Africa, India, and even China over most of a five-thousand-year period. It is highly improbable that Joseph Smith or his contemporaries knew that southern Arabia was home to world-class mariners and shipbuilders for millennia. We do not know whether Nephi built his ship in the Omani style (which would have been different from "the manner of men" he would have known from the Mediterranean) or whether the construction style the Lord showed him was different from both of these. But the reputation of ancient Oman as a center of shipbuilding demonstrates clearly that the necessary materials for the successful constructions were available in that land in Lehi's day.

Nephi's Temple

Nephi records that after their separation from the Lamanites, his people built a temple "after the manner of the temple of Solomon save it were not built of so many precious things" (2 Nephi 5:16). Smaller temples patterned after the temple of Solomon existed in ancient Israel at the time of Lehi in areas distant from Jerusalem. Israeli archaeologist Avraham Negev commented on one of these temples: "The most remarkable discovery at Arad is the temple which occupied the north-western corner of the citadel. . . . Its orientation, general plan and contents, especially the tabernacle, are *similar to the Temple of Solomon*."[4] In other words, Nephi's construction of a simpler version of Solomon's temple in a remote location once he had established his people in a permanent city was not a unique event in Jewish history, but rather an expected occurrence, a fact of which Joseph Smith and his contemporaries (including especially his critic Alexander Campbell), lacking the aid of modern archaeology, would certainly have been unaware.

Nephite Population Numbers

Thoughtful students of the Book of Mormon have sometimes questioned the seemingly large number of Nephites who descended from Lehi's original group. Critics have suggested on this basis that the Book of Mormon is demographically implausible.[5] But it has now been shown that the size and fluctuations in Nephite numbers resemble the patterns of known historical populations. James E. Smith, one of the chief architects of the widely used Cambridge model for estimating historical populations, refutes the critics' claim by comparing the Book of
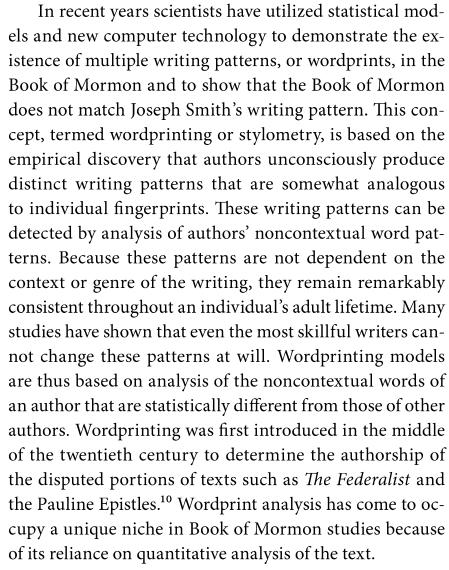
Mormon account with other ancient civilizations and by utilizing the Cambridge demographic model to demonstrate possible numbers of Nephites.[6] He notes in passing that "if there is any hallmark of ancient historical records, it is their strong tendency to present [what might intuitively seem to be] puzzling, unrealistic, and inconsistent population figures."[7] Also, historical populations have generally experienced significant fluctuation and change similar to that depicted in the Book of Mormon.

Applying the Cambridge model with conservative assumptions about the growth of Nephite population, Smith calculated that the numbers in the text are on the high end of what would be predicted scientifically, but they remain plausible. For example, we know that "most of today's six million French Canadians descend from about five thousand immigrant pioneers of the seventeenth century," reflecting a much higher actual fertility rate than Smith assumes for his reconstruction of Nephite demographics. Relaxing any of Smith's perhaps unduly conservative assumptions would move the numbers closer to the middle of the expected range. Additionally, if the Nephites or Lamanites absorbed any unmentioned populations, the numbers cease to be at all problematic.[8] Because the demographic data in the Book of Mormon is incomplete, a precise picture of population sizes is impossible; however, as Smith concludes, "some plausible demographic inferences can be made, and the picture of Nephite population history that emerges is a realistic one."[9]

Joseph Smith went out on a limb when he included specific dates and population data in his translation of the Book of Mormon. Only in light of sophisticated analysis using tools far beyond the primitive Malthusian population projections

of the early nineteenth century can modern appreciate how true to actual human experience such details in the Book of Mormon are.

Wordprinting

In recent years scientists have utilized statistical models and new computer technology to demonstrate the existence of multiple writing patterns, or wordprints, in the Book of Mormon and to show that the Book of Mormon does not match Joseph Smith's writing pattern. This concept, termed wordprinting or stylometry, is based on the empirical discovery that authors unconsciously produce distinct writing patterns that are somewhat analogous to individual fingerprints. These writing patterns can be detected by analysis of authors' noncontextual word patterns. Because these patterns are not dependent on the context or genre of the writing, they remain remarkably consistent throughout an individual's adult lifetime. Many studies have shown that even the most skillful writers cannot change these patterns at will. Wordprinting models are thus based on analysis of the noncontextual words of an author that are statistically different from those of other authors. Wordprinting was first introduced in the middle of the twentieth century to determine the authorship of the disputed portions of texts such as *The Federalist* and the Pauline Epistles.[10] Wordprint analysis has come to occupy a unique niche in Book of Mormon studies because of its reliance on quantitative analysis of the text.

The concept of wordprinting in Book of Mormon analysis was first introduced in a 1980 study by Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher.[11] In their study Larsen and Rencher first carefully identified sections of the Book of

Wordprints and the Book of Mormon

TESTS		NUMBER OF REJECTIONS															
		0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Nephi vs. Nephi	3			x		x	x										
Alma vs. Alma	3		x	x	x												
Smith vs. Smith	3	x		xx													
Cowdery vs. Cowdery	1		x														
Spaulding vs. Spaulding	1			x													
Nephi vs. Alma	9			x			xx	xx	x	x	x	x					
Smith vs. Nephi	6					x				xx		x	x	x			
Smith vs. Alma	6				xx	x	x		xx								
Cowdery vs. Nephi	6							x	x				xx		x	x	
Cowdery vs. Alma	6								xxxx	x	x						
Spaulding vs. Nephi	5											x	x	x		x	x
Spaulding vs. Alma	6							xxx		xx				x			

The higher the number of "rejections," or differences in measurable stylometric elements, the less likely it is that two blocks of text were written by the same author. This chart shows results comparing blocks by the same authors and then by different authors.

Clearly different author

Mormon that the text indicates are the products of different authors. They based their analysis on the twenty-four writers who contributed the most to the text, all with at least nearly one thousand words to their credit. They then utilized three separate statistical models to compare the writings of each author with those of the others and of Joseph Smith, Sidney Rigdon, Solomon Spaulding, Oliver Cowdery, and other nineteenth-century Mormon authors. All three models measured the frequency of letters and of both common (e.g., *the, and, of*) and less common (e.g., *out, after, among*) noncontextual words. They concluded that all three statistical models "strongly support multiple authorship of the Book of Mormon" and that the word-print patterns in the text significantly differ from the writing patterns of Joseph Smith and the other nineteenth-century authors tested.[12]

During the 1980s John L. Hilton and several associates, some of whom were not Latter-day Saints, formed a group of scientists in Berkeley, California, to develop a more rigorous wordprinting model with which to test the Book of Mormon.[13] Rather than test the frequency of letters or noncontextual words, Hilton's model measures noncontextual word-pattern ratios (such as the percentage of sentences beginning with *a* and *and*) using a list of sixty-five ratios first suggested by Scottish forensics specialist A. Q. Morton. Hilton's model also has the distinct advantage of being based on a large body of control author studies, which helped to establish statistical significance; additionally, its more conservative assumptions require the use of authors with at least five thousand words in a text. Hilton's techniques were critically reviewed and accepted by the University of Chicago Press prior to its publication

of a recent book that used his model to identify previously unrecognized writings of the seventeenth-century English philosopher Thomas Hobbes.[14]

There is much yet to be learned about wordprinting and its limits. One important discovery is that translators who attempt literal renderings of a text usually preserve a distinctive wordprint that maintains the statistical differences between that text and texts by other authors translated by the same or other persons. Looser approaches to translation, however, will stamp the translator's own wordprint on the resulting text. Thus we should not be too surprised to see the English-language edition of the Book of Mormon preserving differences between different Book of Mormon authors, even when many of the actual terms being counted in the English translation do not have specific parallels in the hypothesized original languages.

Hilton compared three independent texts of the didactic writings of Nephi and Alma with one another and with writings of Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Solomon Spaulding. The results unambiguously showed that the wordprints of Nephi and Alma are distinct and significantly different from each other and from the wordprints of Smith, Cowdery, and Spaulding. The original findings were therefore confirmed, rendering it, in Hilton's words, "statistically indefensible" to claim that Joseph Smith or one of his contemporaries was the author of the Book of Mormon.[15]

Narrative of Zosimus

Another text that contains instructive parallels to the Book of Mormon is the Narrative of Zosimus, an early Christian document widely circulated in the first centuries A.D. that was listed in the ninth-century canon of Nicephorous

Zosimus

with apocryphal works that were to be discarded.[16] The traditions upon which this narrative is based most likely predate the birth of Christianity and are reflective of more ancient Jewish thought.[17] John W. Welch has demonstrated that the Zosimus narrative parallels the story of Lehi and Nephi in 1 Nephi in several key aspects.[18] On a general level, the text describes a righteous group that left Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah, crossed the ocean, and arrived in a promised land. This striking initial connection to the Book of Mormon is further continued in many details of the Zosimus narrative, which suggests that both texts grew out of a common historical and cultural heritage.

History tells us nothing about Zosimus. In the narrative he is a righteous man who receives an angelic visitation in response to prayer. The angel informs him that he will be taken to a land of blessedness. Zosimus wanders without guidance through a wilderness and, though exhausted, arrives at the land of blessedness through prayer and divine intervention. He then encounters an "unfathomable river of water covered by an impenetrable cloud of darkness," which he crosses by grabbing the branches of a tree.[19] Reminiscent of the tree of life, the beautiful and fruit-laden tree next to a fountain of water gives nourishment to Zosimus, who then converses with an angelic escort who, after inquiring what he wants, allows him to see a vision of the Son of God.

After the vision, Zosimus is introduced to a gathering of the righteous sons of God, who share with him their history written upon stone plates. According to this history, these righteous sons of God were led from Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah to this paradise on account of their righteousness. To Zosimus they stress the ideals of prayer and chastity and

show him a book through which Zosimus learns that the inhabitants of Jerusalem, though wicked, will be shown mercy by God. Zosimus then returns from the land of blessedness to the world.

The parallels between Zosimus's journey and Lehi's and Nephi's vision of the tree of life—including the emphasis on prayer and faith, wandering through a dark and dreary wilderness, a river, a great mist, the tree of life next to the fountain of living waters, the angelic escort, the interrogation of desires, and the vision of the Son of God—are numerous and significant. Likewise, the intriguing similarities between the exodus of Lehi's family from Jerusalem at the time of Jeremiah and Zosimus's account of the history of the sons of God in the land of blessedness also strongly suggest that the two texts are connected in some significant manner. But the connection would seem to be an ancient one, as there is no evidence that the Zosimus narrative was available in English until decades after the publication of the Book of Mormon.[20]

Although the exact connection between the Narrative of Zosimus and the Book of Mormon will likely remain obscured by the passage of time, the similarities appear too extensive to explain by an appeal to mere coincidence. At the very least, Joseph Smith made a bold, bald assertion by claiming that Jesus had alluded to the Nephites—Israelites separated from the main body of Jews in Jerusalem at the time it was destroyed by the Babylonians and still living across the ocean—when he told his disciples in the Old World about the existence of "other sheep" whom he must also visit and bring (see John 10:16; 3 Nephi 15:16–17). Little could the young translator have dreamed that a text such as the Narrative of Zosimus would later

surface, preserving just such a belief among early Palestinian Christians.

Orphic Gold Plates

Verifying the authenticity of disputed ancient documents generally entails rigorous comparison of a document with the intellectual, cultural, and social heritage of the civilization it purports to describe. It is generally accepted that no forger of a text claiming to describe an area or time period with which he is not personally acquainted can possibly create a text that accurately describes another society in any detail. Indeed, historians usually have little trouble identifying forgeries of ancient documents, especially when those texts present a large amount of historical information, as does the Book of Mormon. If the Book of Mormon were a nineteenth-century concoction, this would have been easily and convincingly demonstrated a thousand times over. But this has not happened, and the attempts to pin such characterizations on the book have been largely refuted and replaced with a growing realization that the more carefully one examines the text, the more plausible its claimed ancient origins become.

Wilfred Griggs, a professor of classics, history, and ancient scripture at Brigham Young University, has compared Book of Mormon imagery with known Greek and Egyptian texts from around the time of Lehi.[21] In particular he has found powerful evidence that visions of the tree of life experienced by Lehi and Nephi share certain symbols and motifs with recently excavated Greek and Egyptian religious texts contemporary with Lehi's lifetime.

Symbols reminiscent of the tree of life visions described in the Book of Mormon are found in the ritual

writings (recorded on gold plates) of the Orphic religious movement of Greek society, which became prominent throughout the eastern Mediterranean as early as the seventh century B.C. The Orphic plates, buried with the dead, were intended to guide the deceased in the afterworld, where he would encounter, among other items, two paths, one of which led to "a spring, near which is standing a white cypress."[22] Griggs explains that scholars have consistently associated the white cypress with the tree of life, and the plates themselves identify the spring as the "Lake of Memory," also symbolic of life. While scholars dispute the exact nature of the plates and the interpretation of the symbolism, there is broad consensus that they were the products of, or heavily influenced by, the ancient Near East.

Egyptian ritualistic funerary texts also contain similar references to a "tree growing by the fountain or spring of living water." Griggs explains that the rituals described in both the Orphic and Egyptian texts also would have been significant to the living, as a method of preparing "the living initiate for his journey into the world of departed spirits."[23] Given the ties between Greece and Egypt in this epoch, many scholars assert that the motifs on the Orphic plates have in reality an Egyptian origin. Griggs likewise suggests that the symbols used in the Book of Mormon were also influenced by the Egyptian ties, probably commercial, of Lehi and his family. Thus he suggests that the "most feasible and plausible explanation" for the similarities between the Orphic gold plates and the visions of the tree of life in the Book of Mormon is that "Egypt is the common meeting ground for the two traditions."[24] Growing evidence that symbols used in the Book of Mormon

were part of the cultural milieu of Lehi's world—and not Joseph Smith's New York—strongly supports the divine and ancient origin of the Book of Mormon.

Forty-Day Literature

The Book of Mormon text is supported by striking similarities to other ancient religious manuscripts that were unknown in 1830, when the Book of Mormon was published. Hugh Nibley has suggested that the texts of the "forty-day" literature, which are among the oldest Christian documents and purport to contain the postresurrectional teachings of Christ to his Old World apostles, have intriguing parallels in content to 3 Nephi, which records the visit and instruction of the resurrected Lord to his New World disciples.[25] A comparison between these relatively recently discovered texts, according to Nibley, allows 3 Nephi to take "its place in the bona fide apocalyptic library so easily and naturally that with the title removed, any scholar would be hard put to it to detect its irregular origin."[26] Elements in common include Christ's prophecy about the eventual apostasy of the church, after two generations in the Old World and four among the Nephites; references to the secrecy of certain teachings; statements about the visits of Christ to other peoples; a discussion of the history of the world in terms of dispensations; and the fact that Jesus physically ate food to show his status as a resurrected being. Additionally, Nibley notes that both accounts emphasize that the purpose of Christ's visit was to prepare his disciples for their missions to establish the church and that both stress the splendor and the intimacy of Christ's visits.

Nibley also engages in an extended comparison of 3 Nephi and the Coptic manuscript of the Gospel of the Twelve Apostles, discovered in 1904, seventy-four years after the Book of Mormon was published. Again, the parallels between the two texts in regard to general motifs and specific actions are consistent enough to suggest that they share a common origin in the teachings of the resurrected Christ. Among these similarities are the descriptions of Christ's condescension, his partaking of food with his disciples, a doctrinal emphasis on unity, the administering and withholding of the sacrament, the sacramental prayers, and three prayers by Christ. Additionally, both texts describe a private conversation between the Lord and either the Twelve Apostles or the twelve Nephite disciples. In both cases Christ encourages his disciples, who are at first abashed, to ask him what they are thinking; they eventually respond and inquire about the "type of the human who is dead but not dead, raised from the dead but still not resurrected,"[27] with Lazarus in the Old World and the Three Nephites in the New World representing this unique case. In both instances Jesus reassures them of the universality of the resurrection. The strong connections between the texts of the forty-day literature and 3 Nephi demonstrate the strong consistency of the latter with a genre of early Christian literature that was not known to early-nineteenth-century Americans and something that Joseph Smith could scarcely have imagined.

Merismus

In the Book of Mormon the Lord clearly outlines his gospel, particularly in 2 Nephi 31, 3 Nephi 11, and 3 Nephi 27, using a pattern with six major points of doctrine: faith

in Jesus Christ, repentance, baptism of water, baptism of fire and of the Holy Ghost, endurance to the end, and eternal life. This same doctrinal pattern appears in the teachings of all the Book of Mormon prophets in the form of injunctions to the people. Throughout the Book of Mormon, the many statements regarding the gospel contain instructive variations on terminology and are often elliptical, leaving out one or more of the six points in any one articulation. However, for an audience familiar with the basic pattern, the allusion to that pattern is perfectly clear.

MERISMUS

The elliptical references often take the form of merismus, a classical rhetorical device in which the division of an important topic or statement into component parts allows for its full invocation by explicit listing of selected parts only. In the Hebrew Bible merismus occurs as concise or condensed expressions that, by mentioning the first and last or more prominent elements of a series, invoke the entire list.[28] In other words, once a pattern is established in the form of A, B, C, D, E, F (such as the list of elements of the gospel), the mere mention of two or more of these items, such as A and F, is used to represent the entire series. Understood as a formula composed of a list of ordered items, the gospel lends itself well to this rhetorical device. For example, a typical Book of Mormon merism states that believing in Jesus and enduring to the end is life eternal (see 2 Nephi 33:4). While repentance, baptism, and the gift of the Holy Ghost are not explicitly mentioned, they are implied by the use of merismus. Thus, using the pattern described above, the scripture uses the items A, E, and F to evoke the entire list in the minds of readers.

A conservative count of gospel-related merisms in the Book of Mormon gives at least 130 meristic statements of

the gospel or doctrine of Christ.[29] The use of this ancient rhetorical device in the Book of Mormon, combined with the use of other ancient literary devices, most famously chiasmus, is strong evidence that the Book of Mormon was not the product of nineteenth-century America. Though not the way American writers would ordinarily have invoked formulas or lists, it is an appropriate rhetorical device for a book with ancient biblical connections.

Warfare

Readers of the Book of Mormon invariably wonder why so much attention is given to the preparation for, execution of, and recovery from war by the Jaredites, Nephites, and Lamanites. An estimated one-third of the text is somehow related to military matters, and the description of war-related items is further enhanced by the many prophets who were also military leaders. William J. Hamblin, a professor of history at Brigham Young University, has studied the Book of Mormon in the context of his knowledge regarding ancient warfare and has discovered that on general principles and specific details the Book of Mormon accurately describes an ancient system of warfare.[30] He states, "Despite the fact that Joseph Smith lived in the age of Modern, or technical, warfare, following the great military transformations of both the sixteenth century and the Napoleonic wars, the Book of Mormon consistently reflects the basic patterns of Pre-Modern warfare."[31]

Ancient societies usually viewed warfare as inevitable, and thus they devoted most government resources to the military and maintained a martial mentality among the citizenry, who themselves constituted the bulk of the army. Such attitudes are readily recognizable in the Book

COMPLEXITIES
OF ACTUAL
WARFARE

of Mormon accounts. Historians of war divide the human experience into two broad categories, Modern and Pre-Modern warfare, with the rise of Modern warfare beginning in Europe in the sixteenth century. Pre-Modern warfare was always bound by certain environmental constraints, including the limitations of the human body, the terrain, the climate, and animal resources. Consistent with that fact, Book of Mormon accounts of war often explicitly speak of the constraints placed on the various armies by human, geographical, and seasonal circumstances. Significantly, Book of Mormon armies did not use animals during war, a situation that differed from much of the ancient world but that reflects exactly what archaeologists have discovered about ancient Mesoamerican warfare.[32] Weaponry mentioned in the Book of Mormon is likewise consistent with weapons used elsewhere in antiquity. In this regard the Book of Mormon most closely parallels Mesoamerican use of war technology, which lacked many of the elements, such as coats of mail and cavalry, that distinguished warfare in the ancient Near East. Additionally, the Book of Mormon does not present a static account of war technology but accurately portrays the constantly changing nature of warfare over the centuries.

Ancient warfare, which generally involved the entire society in its economic and social implications, was usually organized communally under the command of an elite hereditary military aristocracy. This also appears to be the case in the Book of Mormon. Military operations in the Book of Mormon also accurately reflect what is currently known about warfare throughout antiquity. War usually included complex preparations, an emphasis on

marching to ensure that both supplies and men arrived in timely fashion at the correct locations, some guerrilla warfare, spies, a council of war, and a necessity of group cohesion on the battlefield—all elements of Book of Mormon warfare. Additionally, the pattern of organizing Book of Mormon armies in a decimal system (hundreds, thousands, ten thousands) is also found in ancient Israel and elsewhere in the ancient world.

Emphasis in the Book of Mormon on personal oaths of loyalty and of surrender is also typical of the ancient world, a fact that represents "perhaps the greatest distinction between modern and ancient international affairs."[33] Another major difference between Modern and Pre-Modern warfare is that war in antiquity was characterized by its religious connections, while war in modernity has become a secularized affair. In the Book of Mormon actions and beliefs associated with military culture (God's frequent intervention in battles on behalf of the righteous, consultation with prophets over military matters, the code of purity typified by Helaman's stripling warriors, to name a few examples), are representative of a ritualistic and sacral approach to warfare, paralleling patterns in the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica. Hamblin notes that of the three major themes of ancient literature and art—God, war, and love—the Book of Mormon accurately reflects the ancient world in its thematic emphases on two—God and war. Thus Hamblin concludes that the Book of Mormon describes a system of ancient warfare that in both general principles and specific practices would have been foreign to the world of Joseph Smith and yet is entirely consistent with what scholars now know about that feature of ancient societies.

Politics and the American Revolution

Numerous critics of the Book of Mormon have asserted that the book contains political ideas that are a simple reflection of American thought in Joseph Smith's time. As Thomas O'Dea has claimed, "In it are found the democratic, the republican, the antimonarchical, and the egalitarian doctrines that pervaded the climate of opinion in which it was conceived."[34] However, in a careful study of the political philosophy and context of the Book of Mormon, Richard Bushman, a noted American historian, has demonstrated that it is "an anomaly on the political scene of 1830" and is much closer in government structure and philosophy to ancient Israelite monarchy than American republicanism.[35]

During his youth, Joseph Smith was undoubtedly imbued with the prevailing notion of the preeminent place of the American Revolution in world history. The victory of the American colonists was predominantly portrayed as a case of "heroic resistance" in which the colonists threw off the shackles of tyranny. However, the Book of Mormon account of the American Revolution emphasizes not courageous defiance but divine deliverance, a major theme and pattern in the entire book. Likewise, Bushman examined three separate cases in the Book of Mormon when the people of God faced situations similar to that of the American colonists; in each case, the people were delivered by fleeing, not by fighting. In fact, Book of Mormon peoples never overthrew an established government, no matter how tyrannical.

Joseph Smith was also exposed to a political context that celebrated the "true principles of government," meaning republicanism as opposed in principle to monarchy.

However, Bushman notes that "principled opposition to monarchy is scarcely in evidence" in the Book of Mormon.[36] In sharp contrast to this paradigm of early-nineteenth-century America—popular opposition to monarchy—the Nephite people often desired a king, while their leaders, the actual monarchs themselves, warned of the dangers of an evil king. In a reversal of roles from American images of enlightened patriots and despotic monarchs, "the people delighted in their subjection to the king, and the rulers were enlightened." Also, as Bushman argues, the Book of Mormon does not present monarchy as fundamentally evil; rather, "it was simply inexpedient because it was subject to abuse."[37]

Critics often cite the Nephite judges as an example of a democratic institution in the Book of Mormon. However, even though the judges were approved by the voice of the people, little else about them reflects American thought. The judges served for life, often inherited their positions, and wielded a concentration of powers without any functional checks and balances reminiscent of the American system. Nor is it obvious that they functioned like the biblical judges.

The Book of Mormon, in Bushman's analysis, is "strangely distant from the time and place of its publication."[38] On several key issues it stands in fundamental opposition to nineteenth-century-American political thought, not as a simple reflection of it as the book's critics have claimed. Parallels in ancient Israel more accurately stand as precedents to the political institutions and culture in the Book of Mormon narrative, though in subtle ways that Joseph Smith himself was not likely to have noticed: the motif of divine deliverance in Israelite history, popular

desire for monarchy, and an emphasis on traditional law as opposed to constitutional rule of law with separation of powers and checks and balances. In terms of its political philosophy, the Book of Mormon fits much more comfortably into the tradition of Israelite thought than it does into the American context of Joseph Smith.

Consistency in Complexity

One of the strongest arguments for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon is the amazing depth of complexity addressed in a consistent manner throughout the book. This argument, first developed and perfected by Hugh Nibley, points to Joseph Smith's lack of education and his dictation of the Book of Mormon line by line without notes and without reviewing what was said minutes, hours, days, or even months earlier. Yet despite these circumstances, a large number of complex relationships are developed in the book and consistently maintained from beginning to end. Many of these relationships have taken scholars longer to sort out than it took Joseph Smith to translate the entire book.[39]

For example, the Book of Mormon employs at least three independent dating systems with remarkable accuracy. It also contains a complex system of religious teachings that is enriched as new sermons are added but is never confused or contradicted. The book's authors refer to a huge and complex set of sources—including official records, sermons, letters, monument inscriptions, and church records—that always maintain a consistent relationship in the final text. A large number of ancient literary forms, typical of ancient texts but virtually unknown in English in most cases, are woven into the narrative.

Subtle and complex political traditions evolve early in the text and surface in a variety of forms in later sections, always plausibly and consistently. The book describes various ebbs and flows of ethnic interaction without once losing track of even the most minor groups. Hundreds of individual characters are successfully introduced and coherently tracked. The geographical data in the text is diverse and complex, yet when carefully analyzed, it is perfectly consistent and matches an identifiable portion of Mesoamerica as well. This list of examples could go on at great length.

Melvin J. Thorne has argued that the improbability of alternative theories of the origin of the Book of Mormon increases rapidly as the number of elements establishing Book of Mormon complexity and parallels with the ancient world increases.[40] He utilizes the statistical rule that the probability of two events occurring by chance at the same time is equal to the product of their separate probabilities of occurring at all; in other words, two events that are likely to occur half the time independently are likely to occur jointly only one quarter of the time (.5 x .5 = .25). From a probabilistic point of view, the large number of ancient elements in the Book of Mormon, which would be natural in an ancient book but not in a nineteenth-century production, yields a joint probability that is astronomical against its being a nineteenth-century composition that just by chance is historically and culturally accurate.

Conclusion

These studies selected from such diverse fields as archaeology, historical demography, statistical authorship analysis, ancient history and literature, and American political

culture all lead to a common conclusion: the Book of Mormon text displays a complexity of details and a richness of ancient patterns of life and literature that would have been impossible for anyone to compose on the basis of what was known in 1829. And scholarly discoveries and advances since that time have shown us that the facts and patterns embedded in that 1829 translation fit comfortably with the ancient world it purports to describe.

<div align="center">Notes</div>

1. See Eugene England, "Through the Arabian Desert to a Bountiful Land: Could Joseph Smith Have Known the Way?" in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1997), 144–56.

2. See Noel B. Reynolds, "Lehi's Arabian Journey Updated," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* ed. Reynolds, 379–89.

3. Michael Rice, *The Archaeology of the Arabian Gulf, c. 5000–323 BC* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), 246–48.

4. Quoted in Daniel C. Peterson, "Is the Book of Mormon True? Notes on the Debate," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* ed. Reynolds, 154, emphasis added. See the original reports in Yohanan Aharoni and Ruth Amiran, "Arad: A Biblical City in Southern Palestine," *Archaeology* 17 (1964): 43–53; "Excavations at Tel Arad: Preliminary Report on the First Season," *Israel Exploration Journal* 14 (1964): 131–47; and "Excavations at Tel Arad: Preliminary Report of the Second Season," *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967): 233–49. See also Yohanan Aharoni, "Arad: Its Inscriptions and Temple," *Biblical Archaeologist* 31 (1968): 232; and "The Israelite Sanctuary in Arad," in *New Directions in Biblical Archaeology,* ed. David Noel Freedman and Jonas Greenfield (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969), 28–44.

5. See John Tvedtnes's review of critic John C. Kunich, "Multiply Exceedingly: Book of Mormon Population Sizes," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 24–29.

6. See James E. Smith, "How Many Nephites? The Book of Mormon at the Bar of Demography," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* ed. Reynolds, 255–93.

7. Smith, "How Many Nephites?" 258.

8. See the textual and other evidence for the presence of other peoples among Lehi's descendents in the New World assembled in John L. Sorenson, "When Lehi's Party Arrived in the Land, Did They Find Others There?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1/1 (1992): 1–34.

9. Smith, "How Many Nephites?" 287.

10. See, for example, Frederick Mosteller and David L. Wallace, *Inference and Disputed Authorship: The Federalist* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1964); and S. Michaelson and A. Q. Morton, "Last Words," *New Testament Studies* 8 (1972): 192–208.

11. See Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," in *Book of Mormon Authorship: New Light on Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1982), 157–88; or the earlier version in Wayne A. Larsen, Alvin C. Rencher, and Tim Layton, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," *BYU Studies* 20/3 (1980): 225–51.

12. Larsen and Rencher, "Analysis of Wordprints," 178.

13. See John L. Hilton, "On Verifying Wordprint Studies: Book of Mormon Authorship," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, ed. Reynolds, 225–54; reprinted with changes from *BYU Studies* 30/3 (1990): 89–108.

14. See Thomas Hobbes, *Three Discourses: A Critical Modern Edition of Newly Identified Work of the Young Hobbes*, ed. (with explanatory essays) Noel B. Reynolds and Arlene W. Saxonhouse (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

15. Hilton, "Verifying Wordprint Studies," 241.

16. See John W. Welch, "The Narrative of Zosimus (History of the Rechabites) and the Book of Mormon," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* ed. Reynolds, 325.

17. James H. Charlesworth, in *The Pseudepigrapha and Modern Research* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars Press, 1976), 225, speculates that it may be a Jewish text predating a.d. 70.

18. Welch, "Narrative of Zosimus," 323–74.

19. Ibid., 326.

20. The Zosimus narrative became generally available in English after 1867, when a translation appeared in the Edinburgh edition of *The Ante-Nicene Fathers,* published from 1867 to 1872.

21. See C. Wilfred Griggs, "The Book of Mormon as an Ancient Book," in *Book of Mormon Authorship,* ed. Reynolds, 75–101.

22. Ibid., 82.

23. Ibid., 91.

24. Ibid.

25. See Hugh W. Nibley, "Two Shots in the Dark: Christ among the Ruins," in *Book of Mormon Authorship,* ed. Reynolds, 121–41. Nibley draws here on his 1966 article in *Vigiliae christianae,* now reprinted and easily accessible as " Evangelium quadraginta dierum: The Forty-Day Mission of Christ—the Forgotten Heritage," in Hugh W. Nibley, *When the Lights Went Out: Three Studies on the Ancient Apostasy* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2001), 49–89.

26. Nibley, "Two Shots in the Dark," 122–23.

27. Ibid., 136.

28. See A. M. Honeyman, "*Merismus* in Biblical Hebrew," *Journal of Biblical Hebrew* 71 (1952): 14.

29. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ as Taught by the Nephite Prophets," *BYU Studies* 31/3 (1991): 31–50.

30. See William J. Hamblin, "The Importance of Warfare in Book of Mormon Studies," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* ed. Reynolds, 523–43. See also, more generally, Stephen

D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, eds., *Warfare in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990).

31. Hamblin, "Importance of Warfare," 526.

32. See ibid., 529.

33. Ibid., 535. See Terrence L. Szink, "An Oath of Allegiance in the Book of Mormon," in *Warfare in the Book of Mormon,* ed. Ricks and Hamblin, 35–45.

34. Thomas F. O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 32.

35. See Richard L. Bushman, "The Book of Mormon and the American Revolution," in *Book of Mormon Authorship,* ed. Reynolds, 189–211. See also an earlier version in *BYU Studies* 17/1 (1976): 3–20.

36. Ibid., 198. An exception might be the brother of Jared, in an event recorded more than a thousand years before the Nephites existed (see Ether 6:23).

37. Ibid., 200.

38. Ibid., 203.

39. Many of the complexities that scholars have observed in the Book of Mormon are reported in John W. Welch, ed., *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991).

40. See Melvin J. Thorne, "Complexity, Consistency, Ignorance, and Probabilities," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited,* ed. Reynolds, 179–93.