A NATION NOW EXTINCT

Thank you for the . . . interesting and cogent articles, with special thanks for [Richard E.] Bennett’s piece [“A Nation Now Extinct,” American Indian Origin Theories as of 1820: Samuel L. Mitchill, Martin Harris, and the New York Theory,” Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture 20/2 (2011): 30–69]. I have hoped for some years that a competent scholar would produce just such a piece. It pleases me that he has now done it.

JOHN L. SORENSON

SOLOMON HARRIS

The article by Susan Easton Black and Larry Porter (“‘Rest Assured, Martin Harris Will Be Here in Time,’” 20/1 [2011]: 5–27) mentions that when Martin Harris was rebaptized in 1870 he was also baptized for his deceased “uncle,” Solomon Harris. I find a brother named Solomon Harris for Martin but no uncle.

LYLE FLETCHER

We really appreciate your welcome critique. You are 100% correct, and we are embarrassed to tears. How “Uncle Solomon” slipped by us both is beyond our comprehension because we knew better. Yes, Solomon is the recognized brother of Martin Harris and not an uncle. Thank you for picking up on it so readily and alerting us to what was more than a slight oversight. We examined the text forever and still had a black hole on transposing that relationship somehow.

LARRY PORTER

ON THE FRONT COVER:

Emma’s Hymns
© LIZ LEMON SWINDLE • 1998

Images from the Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture may not be copied, distributed, or included in any print or electronic form without permission.
Though interesting, the study of various measures of writing styles cannot provide certainties about Book of Mormon authorship, but only probabilities.

Early Mormon hymnody developed in two directions—the apostles produced a compilation that continues to influence our worship today, while Emma Smith’s hymn collection stayed in the Midwest.

Analysis of four hand and arm gestures described in the Book of Mormon reveals intriguing patterns and illuminates the passages in which they are found.

Attempts to identify which papyrus scrolls were long enough to theoretically contain the Book of Abraham involve the use of formulas designed to estimate the length of missing interior portions.

Faith, revelation, and scholarship should be combined to respond to questions of the historicity of the Book of Mormon.
LATTER-DAY SAINT TEMPLES AS SYMBOLS

RICHARD O. COWAN

Symbols are powerful teaching tools. Like the Master’s parables, they allow individuals to learn on their own level—superficially or profoundly—according to their degree of preparation and sensitivity. This is particularly true of teachings Latter-day Saints receive in the temple. This paper, however, will not focus on temple ordinances, but rather on temple buildings themselves.

Early Temples

The Latter-day Saints built their first temple at Kirtland, in northeastern Ohio. Dedicated in 1836, its exterior looked like a typical New England meetinghouse, but its interior was unique. The Lord instructed that it was not to be built “after the manner of the world” but according to a plan he would reveal (D&C 95:13–17). Rather than the customary single large room with a high ceiling, the temple was to have two meeting halls, one above the other. Both rooms featured an unusual teaching tool. At each end, there

FROM THE EDITOR:

Most Latter-day Saints are familiar with the use of symbols and metaphors in the scriptures and in most priesthood ordinances to teach gospel lessons. We are less familiar with other uses of symbols and metaphors. In this article Richard O. Cowan cautiously suggests that a few of the less familiar architectural features of Latter-day Saint temples also were conscious attempts to present symbols and metaphors for the edification of those willing to knock and to ask. As the editor, I appreciate Dr. Cowan’s circumspect and restrained approach to this topic.
was a stair-stepped stand with three pulpits on each of its four levels. Those on the west were for the use of the Melchizedek Priesthood, while those on the east were for the Aaronic Priesthood. Seating in the body of the halls was reversible; hence the congregation could sit facing either set of pulpits, according to which order of priesthood was conducting a particular meeting. Initials on each pulpit represented the specific priesthood office held by the individual occupying it. These arrangements therefore helped church members to understand the relative authority of various priesthood leaders.¹ The great revelation on priesthood, Doctrine and Covenants 107, had been revealed just the year before, so perhaps the relationships among various priesthood groups were still somewhat unfamiliar. Elder Erastus Snow later declared that the Kirtland Temple was built “to show forth the order of the Priesthood, Aaronic and Melchizedek.”²

The second Latter-day Saint temple was dedicated at Nauvoo, Illinois, in 1846. By this time, sacred temple ordinances—including baptisms for the dead, the endowment, and sealings or marriages for eternity—had been instituted. As a result, the temple’s interior added facilities for presenting these sacred rites.

Like the Kirtland Temple’s pulpits, the Nauvoo Temple’s font was an important teaching symbol. The ordinance of baptism has rich symbolic meaning. Immersion in water represents a complete cleansing from sin (Acts 22:16) as well as burying the old life of sin and coming forth or being reborn into a new life of righteousness (Romans 6:3–6). Joseph Smith specifically instructed that temple baptismal fonts are “a similitude of the grave” and hence should be located “underneath where the living are wont to assemble” (D&C 128:13). The Nauvoo Temple’s font

---

### Abbreviations on the Pulpits in the Kirtland Temple

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M.P.C.</td>
<td>Melchizedek Presiding Council (First Presidency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.M.H.</td>
<td>Presiding Melchizedek High Priesthood (the Twelve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.H.P.</td>
<td>Melchizedek High Priesthood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.E.M.</td>
<td>Presidency of Elders, Melchizedek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.P.A.</td>
<td>Bishopric Presiding, Aaronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.A.P.</td>
<td>Presidency of Aaronic Priests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.T.A.</td>
<td>Presidency of Teachers, Aaronic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P.D.A.</td>
<td>Presidency of Deacons, Aaronic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
as well as most other temple fonts have followed the description of the “sea” at Solomon’s Temple, being supported on the backs of twelve oxen (see 1 Kings 7:25), perhaps representing the twelve tribes of Israel and symbolizing how the house of Israel bears the burden of providing salvation to the four corners of the earth.

Other temple ordinances were conducted on the attic level of the Nauvoo Temple. A large room was divided by canvas partitions into areas that were furnished to represent distinct stages in our quest to return to God’s presence; as the instructions of the endowment unfolded, worshippers moved from one area to the next, symbolizing our forward progression. Other smaller rooms were offices, some having altars where sacred sealings were performed.3

The first temple in Utah, dedicated at St. George in 1877, was similar to the Nauvoo Temple; in this case, however, the lower of the two main assembly halls was divided by temporary partitions to accommodate the endowment. Later in the nineteenth century, the Logan, Manti, and Salt Lake Temples employed a series of rooms to present this ordinance. Their walls were adorned with murals depicting distinctive stages in mankind’s progress back into God’s presence—the creation, the Garden of Eden, our present telestial world, the terrestrial state, and finally the celestial room, generally the most beautifully furnished space in the temple, representing the feelings of peace and joy in that glory. Typically one climbs a few stairs when going from one room to the next, representing progress forward and upward. As meaningful as the earlier interior architectural features were, it would be on the exterior of the Salt Lake Temple where symbols were employed most extensively.

The Best-Known Temple

The great Salt Lake Temple is probably the most widely known of all Latter-day Saint temples. Architectural historian C. Mark Hamilton noted that Brigham Young had “made provisions in the original plans for the Temple to incorporate numerous symbols . . . to speak of the order of God, Christ, the Restoration of His gospel, man’s relationship to Him and the proclamation to the world of His reality.” Hamilton continued, “The intended program of the building is to aid man in his quest to gain entrance back into the presence of God from whence he came.”

While the Kirtland Temple had a simple belfry, the Nauvoo and St. George Temples had taller single towers. Located on the east side of their respective valleys, the Logan and Manti Temples each had two towers; one slightly taller tower adorned each temple’s formal front, while the other tower architecturally completed the end of the building facing the town. The Salt Lake Temple’s six towers were a distinctive feature of its design. Brigham Young testified that he learned of the temple’s location and basic

Nauvoo Temple baptismal font. © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

World Room mural by Minerva Teichert in the Manti Temple. Courtesy Church History Museum.
design by revelation. Just a few days after the pioneers’ arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, he and a few others were walking across the area that would become Temple Square. He struck the ground with his cane and declared: “Here will be the Temple of our God.”

President Young later spoke of this occasion:

I scarcely ever say much about revelations, or visions, but suffice it to say, five years ago last July [1847] I was here, and saw in the Spirit the Temple not ten feet from where we have laid the Chief Corner Stone. I have not inquired what kind of a Temple we should build. Why? Because it was represented before me. I have never looked upon that ground, but the vision of it was there. I see it as plainly as if it was in reality before me. Wait until it is done. I will say, however, that it will have six towers, to begin with, instead of one. Now do not any of you apostatize because it will have six towers, and Joseph only built one. It is easier for us to build sixteen, than it was for him to build one.”

An early account by William Ward described how the temple’s major features were designed: “Brigham Young drew upon a slate in the architect’s office a sketch, and said to Truman O. Angell [the temple’s architect]: ‘There will be three towers on the east, representing the President and his two Counselors; also three similar towers on the west representing the Presiding Bishop and his two Counselors; the towers on the east, the Melchisedek priesthood, those on the west the Aaronic priesthood. The center towers will be higher than those on the sides, and the west towers a little lower than those on the east end.” Angell pointed out that each tower would have twelve pinnacles, symbolizing the Twelve Apostles.

Perhaps the most visible symbol of the Salt Lake Temple is the figure of Moroni atop the east center spire. The twelve-foot hammered copper figure had been prepared in Salem, Ohio, from a model by Utah sculptor Cyrus E. Dallin. Even though Dallin was not a Latter-day Saint, he later professed that “my ‘Angel Moroni’ brought me nearer to God than anything I ever did. It seemed to me that I came to know what it means to commune with angels from heaven.” The gleaming gold-leafed statue was of a heavenly herald sounding his trumpet, representing the latter-day fulfillment of John the Revelator’s prophecy of an angel bringing “the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people” (Revelation 14:6).

Emil Fetzer, who would serve many years as church architect, explained that the figure of Moroni symbolizes “the Savior’s charge to take the gospel throughout the world.” Elder Thomas S. Monson concurred, “The Moroni statue which appears on the top of several of our temples is a reminder to us all that God is concerned for all of His people throughout the world, and communicates with them wherever they may be.” Furthermore, because Moroni is specifically associated with the Book of Mormon (whose announced mission is to convince all that Jesus is the Christ), these herald statues remind us of the Savior and the need to prepare for his second coming.

Eastward Orientation

In ancient times, Israelite temples typically were built so that their main doorways opened toward the east. The rising of the sun announced the new day, symbolizing new beginnings and opportunities. Without artificial illumination, ancient peoples paid much more attention to astronomical features and often attributed special meaning to events in the heavens. The tabernacle of Moses as well as the temple of Solomon in Jerusalem were oriented so that their doors faced toward the east. Donald Parry, an Old Testament scholar, believed that this reflected the Garden of Eden, whose entrance was also toward the east.
In the present dispensation, five of the first six temples built faced the east (only the Nauvoo Temple faced west). This eastward orientation symbolizes watching for the second coming of Christ, which has been likened to the dawning of a new day (see Joseph Smith—Matthew 1:26).

**Sunstones, Moonstones, and Starstones**

Emblematic stones had first been employed to adorn the exterior of the Nauvoo Temple. Each of its thirty pilasters featured a representation of the moon’s face at its base, with a stone depicting the sun as part of the capital. A starstone then appeared on the wall directly above, just below the temple’s cornice (see pp. 2–3). They undoubtedly reminded Latter-day Saints of the three degrees of glory spoken of by Paul and elaborated in latter-day revelation (see 1 Corinthians 15:40–42 and D&C 76). One might question why stars, the symbol for the least of the degrees of glory, were placed at the highest point on the wall. These stones may not symbolize the kingdoms in ascending order, but they do represent the order in nature, the moon being closest to the earth and the stars being the most distant. Questions have been asked about the five-pointed stars with a single point downward. In earlier centuries, this was a common symbol for the Morning Star, which was often associated with the coming of Jesus Christ.

Salt Lake Temple model, showing progression from baptismal font to the celestial room. Photograph courtesy Shirley Smith Ricks.
with the coming of Jesus Christ. They may also depict revelation coming down from above.

Similar symbols were next employed on the Salt Lake Temple, built between 1853 and 1893. Earthstones are at the base of each of the temple’s fifty buttresses. Truman O. Angell explained that these stones represent the need for the gospel to go to all the earth. Moonstones were about halfway up each buttress, and sunstones were near the top. Starstones are found higher up on the temple’s towers. As at Nauvoo, these ornamental stones reminded Latter-day Saints of the three degrees of glory. There is another possible way to look at the meaning of these stones. Referring to Abraham 3:5, Richard Oman, another student of architectural history, pointed out that “as we move upward into the heavens, the time sequences become longer” and that the stones on the Salt Lake Temple do the same. The earth, represented by stones at the temple’s base, rotates once every day. The moon revolves around the earth once each month. The earth and the moon together revolve around the sun, depicted higher on the temple, once each year. The entire solar system revolves around the center of our galaxy . . . in a much longer period of time—approaching eternity.

Proceeding from right to left, the moonstones represent the new, first-quarter, full, and third-quarter phases. The temple’s fifty buttresses approximate the number of these phases during a year. Since this number cannot be divided evenly by the four phases, at some point the cycle around the temple must be interrupted. Architectural historian Mark Hamilton was convinced that this was deliberate. “The specific reason for fifty moon-stones was to create a sequential break to establish the beginning point of the lunar cycle.” This break is found on the temple’s north side. If the date of 1 January is assigned to the new moon immediately after this break, dates can also be assigned to each of the succeeding phases. The first quarter moon on the right buttress of the temple’s main east center tower would thus represent 6 April, commonly regarded by Latter-day Saints as the date of the Savior’s birth. Gold letters higher on the tower identify 6 April as the date the cornerstone was laid in 1853 as well as the date the temple was dedicated in 1893. A full moon is represented on the left buttress of this same tower. Because Easter is celebrated on the Sunday following the first full moon after the beginning of spring, this moonstone may remind us of the Savior’s atoning sacrifice, which was completed with his resurrection.

The constellation of the Big Dipper is depicted on the west center tower in such a way that the two “pointer stars” are aligned with the North Star in the sky. This star appears to be a fixed point in the heavens around which other stars revolve; hence, it
represents the absence of time—that is, it represents eternity.19 Architect Truman O. Angell suggested another meaning of this constellation on the temple—“that through the priesthood of God, the lost might find their way.” Elder Harold B. Lee cited this statement and likened it to the increasingly important role being given to the priesthood in church organization and activities.20

**Lesser-Known Features of the Salt Lake Temple’s Exterior**

The buttresses of the east center tower include cloudstones. These may represent the light of the gospel penetrating the dark clouds of superstition and error (see Isaiah 60:2–3). On the other hand, they may also recall how a brilliant cloud of glory filled the ancient temple (1 Kings 8:10) and will rest upon the latter-day temple in the New Jerusalem (D&C 84:5). Early drawings depicted a hand holding a trumpet penetrating from the cloud, suggesting a representation of the judgment at the time of Christ’s second coming when he will appear in the clouds of heaven (see Acts 1:9–11 and D&C 34:7).

The arch at the top of the lower large window depicts clasped hands. They symbolize brotherly love and fellowship, as well as the unity that must exist among those who would build Zion (see Galatians 2:9; Moses 7:18; D&C 38:24–27; and D&C 88:133). The hands may also represent the importance of honoring sacred commitments. President Gordon B. Hinckley declared that the temple is “a house of covenants. Here we promise, solemnly and sacredly, to live the gospel of Jesus Christ in its finest expression. We covenant with God our Eternal Father to live those principles which are the bedrock of all true religion.”21 Just above the clasped hands, the gilded phrase “I am Alpha and Omega” refers to Christ; these letters from the Greek alphabet are reminders of his being known as the first and the last or the beginning and the end. The arch above the upper large window depicts God’s “All-seeing Eye,” which watches over both the righteous and the wicked (see 1 Kings 9:3; Psalm 33:13–14, 18–19; Proverbs 15:3).22

The stones just below the temple’s battlements feature a circle inside a square. Some have erroneously identified them as “Saturnstones.” Angell’s early plans, however, showed these stones as distinctly different from the stones depicting Saturn. The Saturnstones would appear on the buttresses while the stones with the circles would be on the wall between the buttresses. Hugh Nibley noted that the “squared circle” is a common symbol, the
circle representing the expanse of the heavens, and the square symbolizing the four corners of the earth. Hence these stones appropriately adorn the temple in which ordinances link heaven and earth.23 The temple’s granite exterior likewise suggests permanence and hence is a meaningful symbol for the eternal nature of sacred temple covenants.

Beginning with the Bern Switzerland Temple, the endowment was presented in a single room. Rather than painted murals, motion pictures provided the visual context for the teachings of this ordinance. In recent years, many temples have been built with a two-room sequence.

Subsequent Temples

Other temples built during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries frequently reflect patterns seen in the great Salt Lake Temple. While the Laie Hawaii, Cardston Alberta, and Mesa Arizona Temples were built without towers, temples with a single spire, directing attention upward and symbolizing man’s yearning for heaven, have become more common. However, because the Salt Lake Temple’s pattern of six towers had become so widely recognized, it was employed in the design of the large Washington DC Temple (1974) in order for it to be readily identified as a Latter-day Saint temple. During the following decade, about a dozen smaller temples also featured two sets of three towers.

After the Salt Lake Temple, the next temple to receive a statue of the Angel Moroni was the Los Angeles Temple. The fifteen-foot figure depicting the angel with the gold plates in one hand was placed atop the temple’s tower in October 1954. Two decades later, the third statue of Moroni was hoisted to the top of the Washington DC Temple’s 280-foot east center spire, the tallest on any Latter-day Saint temple. Avard Fairbanks, who sculpted this eighteen-foot figure, imagined how, especially on this particular temple, it represented “the Angel Moroni coming to the world to herald the advent of the latter days.”24 Hence, the church’s largest three temples were all adorned by the angelic figure.

Beginning in the early 1980s, these statues have adorned virtually all new temples, even the smallest. In subsequent years, several other temples that had been built without the statue of Moroni had the angelic figure added to their towers. Thus this statue of the herald angel, first seen on the Salt Lake Temple, has become the recognized symbol of Latter-day Saint temples worldwide.

Early twentieth-century temples continued the Salt Lake Temple’s pattern of a series of instruction rooms adorned with symbolic murals. The Cardston Alberta Temple, noted for its beautiful inlaid woodwork, used increasingly elegant woods in successive rooms to strengthen the symbolism of advancement toward celestial exaltation.

Beginning with the Bern Switzerland Temple, the endowment was presented in a single room. Rather than painted murals, motion pictures provided the visual context for the teachings of this ordinance. In recent years, many temples have been built with a two-room sequence. The first of these rooms is generally adorned with murals depicting scenery typical of the temple’s locale, symbolizing our present telesstial world. The second room customarily features off-white walls, brighter illumination, and some gold highlighting—all suggesting progress toward our heavenly reward.
Other symbols have been employed. A central staircase in the Mesa Arizona Temple, with the celestial room at its top, symbolizes the path leading back to God’s presence. The San Diego California Temple has an unusual number of windows; as one ascends to the sealing rooms where the highest temple blessings are received, the amount of light increases. This symbolizes approaching a fulness of God’s glory, which is characterized by light (D&C 93:36).

Thus the symbolic features of temple buildings can open our understandings to meaningful insights. What Elder John A. Widtsoe said about temple ordinances can profitably be applied to the buildings in which those ordinances are presented: “To the man or woman who goes through the temple, with open eyes, heeding the symbols and the covenants, and making a steady, continuous effort to understand the full meaning, God speaks his word, and revelations come. . . . At the most unexpected moments, in or out of the temple will come to him, as a revelation, the solution of the problems that vex his life.”

Richard O. Cowan received his PhD in history at Stanford University and joined the Religious Education faculty at Brigham Young University in 1961. He teaches a class on Latter-day Saint temples and is the author of Temples to Dot the Earth. A new edition was published by Cedar Fort last year.

NOTES

2. St. George Stake Historical Record, quoted in Petersen, “Kirtland Temple,” 405.
5. Hamilton, Salt Lake Temple, 147.
6. Wilford Woodruff: History of His Life and Labors as Recorded in His Daily Journals, ed. Matthias F. Cowley (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), 620; early published accounts of this event place it on 28 July, but a study of diaries suggests that it actually happened two days earlier.
14. President Gordon B. Hinckley, in “Great Opportunities Really Are Ahead of Us,” Church News, 29 June 2002, remarked on the fact that the Salt Lake and Nauvoo Temples face each other: “I see these two great structures facing each other across a major part of the continent and bonded together in a common purpose for the good and blessing of the work of the Lord.”
EMMA SMITH’S 1841 HYMNBOOK

MICHAEL HICKS

Above: Emma Smith and son David (ca. 1845). Courtesy Church History Library and Archives. Right: Latter-day Saint 1841 hymnbook. Photograph by Mark Philbrick. Courtesy Perry Special Collections, Lee Library, Brigham Young University.
FROM THE EDITOR:

Unofficially we Latter-day Saints sometimes treat our hymnbook as a fifth scriptural volume. After all, as we have been told by the Lord, “the song of the righteous is a prayer unto me” (D&C 25:12). The words of our hymns even occasionally provide the easiest access to some of our more unique LDS doctrines. Yet few of us know the history of our hymnody. In this article, Michael Hicks tells the fascinating tale (at least for this reader) of a juncture in church history when our LDS hymnody stood at a crossroads, with one road leading to our present hymns and the other leading to an unfortunate cul-de-sac.
History

A revelation given to Joseph Smith in July 1830 introduced Emma’s special stewardship in the church: “It shall be given thee also to make a selection of Sacred Hymns as it shall be given thee which is pleasing unto me to be had in my Church for my Soul delighteth in the song of the heart yea the song of the heart righteous is a prayer unto me & it shall be answered with a blessing upon their heads.” She gradually made her selection, which was published in installments in the church newspaper *The Evening and the Morning Star* beginning in 1832—only after Joseph Smith and his associates decided that Emma’s selection should be “corrected” and “revised” by W. W. Phelps, the newspaper’s editor. A hymnbook, if contemplated by that time, seemed to lie in the future.

The book whose publication would surely take precedence over a hymnbook was the Book of Commandments, planned for an edition of 10,000 but later cut to 3,000—a number that itself was thwarted by mobs. The follow-up volume, the Doctrine and Covenants, seems to have been planned with a hymnbook as its sequel: the Doctrine and Covenants came off the press in 1835, the hymnbook in 1836 (despite its imprint date of 1835). The hymnbook contained ninety hymns (texts only), mostly borrowed. One cannot say how much Phelps stamped Emma’s book with his own biases and quirks. But many of the borrowed hymns were indeed altered by him to be more group-oriented (e.g., *I changed to we*) or more millennial (e.g., in “Joy to the World,” the phrase “the Lord is come” changed to “the Lord will come”).

We don’t know the size of the imprint of that first hymnbook, though it was probably less than that of the Doctrine and Covenants, whose print run is also unknown. (We might infer the probable difference by considering the apostles’ decision on their 1840 British mission to print 5,000 copies of the Book of Mormon but only 3,000 of the hymnbook they compiled.) Whatever the number of copies of Emma’s book, circumstantial evidence suggests it was either sold out or in disuse within three years. I say “disuse” because missionaries traveling with books to distribute would have carried copies in the obvious proportions of priority: the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and, last of all, hymnbooks. Even though the Book of Mormon (republished in Kirtland in 1837) and the Doctrine and Covenants (1835) were presumably in higher demand, Emma’s 1835 book was in short supply and by July 1839 could well have been deemed “out of print.” Meanwhile, in 1838 David W. Rogers claimed Jesus had appeared to him in a dream and told him to compile a new Latter-day Saint hymnbook. While the size and title of the book he published implies that it was Emma Smith’s original, Rogers is clearly shown on the title page as the compiler.

At the October 1839 general conference—by which time another unauthorized hymnbook had
also appeared—the same conference resolved “that a new edition of Hymn Books be printed immediately, and that the one published by D. W. Rogers be utterly discarded by the Church.” He, in turn, would have to answer to the Nauvoo High Council. When the high council met on Rogers’s case twenty days later, they voted “that Sister Emma Smith select and publish a hymn-book for the use of the Church, . . . that Brigham Young be informed of this action and he not publish the hymns taken by him from Commerce [Nauvoo],” and that they themselves should assist in publishing Emma’s book.¹¹

Unfortunately, Joseph had already begun going in a different direction, as suggested by the high council’s reference to the hymns taken abroad by Brigham Young. Joseph’s 1839 journal mentions that on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, 8–10 July, he was not only spending most of his time ministering to the sick in the Saints’ new gathering place in Illinois, but also “selecting hymns with the 12.”¹² When the journal entry was published in the History of the Church, the editors expanded the statement to read, “I was with the Twelve selecting hymns, for the purpose of compiling a hymn book.”¹³ The additional clause may seem inconsequential. But with the Twelve about to leave on their mission to the east coast and Great Britain, the issue of publishing a new book of hymns was far from settled.

In a letter dated 22 November 1839, it seems clear that Elder Parley Pratt—whether or not he had heard of the high council’s recent decision to have Emma compile a new book—was not expecting the Twelve to publish its own hymnbook from the mission field but was waiting for a new one from Emma: “There is a great call for hymn-books, but none to be had. I wish Sister Smith would add to the old collection such new ones as is best, and republish them immediately. If means and facilities are lacking in the west, send it here [New York], and it shall be nicely done for her; and at least one thousand would immediately sell in these parts wholesale and retail.” After offering to raise money to publish the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants in the east, Pratt added: “Any hymn-book which Sister Smith or the Church will favor us with, shall also be published on similar conditions.”¹⁴

In his letter of reply, 22 December 1839, Hyrum Smith made it clear that the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and hymnbook should all be published at Nauvoo and then, if non-English versions were needed, the Nauvoo editions could be translated and published elsewhere.¹⁵ The high council, meanwhile, effectively declined Pratt’s offer to publish the book in the east, voting on 29 December 1839 to print 10,000 copies of Emma’s new book “under the inspection of the First Presidency at Nauvoo, so soon as means can be obtained.”¹⁶ Within a few days, Hyrum Smith wrote to his brother Joseph, bringing up Pratt’s request and urging Joseph to get all three books out “under your immediate inspection. I am afraid some have been induced to tarry and assist Parly in these undertakings.”¹⁷

The zeal with which the people of Nauvoo tried to protect Emma’s authority as the church hymnodist came to a head on 6 April 1840, when Thomas Grover preferred charges against David Rogers (who was not present) “for compiling a hymn-book, and selling it as the one compiled and published by Sister Emma Smith.” The next day, though, Rogers was forgiven of his breach.¹⁸

Ten days later in Manchester, England, a council meeting of seven of the Twelve Apostles voted to appoint its own three-member committee to make a selection of hymns—presumably based on the one they had begun with Joseph Smith before leaving on their mission. If there was any ambiguity about whether their selection was to be published
as a book, however, Brigham Young answered that with a decidedly pragmatic argument: “Concerning the hymn-book—when we arrived here, we found the brethren had laid by their old hymn-books, and they wanted new ones; for the Bible, religion, and all is new to them. When I came to learn more about carrying books into the states, or bringing them here, I found the duties were so high that we never should want to bring books from the states.” Making this justification, Young asked no permission to publish their own hymnbook, probably because the issue of Emma’s authority—not to mention the high council’s—would come into play.19

Apostles Orson Hyde and John E. Page, apparently confused about Joseph’s direction regarding the hymnbook, wrote to the Prophet from Ohio on 1 May 1840 concerning their impending mission to Germany. “Should we deem it necessary to publish an edition of Hymn Books in any Country: are we at liberty to do it? The fact is we need such works; and we cannot get them from the Church here; and if we could we could not well carry them with us, in any quantity. . . . We did not convers[e] so much upon these literary works as we should have done before we left.” Part of the problem, Elders Hyde and Page said, was that “we did not begin to see the greatness of our mission before we left home; our minds were in a nutt shell.”20

The Prophet quickly replied. “In answer to your inquiries respecting the translation and publication . . . I would say that I entirely approve of the same; and give my consent, with the exception of the Hymn Book, as a new edition, containing a greater variety of Hymns, will be shortly published or printed in this place; which, I think will be a standard work.” He added that “as soon as it is printed, you shall have some to you, which you may get translated, and printed into any language you please. Should we not be able to send some to you, and there should be a great call for Hymns where you may be; then I should have no objections to your publishing the present one [that is, the 1835 edition]. Were you [to do so] I desire the copy rights of the same to be secured in my name.”21

In the midst of that interchange, on 7 May 1840, Brigham Young wrote the Prophet with a formal request to publish the Book of Mormon and Doctrine and Covenants in England, but not the hymnbook, except perhaps by implication. On 26 May John Taylor arrived in Manchester and joined the hymnbook committee, though the process they would follow was still unclear to him; it seemed to favor Parley Pratt, as Taylor had written to Willard Richards on 4 May 1840:

I am preparing hymns for the book but should be pleased of a little explanation on a sentence dropped in your letter. You say, ‘He Er Young intends to prepare what hymns he can & forward them to Er Pratt.’—Am I to understand that Er Young will prepare what hymns he can & that he wishes me to do the same & forward them to Er Pratt & leave it for Er Pratt to select and Compile the same—or that when we have each made our selections we as a committee meet together & select & compile the hymns—This latter was my view that I had formed of it. I should think that it would be necessary for us to meet because we may all of us have made large selections & the question will be which shall be left out & which shall go in, a question that would be easily decided were we all together.”22

The full committee met 27–30 May and made their collective decisions. By the end of June they had prepared a manuscript for the press with the intent to publish 3,000 copies.23

A small note below Young’s 7 May letter in Smith’s letterbook says that an answer was sent by Lorenzo Snow, authorizing the Twelve to publish books, including the hymnbook. Because of the time delay in receiving Young’s initial request, though, that reply was not sent until 19 July. By then Young had already published the apostles’ new hymnbook and introduced it at a public meeting in Manchester (6 July 1840). The congregation at that meeting voted to receive and approve the new book.24

When he learned of this, Smith apparently wrote a letter to the Twelve scolding them for what they had done. Although the letter seems not to have survived, Brigham Young wrote to his wife about it on 12 November:
Some of Emma’s initial hymn selections were published in installments in The Evening and the Morning Star, as shown here in vol. 1, no. 1, June 1832.

[Joseph] said he had somthings against them, according to what I could learn from the letter it was because we did not write to him upon the subject of printing the hymnbook and the Book of Mormon which we should have been glad to have done if we could, but it did not seem to be possible, all I have to say about the matter as to myself is I have done all that I could to do good and promote the cause that we are in, I have done the very best that I knew how, and I think that Br Joseph will tell us all about things when we return home, there was som of his letter Blotted out But I think we understood it by what we could read of the part blotted out, you may read this letter to Br Joseph or not just as you please, but tell him at ennyrate to say what he wants me to do and I will try and do it the Lord will.

Nevertheless, before Young wrote that November letter, Joseph had received a copy of the hymnbook and on 19 October 1840 reversed his position, writing to the apostles: “In my former epistle I told you my mind respecting the printing of the Book of Mormon, Hymn Book &c &c I have been favored by receiving a Hymn Book from you, and as far as I have examined it I highly approve of it, and think it to be a very valuable Collection.” And indeed, as we shall see, the evidence shows that Emma Smith would rely on it in her new compilation.

At the church’s general conference on 4 October 1840, Ebenezer Robinson had given an account of the work in progress at Kirtland, including the printing of the hymnbook. The following year, at the conference on 26 July 1841, Young announced that the Kirtland Press was now producing the Book of Mormon, and at the conference on 7 October 1841, he reported that the first edition of the Hymn Book was completed and that the Kirtland Press was now printing the Book of Mormon. 

**HARKEN, O ye Gentiles, and hear the words of Joseph Chace, the son of the living God, which he has commanded me that I should speak concerning you: For I beheld in my vision that I should write, saying, Turn all to Gentiles from your wicked ways, and repent of all your evil ways, and direct your thoughts, and your wills, and your purposes, and your deeds, and your monitions, and your solemnities, and your revelations, and your stewardships, and your oracles, and your systems, and your policies, and your purposes, and your directions, and all these are written in your books, that ye may receive a remission of your sins, and be fitted with the Holy Ghost, and ye may be grounded with my people, which are the house of Israel.”**
recent publication of the Book of Mormon at Nauvoo and said that arrangements had now been made for printing Emma’s new hymnbook. He soon left for Cincinnati to buy paper and other materials for printing and binding. When he returned, he wrote a starkly headlined article—“HYMNS!! HYMNS!!”—for the Times and Seasons, of which he was editor. He wrote that he had the physical makings of the hymnbook but now (1 November) needed content for a new selection of Hymns which have so long been desired by the saints, [of which] we contemplate commencing the work immediately; and feeling desirous to have an extensive, and valuable book; it is requested that all those who have been endowed with a poetical genius, whose muse has not been altogether idle, will feel enough interest in a work of this kind, to immediately forward all choice, newly composed or revised hymns. In designating those who are endowed with a Poetical genius, we do not intend to exclude others; we mean all who have good hymns that will cheer the heart of the righteous man, to send them as soon as practicable, directed to Mrs. Emma Smith, Nauvoo, Ill. Post Paid.27

What must have struck many who read this plea was the absence of any reference to the apostles’ hymnbook, of which many must have been aware in a city now swelling with the inflow of British immigrants. Emma herself—via Joseph—must have had one; Brigham Young himself was anxious to know that she did as of January 1841.

The character of Emma’s new hymnbook would depend largely on what hymns she added. But before looking at those, we should look at what hymns she deleted. As to why she deleted them we should be cautious. One deletes for various reasons. Sometimes a hymnbook compiler’s personal preference may be enough to omit hymns that a book once included. Sometimes hymn texts turn out to be awkward, hard to fit to a tune. Sometimes hymns fall into disuse—if nobody wants to sing them, perhaps it is time to delete them to make way for potentially more popular ones. And sometimes the message is off or, in the case of LDS doctrine, has been superseded by new revelation. All such reasons may have led Emma to remove eleven hymns from the ninety in her earlier book.

Four of these the apostles had also removed in their 1940 book. The reasons seem clear. “There’s a Power in the Sun” was perhaps a bit too mystical for the Saints, referring continually to the divine presence in nature but mentioning God as such only in the last line of each verse, “Oh behold the Lord is nigh.” “Through All This World Below” is similar in its descriptions of “natural divinity” and was in fact too overtly Trinitarian to remain in the hymnbook. “There Is a Land the Lord Will Bless” (a rewrite of Isaac Watts’s “There Is a Land of Pure Delight”) not only was awkward at times (e.g., “joy” rhymed with “Destroy!” [the latter term in italics]) but also probably seemed obsolete since it dwelled on the Saints’ gathering to Missouri. The fourth hymn deleted from both hymnbooks was “When Earth was Dress’d in Beauty,” an anomalous text that Phelps had written for his wife to celebrate their marriage (and perhaps reassure her of its durability). This hymn constituted the only hymn in the section marked “On Marriage.” Both the hymn and the section were cut from both hymnbooks.

But Emma removed seven more hymns that the apostles retained. Allow me to speculate on her motives. The opening line of “God Spake the Word and Time Began” seemed at odds with Joseph’s in-
creasingly “eternalist” perspective, in which God, though perhaps outside of time, did not necessarily create it. “There’s a Feast of Fat Things,” a hymn celebrating the feasts of the poor at Kirtland, may now have seemed obsolete, a relic. “When Restless on My Bed I Lie” was weak: it is essentially a hymn about insomnia. Two hymns may have been deleted because of the awkwardness of their meters. The boldly millennialistic “Let All the Saints Their Hearts Prepare” seems especially well suited in text to the apostles’ missionary emphasis: cultivating a people ready for God’s kingdom; and “The Lord into His Garden Comes” seems especially attuned to what seem Emma’s predilections, with its celebration of the individual soul’s intimate relationship with Christ. But one would have a hard time finding suitable tunes for them. Concerning the deletion of “Jesus the Name That Charms Our Fears,” I can find no plausible rationale.

One deletion Emma uniquely made is telling. Phelps had rewritten Isaac Watts’s “He Dies, the Friend of Sinners Dies” into “He Died, the Great Redeemer Died.” Here are their respective first verses:

**Watts**

He dies! the Friend of sinners dies!
Lo! Salem’s daughters weep around;
A solemn darkness veils the skies,
A sudden trembling shakes the ground.

**Phelps**

He died; the great Redeemer died,
And Israel’s daughters wept around;
A solemn darkness veiled the sky,
A sudden trembling shook the ground.

Phelps, of course, moves the lyric from the vividness of the present tense to the past and also throws out the idea that Jesus is “the Friend of sinners.” By discarding Phelps’s version and adding back Watts’s original, Emma seems to be retrenching to Protestant language and the heavenly grace it implies.

One more case we should mention is a little more complicated. While Phelps’s popular “Redeemer of Israel” remains in the 1841 volume, it is omitted from the index. Thus, if anyone were looking for it by name it would not appear, seemingly cut from the collection. (This is the only hymn that appears in the book but not in the index.) What does appear in both the index and the book is the model Phelps used for writing “Redeemer of Israel”: Joseph Swain’s “O Thou in Whose Presence My Soul Takes Delight.” Swain’s hymn is in the first-person singular, reflecting on the singer’s joy in his Savior:

O thou in whose presence
My soul takes delight,
On whom in affliction I call:
My comfort by day
And my song in the night,
My hope, my salvation, my all!

Where dost Thou at noon-tide
Resort with Thy sheep,
To feed on the pastures of love;
For why in the valley
Of death should I weep,
Or alone in the wilderness rove?

Oh, why should I wander
An alien from Thee,
And cry in the desert for bread?
Thy foes will rejoice
When my sorrows they see,
And smile at the tears I have shed.

Phelps’s massive rewrite had made the song a first-person plural praise song for the coming redemption of Zion and her people:

Redeemer of Israel, our only delight,
On whom for a blessing we call,
Our shadow by day, and our pillar by night,
Our King, our Deliverer, our all!

We know he is coming, to gather his sheep
And lead them to Zion in love,
For why in the valley of death should they weep
Or in the lone wilderness rove?

How long we have wandered as strangers in sin,
And cried in the desert for thee!
Our foes have rejoiced when our sorrows
they’ve seen,
But Israel will shortly be free.

I believe that Emma had been drawn to Swain’s song in the first harvest of Mormon hymns in the 1830s, only to have it replaced by Phelps’s new version. As good as his was, she wanted the original back as part of a more privately worshipful collection. The reintroduction of “O Thou in Whose Presence” into Emma’s 1841 hymnbook suggests the overall tone of retrenchment in that volume.

The apostles’ Manchester book had 108 new hymns that did not appear in Emma’s book. Emma’s had 141 new hymns that did not appear in theirs.
Both books had many new hymns by Protestant authors and some new hymns by LDS authors. In appendix 2 we see an alphabetical listing of all the hymns in Emma's 1841 volume, with the ones retained from her 1835 volume distinguished from the ones added to her 1841 edition, giving special attention to the new ones found only in hers and not in the apostles' book.

The LDS hymn author who looms largest among the new LDS hymns in both books is one of the apostles who edited the Manchester volume, indeed the one who seemed most in charge of the project: Parley P. Pratt, who contributed at least thirty-six new hymns to that volume. Pratt’s themes mirrored those of his missionary tracts: the second coming, the kingdom of God, the millennium, the people of God, priesthood, and the apostleship. Emma used one-third of those new Pratt hymns in her collection (and no other new ones by Pratt), including several that have become classics (e.g., “Jesus, Once of Humble Birth,” “The Morning Breaks, the Shadows Flee”). But while Pratt’s influence on both books cannot be overestimated, Emma’s collection turned more to other authors, mostly Protestant.

Of the 141 new hymns Emma included that the apostles did not, 83 were borrowed from known Protestant sources; at least a dozen more whose sources I cannot find also seem to come from mainstream Protestantism. That is understandable, of course—the Saints were still far from creating an indigenous hymnody, even if they wanted to. And Protestant hymns had a wide range of themes, many not unlike Pratt’s, including the kingdom of God, the second coming, and so forth—though not priesthood or apostleship, for obvious reasons. More often, though, Protestant hymns also featured praise, confession, and the search for comfort. That is, they leaned toward the believer’s personal relationship with Christ or meditations on how he and his atonement have affected the individual singer.

With that in mind, I’d like to dwell on three specific themes that help color the character of Emma’s collection, giving it more of a Protestant revivalist air: the cross, the blood of Jesus, and grace.31

### The Cross

In all his published doctrinal writings and addresses, Joseph Smith almost always refers to “the cross” only in its literal sense of the specific object on which Jesus was hung to die.32 The two exceptions are (1) when he says, “I can go to the cross—I can lay down my life,” and (2) when he vaguely alludes to Catholic doctrine thus: “tis not the cross as the Catholics would have it”—a statement whose context is unclear but that seems a critique of traditional Christian emphasis on the cross as a symbol.33 Emma’s 1835 hymnbook uses the term similarly to Joseph, referring only to “the cross” in its literal sense or, one time, in this analogy: “If we, like Jesus, bear the cross— / Like him despise the shame.”34 In other words, “the cross” is the burden of being a follower of Christ. In her 1841 book, though, Emma begins to employ “the cross” as Protestants (after Paul the apostle) commonly did. That is, “the cross” connotes God’s plan of redemption.

Thus in hymn 65, “Great Was the Day, the Joy Was Great,” the first verse describes the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The second
and third verses lead to the impending mission of Jesus's twelve apostles—spreading “the myst’ry of his cross”:

What gifts, what miracles he gave!
And power to kill, and pow’r to save!
Furnish’d their tongues with wond’rous words,
Instead of shields, and spears, and swords.

Thus arm’d, he sent the champions forth,
From east to west, from south to north;
“Go, and assert your Savior’s cause;
Go, spread the myst’ry of his cross.”

Then the fifth verse gives the devil’s response and decidedly turns “the cross” into a “doctrine”:

The Greeks and Jews, the learn’d and rude,
Are by these heav’nly arms subdu’d;
While Satan rages at his loss,
And hates the doctrine of the cross.

The sense of “the cross” as the Christian mission also appears in hymn 257, which begins with a self-interrogatory about the singer’s valiance:

Am I a soldier of the cross,
A follower of the Lamb?
And shall I fear to own his cause,
Or blush to speak his name?

If these new usages of “the cross” seem incidental, new references to “the blood of Jesus” are more potent.

The Blood of Jesus

Joseph Smith never referred to the “blood of Jesus” as such in his doctrinal writings and speeches. Although it was not uncommon for him to refer to “blood,” he did so almost always in the context of any of three themes: (1) the shedding of innocent blood as a grievous sin, (2) the blood of Abraham or related blood as a genetic or covenantal marker, and (3) the spilling of the blood of the righteous in persecution (or specifically his enemies’ “thirst” for his blood). The 1835 hymnbook mentions Jesus’s blood most often in connection with the sacrament or in questions such as “Alas! And did my Savior bleed” (hymn 61) or “And did my Savior die / and shed his blood for me?” (hymn 64). The closest it comes to invoking the transformative power of Jesus’s blood is in the sixth verse of hymn 67: “His blood can make the foulest clean.”

The 1841 hymnbook vividly elevates the blood of Jesus in its imagery, aligning it with the rhetoric of camp-meeting preachers. One example is referring to his flowing blood as the “crimson tide” in this stanza from hymn 185:

Stretched on the cross, the Savior dies;
Hark!—his expiring groans arise!
See, from his hands—his feet—his side,
Descends the sacred—crimson tide!

In this Christian favorite (hymn 176), we find his blood as an overflowing fountain in an extended metaphor connected to “redeeming love”:

There is a fountain fill’d with blood,
Pour’d from Immanuel’s veins;
And sinners plung’d beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoic’d to see
That fountain in his day;
And there have I, though vile as he,
Wash’d all my sins away.

O Lamb of God! thy precious blood
Shall never lose its pow’r
Till all the ransom’d sons of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

E’er since by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply.
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

The idea of washing the soul in his blood occurs again in hymn 66:

To him that lov’d the sons of men,
And wash’d us in his blood,
To royal honors rais’d our hands,
And made us priests to God.

Still another hymn (hymn 52) contrasts the power of Jesus’s blood with that of the sacrificial animals in earlier times:

Not all the blood of beasts,
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace
Or wash away the stain.

But Christ, the Heavenly Lamb,
Bears all our sins away;
A sacrifice of nobler name,
And richer blood than they.
Hymn 110 treats the blood of Jesus as a source of both comfort and joy as well as a link to God’s “fulness”:

This comfort is mine,
Since the favor divine
I have found in the blood of the Lamb;
Since the truth I believ’d,
What a joy I’ve receiv’d,
What a heaven in Jesus’ bless’d name!

O the rapturous height
Of this holy delight,
Which I feel in the life-giving blood!
Of my Savior possess’d,
I am perfectly bless’d,
Being filled with the fulness of God!

Hymn 245 suggests that the blood of Jesus allows saints to conquer.

Rise, O my soul—pursue the path
By ancient worthies trod;
Aspiring, view those holy men
Who liv’d and walk’d with God.

Though dead, they speak in reason’s ear,
And in example live;
Their faith, and hope, and mighty deeds,
Still fresh instruction give.

’Twas thro’ the Lamb’s most precious blood,
They conquered every foe;
To his almighty power and grace,
Their crowns of life they owe.

Lord, may I ever keep in view
The patterns thou hast given,
And ne’er forsake the blesséd road,
That led them safe to heav’n.

I have included the entire text here for its eloquence as well as its appeal to the last of our three ideas, grace.

Grace

The word grace appears many times in the 1835 hymnbook. Occasionally it has glowing adjectives attached—heav’nly, wond’rous, bounteous, free, and all-sufficient. The idea of grace rises high in three phrases: “the triumph of his grace,” “the gospel of grace,” and “my faith and hope relies / upon thy grace alone.” In all his recorded doctrinal statements, Joseph never qualifies grace with superlatives or exultant modifiers. Nor does he make salvation reliant “upon thy grace alone.” Instead, he tends to use the term in a relatively generic sense, referring simply to “God’s grace,” “divine grace,” or, on the negative side, “falling from grace.”

But many hymns unique to the 1841 hymnbook revel in the principle of grace. Fresh elocutions appear: “wonders of his grace,” “riches of his grace,” “God’s redeeming grace,” “boundless grace,” “the power of sovereign grace,” “the treasures of his grace”—these all being gifts of Jesus, who is called “the prince of grace” (see below). Some hymns emphasize grace in distinct, sometimes unprecedented ways. In this hymnbook, for example, the message of the church is not so much the restoration of the gospel (as in the apostles’ hymnbook) but “proclaiming grace,” as in hymn 175:

Proclaim, says Christ, my wond’rous grace
To all the sons of men;
He that believes and is immers’d,
Salvation shall obtain.

Let plenteous grace descend on those,
Who, hoping in the word,
This day have publicly declar’d,
That Jesus is their Lord.

With cheerful feet may they advance,
And run the Christian race:
And, through the troubles of the way,
Find all sufficient grace.

Another newly added hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” (hymn 76), begins thus:

Come thou fount of ev’ry blessing,
Tune my heart to sing thy grace;
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of loudest praise.

The next verse emphasizes grace and the singer’s propensity to stray:

Oh! to grace how great a debtor
Daily I’m constrain’d to be!
Let thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my wand’ring heart to thee!
Prone to wander—Lord, I feel it—
Prone to leave the God I love;
Here’s my heart—O take and seal it—
Seal it for thy courts above.

Hymn 60 is an extended meditation on grace, particularly as it arises from Jesus’s empathy:

With joy we meditate the grace
Of our High Priest above;
His heart is made of tenderness,  
His bowels melt with love.

Touch’d with a sympathy within,  
He knows our feeble frame;  
He knows what sore temptations mean,  
For he has felt the same.

He, in the days of feeble flesh,  
Pour’d out his cries and tears,  
And in his measure feels afresh  
What ev’ry member bears.

Then let our humble faith address  
His mercy and his pow’r;  
We shall obtain deliv’ring grace  
In each distressing hour.

Still another hymn (hymn 57) emphasizes the low state of sinners whom Jesus redeems through his grace:

Plunge’d in a gulf of dark despair,  
We wretched sinners lay,  
Without one cheerful beam of hope,  
Or spark of glimmering day!

With pitying eyes the prince of grace  
Beheld our helpless grief:  
He saw—and—O amazing love!—  
He came to our relief.

References to “amazing love” and “wretched sinners,” of course, draw the mind to that most beloved of grace songs, here included as hymn 118.

Amazing grace! (how sweet the sound,)  
That saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,—  
Was blind, but now I see.

’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
And grace my fears reliev’d;  
How precious did that grace appear;  
The hour I first believ’d!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come;  
’Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
And grace will lead me home.

Such hymns, moving back toward revivalist language and sentiment, seem almost at odds with the boldly millennialist, restored-gospel language that characterizes the apostles’ hymnbook.35

Conclusion

At the October 1841 general conference of the church, Emma’s hymnbook was the one used. In total, ten different hymns were sung (two of them twice). Of those ten, three had appeared in the 1835 hymnbook, six were in both the Manchester book and Emma’s, and one was unique to Emma’s. When the new Relief Society began to meet in 1842, Emma was the president. The minutes show that her hymnbook, not surprisingly, was the source of the hymns.

In 1843 the Times and Seasons included a notice that read: “SACRED HYMNS. Persons having Hymns adapted to the worship of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, are requested to hand them, or send them to Emma Smith, immediately.” If yet another hymnbook were in the works, it never came to be—or at least not till Emma and the apostles severed ties after Joseph died.36 The split between Emma and the Twelve may have been aggravated by contentions over the hymnbook. But the roots of the split, of course, went deeper. By 1841 Joseph’s relationship with the Twelve had grown very close, with Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball as his special favorites. But at this time there were clearly things that Joseph shared with the Twelve that he kept from Emma (or that she rejected). Meanwhile, as the letters involving the British hymnbook reveal, Joseph seems to have been triangulating the matter, seemingly supporting Emma’s purview to determine the church’s hymnody but still approving Brigham’s independent production as “highly valuable.” The 1841 hymnbook almost seems a concession to Emma, a counterweight to the apostles’
book, if not a new incentive to her to remain faithful despite the rise of polygamy in her and her friends' households.

Other conflicts between Emma and Brigham Young not only illuminate the divide in hymn traditions but may also suggest why she slanted her hymnbook’s character in the direction she did. Increasingly isolated from new doctrine and the seats of its authority, she would resonate to familiar hymns of personal solace and the intimate, graceful Savior instead of the bold, millennialistic, group-oriented hymns of, say, Parley Pratt, with their penchant for the newness of the fresh dispensation rather than the comforts of the ancient one being restored. In 1853 the *Millennial Star* noted that in the last dispensation “God will send forth, by His servants, things new as well as old, until man is perfected in the truth.” Over time it became clear that in her hymnody Emma tended toward the old, at least when it came to familiar revivalist themes and rhetoric.

It may be too much to infer details of Emma’s heart from her choices in this book. On the other hand, one cannot help wondering how great a loss the church suffered with the loss of Emma’s heart. When the Twelve left Nauvoo and the Smith family stayed behind, the official hymnbook of what we now know as “the church” would be the apostles’ hymnbook, not Emma Smith’s. And that, in effect, eradicated the old direction toward which Emma was coaxing Mormon hymnody.

Hymns flavor our worship. They also color our perception of orthodoxy. Again and again, the character of the hymns we sing asks us: What are the themes that shape our worship? What are the doctrines that, whatever their place in the scriptural canon, get distilled into memorable phrases and, through repetition, saturate our minds? In the case of the 1841 hymnbook, then, we may also ask: had Emma Smith left Nauvoo with the Twelve and resumed her place as the overseer of Mormon hymnody, how different might the character of Mormon worship now be? ■

---

**Appendix 1**

Hymnbooks through 1845 (not including multiple printings)


Young, Brigham, Parley P. Pratt, and John Taylor. *A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Europe*. Manchester: Thomas, 1840. 271 hymns (one printed twice).


---

Composer, scholar, and poet **Michael Hicks** is the author of four books [all published by University of Illinois Press], including *Mormonism and Music: A History*. His historical and analytical articles have appeared in dozens of books and journals, including *American Musicological Society*, and *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. From 2007 to 2010 he was the editor of the journal *American Music*. 
Appendix 2

All hymns in Emma Smith’s 1841 Nauvoo hymnbook appear here, using their first lines (as given in the index, with alphabetization modernized) as titles. Italicized titles are those that appeared in her 1835 hymnbook before appearing in her 1841 collation. All others had not appeared in either the 1835 or 1840 hymnbooks.

Adieu, my dear brethren adieu,
Adieu to the city, where long I, &c.
Alas! and did my Savior bleed!
All hail the power of Jesus’ name!
Am I a soldier of the cross
Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
An angel came down from the &c.
An angel on high
And am I born to die?
And are we yet alive
And did my Savior die
And must this body die?
Angels! roll the rock away
Arise! arise! with joy survey
Arise great God and let thy grace
Arise in all thy splendor Lord
Arise my soul, arise
Awake and sing the song
Awake! for the morning is come
Awake my soul and with the sun
Awake O ye people the Savior is, &c,
Awake! ye saints of God awake!
Awake ye that slumber
Away my unbelieving fears

Be it my only wisdom here
Before Jehovah’s awful throne
Before this earth from chaos sprung
Begin my soul the exalted lay
Begin my tongue the heavenly theme
Begone unbelief my Savior is near
Behold the day so long expected
Behold the day that we may dwell
Glorious things are sung of Zion
Glorious things of thee are spoken
Glorious things of thee are spoken
Go, ye messengers of glory
Go, ye messengers of heaven
God moves in a mysterious way
God moves in a mysterious way
Great God attend while Zion sings
Great God indulge my humble claim
Great God to thee my evening song
Great is the Lord in the city of Zion
Great is the Lord: ‘tis good to praise
Great King of glory come
Great was the day the joy was great
Guide us O thou great Jehovah

Hail the bluest morn when the great
Hail the day so long expected
Hail to the Lord’s anointed
Hail to the Prince of life and peace
Happy the man that finds the grace
Hark! from the tombs a joyful sound
Hark! Hark! the notes of joy
Hark! how the watchmen cry

Hark! listen to the trumpeters
Hark! the glad sound the Savior’s, &c.
Hark the song of Jubilee
Hark the voice of love and mercy
Hark what mean these holy voices
He comes! he comes the Judge
He dies the friend of sinners dies
He lives the everlasting God
He reigns, the Lord the Savior reigns
Hear the royal proclamation
Hear what God the Lord has spoken
Heaven has confirm’d the dread, &c.
Here at thy table Lord we meet
Ho! every one that thirsts draw nigh
How are thy servants blest! O Lord
How beauteous are their feet
How firm a foundation ye saints
How foolish to the carnal mind
How happy are the little flock
How happy are they
How happy every child of grace
How happy gracious Lord are we
How often in sweet meditation
How pleasant how divinely fair
How pleasant ‘tis to see
How pleased and blest was I
How pleasing to behold and see
How will the saints rejoice to tell

I know that my Redeemer lives
I love the Lord he heard my cry
I’ll praise my maker while I’ve, &c.
In ancient days days men fear’d
In ancient times a man of God
In Jordan’s tide the prophet stands
In pleasure sweet here we do meet

Jehovah reigns, O glorious King
Jehovah reigns your tributes bring Jesus! and shall it ever be,
Jesus from whom all blessings flow
Jesus mighty King in Zion
Jesus my glorious light appears
Jesus once of humble birth
Jesus shall reign wher’e the sun
Jesus thou all redeeming Lord
Jesus we hail thy Israel’s King
Joy to the world the Lord will come

Kingdoms and thrones to God belong
Know then that every soul is free

Let earth and heaven agree
Let every mortal ear attend
Let sinners take their course
Let us pray gladly pray
Let Zion in her beauty rise
Life is a span a fleeting hour
Lift up your heads eternal gates
Lo! he comes with clouds descending
Lo! on the waters brink we stand
Lo! the mighty God appearing
Lord in the morning thou shalt hear
Lord thou hast searched and seen
Lord thou wilt hear me when I pray
Lord visit thy forsaken race
Lord we come before thee now
Lord what a thoughtless wretch
Lord what our ears have heard

Mortals awake! with angels join
My God how endless is thy love
My God I am thine what a comfort
My God the spring of all my joys
My soul come meditate the day
My soul is full of peace and love

Never does truth more shine
Nor eye hath seen, nor ear hath
Not all the blood of beasts
Now let our mournful songs record
Now the truth once more appears
Now we'll sing with one accord
O God our help in ages past
O God the eternal Father
O God, thou good, thou great, &c.
O happy souls who pray
O Jesus! the giver
O Lord our Father let thy grace
O Lord our Father let thy grace
O stop and tell me Red Man
O thou, in whose presence
O thou, to whose all searching sight
O thou, to whose all searching sight
O Zion tune thy voice
O Lord, through every changing
Oh! for a shout of sacred joy
On Jordan's stormy banks I stand
On the mountains top appearing
Once more my soul the rising day
Once more we've met to worship
Our Lord is risen from the dead

Plung'd in a gulf of dark despair
Praise God from whom all blessing
Praise ye God immortal praise
Praise ye the Lord my heart shall, &c.
Praise ye the Lord, 'tis good to, &c.
Proclaim says Christ my wonderful

Redeemer of Israel
Reform and be immers'd
Rejoice! ye saints of latter days
Repent ye Gentiles all
Return O God of love return
Rise O my soul pursue the path
Roll on thou mighty ocean!

Salem's bright King Jesus by name
Salvation! O the joyful sound!
See all creation join
See how the morning sun
See the mighty angel flying
Shepherd divine our wants relieve
Sing to the Lord Jehovah's praise
Sitting by the streams that glide
Soon as I heard my Father say
Sound the loud timbrel o'er Egypt
Stretched on a cross the Savior dies
Sweet is thy work my God my King

Talk with us Lord, thyself reveal
That awful day will surely come
The day is past and gone
The flow'ry spring at God's command
The gallant ship is under weigh
The glorious day is drawing nigh
The glorious day is rolling on [repeated with different hymn no.]
The great and glorious gospel light
The happy day has rolled on [repeated with different hymn no.]
The King of heaven his table spreads
The Lord my pasture shall prepare
The morning breaks, the shadows
The morning flowers display their
The praise of Zion waits for thee
The rising sun has chased the night
The Savior lives, no more to die
The spacious firmament on high
The Spirit of God like a fire is
The sun that declines in the far
The time is far spent there is little
The time is nigh that happy time
The time long appointed is now
The towers of Zion soon shall rise
The trump of Israel's jubal' year
There is a fountain fill'd with blood
There is a land of pure delight
There is an hour of peaceful rest
Think mighty God on feeble man
This earth shall be a blessed place
This earth was once a garden place
This God is the God we adore
This is the day the Lord has made
Thou Lord, through every changing
Thou sweet gliding Cedron, by thy
Though in the outward church
Though now the nations sit beneath
Through every age eternal God
Thus was the great Redeemer
Thy beautiful garments O Zion
Thy goodness Lord how great
Thy mercy my God, is the theme
Thy word, O my God, I delight
To Father, Son, and Holy Ghost

To him that lov'd the sons of men
To him that made the world
To leave my dear friends, and from
Triumphant Zion lift thy head
Truth reflects upon our senses
'Twas on that dark, that solemn
'Twas on that night when doomed
'Twas the commission of our Lord

Unveil thy bosom faithful tomb
Vital spark of heavenly flame

Watchman tell us of the night
We have met dear friends, &c.
We're not ashamed to own the Lord
What fair one is this from the
What though no flowers the fig-tree
What wondrous things we now
When all thy mercies O my God
When I can read my title clear
When I survey the wonderous cross
When Israel out of Egypt came
When Joseph his brethren beheld
When shall we all meet again
When the great Judge supreme
When the King of Kings comes
When youth and age are snatch'd
While humble shepherds watch'd
Who are these array'd in white
Why do we mourn for dying friends
Why should the children of a King
Why should we start and fear to die
With all my powers of heart
With Israel's God who can compare
With joy we meditate the grace

Ye ransomed of the Lord
Ye slumbering nations who have
Ye who are called, &c.
Ye, who in his courts are found
Yes mighty Jesus thou shalt reign
Yes my native land land [sic] I love thee
Yes the Redeemer rose
Yes! we trust the day is breaking
Zion's noblest sons are weeping
NOTES


2. Sidney Rigdon, comp., A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Pittsburgh: [Ebenzer] Robinson, 1845), iv. It is not clear to what hymnbook he was contrasting his own.


4. This is from a transcript of the Book of Commandments holograph copy found at http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/revelation-july-1830%E2%80%93c-dc-25#2 (accessed 4 July 2011).


7. The dating issue is treated in Crawley, Descriptive Bibliography, 59.


10. See the preface to David W. Rogers, A Collection of Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints (New York: Vinten, 1838).


13. History of the Church, 4:3.


15. Hyrum Smith to Parley P. Pratt, 22 December 1839, Joseph Smith Collection, box 2, folder 2, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter Church History Library).

16. History of the Church, 4:49.

17. Hyrum Smith to Joseph Smith and Elias Higbee, 2 January 1840, Joseph Smith Collection, box 2, folder 2, Church History Library.


19. History of the Church, 4:120.

20. Orson Hyde and John E. Page to Joseph Smith, 1 May 1840, Joseph Smith Collection, box 2, folder 2, Church History Library.

21. Joseph Smith to Orson Hyde and John E. Page, 14 May 1840, Joseph Smith Collection, box 2, folder 2, Church History Library.

22. John Taylor Papers (typescript), box 1, book 1, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah; original spelling and punctuation retained in quotations.

23. Parley P. Pratt to Brigham Young, 4 May 1840, Brigham Young Papers, box 41, folder 11, Church History Library.


25. Brigham Young to Mary Ann Angell Young, 12 November 1840, Philip Blair Papers, box 1, folder 6, University of Utah.

26. Joseph Smith to Traveling High Council and Elders, 19 October 1840, Joseph Smith Collection, box 2, folder 2, Church History Library.

27. “HYMNS!! HYMNS!!” Times and Seasons 2 (1 November 1840): 204.


29. History of the Church, 4:326.


31. These themes, I should note, form constellations, not conglomerations. That is, there is no overwhelming mass of new hymns with these themes, but notably strong exemplars—points of light from which I infer images of the hymnbook’s distinct character.

32. This and all other statements about Joseph’s usage are based on a search of Truman G. Madsen, ed., Concordance of Doctrinal Statements of Joseph Smith (Salt Lake City: I.E.S., 1985).

33. The quotations are from Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Accounts of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph Smith (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1980), 376 and 239, respectively.

34. In “The glorious day is rolling on,” from Smith, A Collection of Sacred Hymns (1835), 93–94.


FROM THE EDITOR:

What value do computerized studies of author styles contribute to the polemics and irenics that seem to perpetually swirl around the Book of Mormon? In this article, authors Roper, Fields, and Schaalje take a few short steps back to take a long look at what such studies can and cannot contribute, including the latest twist, nearest shrunken centroid (NSC) classification. The authors present eight serious flaws with the NSC study and then offer the results of their recent study using extended nearest shrunken centroid (ENSC) classification, which overcomes those flaws. Long-time readers of FARMS publications and those of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute will enjoy this short history.
Claims about the authorship of the Book of Mormon have a history as long as the book has been around. To discredit Joseph Smith's description of the book's origin, skeptics started proposing theories about who had written it even before it was published in 1830.¹ In 1834 Eber Howe proposed the Spalding-Rigdon theory of Book of Mormon authorship,² which asserts that Sidney Rigdon plagiarized an unpublished fictional work by Solomon Spalding to produce the Book of Mormon. He made this assertion even though the Book of Mormon was printed before Rigdon joined the church. Similar allegations and variations on that theme continue today, despite solid historical evidence that the theory is a baseless fabrication.³ Another way to look for evidence that supports or does not support specific claims of authorship is to examine the writing styles in a text, specifically by identifying word-use patterns. In this article, we look at the strengths and weaknesses of various word studies that have attempted to determine who wrote the Book of Mormon. We conclude with the results of our own study of Book of Mormon authorship.

Stylometry

When reading a written text, a reader may often identify words and phrases that seem to ring with a familiar voice, such that he or she may say, “This sounds like it was written by Mark Twain (or Ernest Hemingway or William Shakespeare).” But this is a very subjective judgment. On the other hand, stylometry, also known as computational stylistics, is a method of authorship attribution that uses far less subjective criteria—namely, statistical techniques—to infer the authorship of texts based on writing patterns. It tries to describe an author's conscious and unconscious creative actions with quantifiable measures such as the frequency with which an author uses certain words or groupings of words.

Stylometric analysis is based on the fundamental premise that authors write with distinctive, repeated patterns of word use. According to English professor John Burrows, written texts have a particular style and inherently display the intellectual propensities of their authors.⁴ By identifying the word-use patterns in a text of unknown or questioned authorship and then comparing and contrasting those patterns to the patterns in texts of known authorship, the similarities and dissimilarities between the textual patterns can provide supporting evidence for or contradicting evidence against an assertion of authorship.

Anonymous writing, plagiarism, and the consequent debates about the authorship of texts have a long history. . . . Ancient catalogs of Aristotelian writings disagree . . . as to which works Aristotle actually wrote.

Anonymous writing, plagiarism, and the consequent debates about the authorship of texts have a long history, perhaps extending back to the advent of writing itself. For example, three ancient catalogs of Aristotelian writings disagree with each other as to which works Aristotle actually wrote.⁵ The authorship of Shakespeare's plays has been a topic of extensive debate and research,⁶ as has the authorship of the biblical epistles historically attributed to the apostle Paul.⁷ In the sixteenth century in England and Wales, a series of anonymous religious writings known as the Martin Marprelate tracts generated a great deal of controversy, including speculation about their authorship.⁸ Common Sense, published anonymously by Thomas Paine in January 1776, was the most influential tract of the American Revolution and became an instant best seller, both in the colonies and in Europe. To promote ratification of the United States Constitution, eighty-five short essays signed with the pseudonym “Publius” were published during 1787–88 in various New York City newspapers. They were later reprinted collectively as The Federalist. Although it was revealed in 1807 that the essays had been written by Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, the specific authorship of twelve essays remained in dispute for over 150 years until statistical analyses would show strong support for Madison as their author.⁹
A Brief History of Stylometry

The use of statistical tools to test questions of authorship in such situations goes back at least to 1851, when mathematician Augustus de Morgan proposed using average word length to numerically characterize authorship style.10 In 1887 Thomas Mendenhall, a physicist, proposed that an author has a “characteristic curve of composition” determined by how frequently an author uses words of different lengths. He applied this approach to compare the works of Shakespeare and Francis Bacon, for example.11 In 1888 William Benjamin Smith, a mathematician writing under the pseudonym Conrad Mascol, published two papers describing a “curve of style” based on average sentence lengths to distinguish authorial styles, which technique he applied to the Pauline Epistles.12 Then in 1893, Lucius Sherman, a professor of English, found that average sentence length could be used as an indicator of changes in writing styles over time.13

A few advances in stylometry were made in the first half of the twentieth century, but the most significant step was the landmark publication in 1964 of statisticians Frederick Mosteller and David Wallace. In their study they innovatively applied Bayesian statistical principles to investigate the authorship of the twelve disputed essays in The Federalist.14 From the late 1980s to the early 2000s, John Burrows made seminal contributions to stylometric methodology. He introduced the “delta score” to measure word frequency differences among texts that varied by author, in genre, or even across time periods.15 His method is now considered a benchmark for authorship attribution studies. Burrows also started a trend of using principal components analysis in stylometry.16

Today, the field of stylometrics is growing rapidly due to the confluence of exponentially increasing computing power, ubiquitous availability of the Internet, development of ultrahigh dimensional statistical tools, and advances in Bayesian statistics.

Limitations of Stylometry

Stylometry is a useful tool in authorship attribution, but several limitations are important to keep in mind when interpreting the results of a stylometric analysis. Although stylometry is sometimes referred to as wordprint analysis (implying that it is a linguistic equivalent to fingerprint analysis), it does not have the same identifying capability. The description of stylometry as verbal DNA is an even less applicable overstatement.17 With stylometrics there is no way to perform population studies to determine the general prevalence of word-use patterns. Consequently, all probability assessments in stylometrics are relative only to the specific authors and the texts included in the study.

Although a person’s fingerprint and DNA are unchangeably unique to that person, a writer is at liberty to adapt his or her style to a particular topic, audience, and genre; to use artistic license to try new styles or even imitate others’ styles; and to modify his or her own style over time as writing skills increase or falter. Shakespeare, for example, was famously diverse in his writing style—an ability that is one of the hallmarks of a great author and also one of the things that makes stylometry a challenging methodology to apply successfully.

Further, writing style is not singularly specific to a person. Stylometry can assess the similarity of writing styles among authors, but it cannot prove personal identification of an author. Not only is there variation in an author’s word-use patterns, but authors can write sufficiently unlike themselves and sufficiently like each other at times that there are not clear boundaries between them, leaving fuzzy areas where their styles can overlap. So even though an author’s style may be distinctive, it is not distinct enough to be considered unique to that author to the exclusion of all other authors in the world.

Stylometric characteristics can provide a general comparative description of an author’s style, but the writing style exhibited in a text is an indirect and uncertain measure of an author’s identity. Authorial style is indistinct enough that one can say only, “Based on these style characteristics, this text could have been written by author X, and it was more likely written by author X than by author Y.” Thus, stylom-
etry can assess the probability of similar writing styles among texts, but that is not the same as the probability of authorship of those texts. Stylometry is only one source of evidence to support a claim of possible authorship. Other evidence—such as historical and biographical evidence—becomes essential.18

In the context of what stylometry is and what it is not, let us now consider the applications of the stylometric analyses that have been made regarding the question of authorship of the Book of Mormon.

**Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon**

Since 1980, four major stylometric analyses of the Book of Mormon have been published—two by researchers at Brigham Young University,19 another by a doctoral student at Bristol Polytechnic,20 and yet another by researchers at Stanford University.21 Each of these studies applied stylometry in different ways, seeking to address differing research questions, but all aimed at testing claims of Book of Mormon authorship.

**The Larsen Study**

Inspired by the Mosteller and Wallace study, three statisticians at Brigham Young University—Wayne Larsen, Alvin Rencher, and Tim Layton—examined the frequencies of noncontextual words in a precedent-setting analysis of the Book of Mormon in 1980. Noncontextual words are function words that have a grammatical role forming the structure of a message, but they do not provide information about the message. These are words such as *a, an, but, however, the, to, with, without,* and so on. Mosteller and Wallace had shown that the way an author uses non-contextual words could be a means of characterizing the author’s literary style independent of the author’s message. For example, they found that Hamilton frequently used *enough* while Madison never used *enough* in his essays. Conversely, Madison frequently used *whilst,* and Hamilton never used that term. Mosteller and Wallace referred to such disparately used words as “markers” that could be used to distinguish between the writings of Hamilton and Madison—a process of authorial discrimination.

In the Larsen study the researchers carefully constructed 2,000-word text blocks for each of the major purported authors in the Book of Mormon. Then they tested whether the text blocks displayed evidence of a consistent style across the blocks, indicative of one author for all the texts, or whether
there was evidence of differing styles, congruent with the claim that the Book of Mormon texts came from different writers.

Applying linear discriminant analysis\(^22\) based on the frequencies of noncontextual words occurring in each text block, the researchers used this technique to compare the authors specified internally in the Book of Mormon to a set of nineteenth-century authors external to the Book of Mormon. The statistical evidence of differences among the writings of the purported authors was overwhelming:

1. “Distinct authorship styles can be readily distinguished within the Book of Mormon.”
2. “The nineteenth-century authors do not resemble Book of Mormon authors in style.”\(^23\)

A summary plot of their findings in figure 1 shows how the texts form clusters for each of the four major authors identified internally in the Book of Mormon with a separate cluster for Joseph Smith as an external author; his personal writings were used in the comparison.

We can see that the text blocks attributed to Nephi, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni in the Book of Mormon are consistently similar within authors (tight grouping of texts by author) but consistently different among purported Book of Mormon authors (distinct cluster for each author, with some overlap). Joseph Smith’s texts are clearly separated from the Book of Mormon texts.

There is, of course, no statistical way to prove that the actual authors for the specific text blocks were Nephi, Alma, Mormon, and Moroni. But whoever the authors were, each one consistently wrote within his or her same style, and the styles differed from each other. If one person wrote the whole Book of Mormon, he or she possessed an unusual and uncanny ability to write in different styles and to switch back and forth consistently between those styles.

Although somewhat overstated, it is hard to disagree with the Larsen study’s main conclusion that “our study has shown conclusively that there were many authors who wrote the Book of Mormon.”\(^24\)

The Hilton Study

Skeptical of, but intrigued by, the results of the Larsen study, John Hilton—a physicist at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and later a researcher at Brigham Young University—decided in 1982 to test the reproducibility of the Larsen study results since a fundamental tenet of scientific research is that results of a study must be reproducible by other researchers. In so doing, Hilton took a different approach than Larsen.\(^25\) Rather than using noncontextual word frequencies as stylistic features, Hilton used sixty-five noncontextual word-pattern ratios suggested by Andrew Morton,\(^26\) a mathematician and religious studies scholar. Word-pattern ratios measure the rate of word use in four categories:

1. Specific words in key positions of sentences, e.g., “the as the first word of a sentence,”
2. Specific words adjacent to certain parts of speech, e.g., “and followed by an adjective, “
3. Collocations of words, e.g., “and followed by the,” and
4. Proportionate pairs of words, e.g., “no and not,” “all and any.”

Figure 1. Text clusters of major Book of Mormon authors and Joseph Smith. Linear discriminant analysis indicates that the writing styles of the major Book of Mormon authors are distinguishable from each other and highly distinctive from Joseph Smith’s writing style.
Hilton’s idea was that these ratios might be minimally affected by unique phrases in the texts or by topic and genre differences among the texts and thus might be better detectors of an author’s unconscious word-use preferences. In agreement with Morton, Hilton reasoned that these word-pattern ratios would be useful since they provide a nonambiguous count, occur frequently, have common alternative expressions, and tend to be used habitually. In addition, he developed a stylometric measure used to differentiate between any two texts based on the number of word-pattern ratios judged to be significantly different than expected (called rejections) between texts purportedly alleged to be written in the same authorial style. He calibrated and validated his method by applying it to texts of undisputed authorship from the 1800s and 1900s. He determined that seven or more rejections provided evidence of differences of writing style indicative of different authorship.

In addition, he developed a stylometric measure used to differentiate between any two texts based on the number of word-pattern ratios judged to be significantly different than expected (called rejections) between texts purportedly alleged to be written in the same authorial style. He calibrated and validated his method by applying it to texts of undisputed authorship from the 1800s and 1900s. He determined that seven or more rejections provided evidence of differences of writing style indicative of different authorship.

Hilton then made various comparisons among Book of Mormon texts attributed to Nephi and Alma and non-Book of Mormon texts known to have been authored by Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and Solomon Spalding. Specifically, he compared each author to the texts attributed to himself (intra-author comparisons) and then each author to every other author (inter-author comparisons). Figure 2 summarizes his results in tabular form. The first line of the table (Nephi vs. Nephi) indicates, for example, that there were three 5,000-word Nephi texts, and pairwise comparisons of these texts yielded two, four, and five rejections for tests of the sixty-five word-pattern ratios. Further, in comparing six sets of texts by Cowdery and Alma, four showed seven pairwise rejections, one showed eight, and the other nine, thus showing their dissimilarity. In figure 2, the intra-author comparisons show evidence of similar style, while the inter-author comparisons show evidence of dissimilar styles.

The most important result was that all of the Nephi, Alma, Smith, Cowdery, and Spalding texts are each consistent within themselves but distinctly different from one another. Thus, the evidence from the Hilton study argues strongly against the idea that

---

**Figure 2.** Rejections of pairwise comparisons of texts from the Hilton study. Pairwise rejections fewer than seven of the possible sixty-five word pattern ratios in each text vs. text comparison indicate evidence of similar authorial style. The intra-author comparisons tend to show similar styles while the inter-author comparisons tend to show dissimilar styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text vs. Text</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
<th>11</th>
<th>12</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>14</th>
<th>15</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intra-Author Comparisons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephi vs. Nephi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alma vs. Alma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith vs. Smith</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowdery vs. Cowdery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spalding vs. Spalding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inter-Author Comparisons</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nephi vs. Alma</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith vs. Nephi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith vs. Alma</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowdery vs. Nephi</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowdery vs. Alma</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spalding vs. Nephi</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spalding vs. Alma</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Evidence of Similar Styles → Evidence of Different Styles**
Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, or Solomon Spalding could be the author of the Nephi or Alma texts. Hilton concluded:

We show that it is statistically indefensible to propose Joseph Smith or Oliver Cowdery or Solomon Spaulding as the author of the 30,000 words from the Book of Mormon manuscript texts attributed to Nephi and Alma. Additionally these two Book of Mormon writers have wordprints unique to themselves and measure statistically independent from each other in the same fashion that other uncontroverted authors do. Therefore, the Book of Mormon measures [as being] multiauthored, with authorship consistent to its own internal claims.28

Hilton's findings were congruent with the Larsen findings. In 2006 these results were reproduced again by researchers at Utah State University using generalized discriminant analysis—an extension of the linear discriminant analysis used in the Larsen study.29

The Holmes Study

Not all Book of Mormon stylometric studies have reached the same conclusion as Larsen and Hilton.30 For his doctoral dissertation at Bristol Polytechnic in 1985, David Holmes—now at the College of New Jersey but previously a professor at the University of the West of England—carried out a stylometric analysis of the Book of Mormon and related texts based on five measures of vocabulary richness.31 As stylistic features, Holmes computed a standardized measure of words used once in the text (R), a standardized measure of words used twice (V2/V), a Poisson-based measure of lexical repetitiveness (K), and two estimated parameters of the Sichel distribution (α and θ)—a theoretical distribution to model word frequencies in writing. The first three measures were calculated for the total vocabulary in the texts, while the last two were calculated for nouns only.

His motivation was his impression at the time that vocabulary richness was a “particularly effective measure for discrimination between writers.”32 Holmes used the 1980 editions of the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Book of Abraham from the Pearl of Great Price; the book of Isaiah from the King James Bible; and diaries and histories written or prepared by Joseph Smith between 1838 and 1843. Ignoring genre (doctrinal discourse versus historical narrative), Holmes extracted fourteen approximately 10,000-word blocks assigned to six Book of Mormon authors, divided sections 1 through 51 of the Doctrine and Covenants into three 10,000-word blocks, combined the writings of Joseph Smith into three 6,000-word blocks, included the Book of Abraham as one text, and extracted three 12,000-word blocks from Isaiah.

As illustrated in figure 3, Holmes found that the Joseph Smith texts clustered together, the Isaiah texts clustered together, and all but three of the other texts clustered together.

Holmes concluded from this that he had definitively shown that the writings of Mormon, Lehi, Nephi, Jacob, and Moroni were not stylometrically different. He stated, “There appears to be no real difference between Alma’s richness of vocabulary and Mormon’s richness of vocabulary, . . . a conclusion in direct contradiction to the findings of Larsen.” He continued, “This study has therefore not found any evidence of multiple authorship within the Book of Mormon itself,” to which he added, “We may consider the Book of Abraham, the purported authors of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith’s revelations to be of similar style, therefore, with all the implications that this may have for Mormon doctrine.”33

The first part of Holmes’s statement is prima facie false since the Larsen study utilized noncontextual word frequencies and did not include any findings about vocabulary richness. The rest of the statement is an example of the classic fallacy argumentum ad ignorantiam: “I did not find a difference so there must not be a difference.” When a researcher does not find evidence of an effect, he or she can only say, “I did not find evidence of an effect.” The researcher cannot say, “Therefore, the effect does not exist.” The effect could still exist; the researcher simply did not find it. In addition, Holmes overgeneralized the usefulness of his methodology by failing to recognize that the successful application of a technique in one instance does not indicate that it is useful in all instances.34 Even if a method found a large difference in one instance does not mean the method will find smaller differences in other cases. A method’s ability to find small differences that in fact exist is referred to by statisticians as the method’s power.

Subsequent research by Schaalje, Hilton, and Archer has shown that Holmes’s stylistic measures
have low power and are consequently weak discriminators of authorship. For example, when testing texts of undisputed authorship by Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) and Samuel Johnson (a British author and lexicographer), among others, correct classification rates were 96% using noncontextual word frequencies, 92% for noncontextual word-pattern ratios, but only 23% for vocabulary richness measures. Similar results were obtained consistently in other tests on sets of texts from novels (translated from German into English), the Book of Mormon texts (translated from an unknown ancient language into English), and the King James New Testament (translated from Greek into English). Later, in a reanalysis of The Federalist essays, Holmes himself found vocabulary richness measures to be comparatively less effective discriminators of authorship than noncontextual word frequencies.

The skepticism of Schaalje, Hilton, and Archer toward the effectiveness of Holmes’s vocabulary richness technique has been borne out in a more recent study by David L. Hoover:

Despite the attractiveness of measures of vocabulary richness, and despite the fact that they are sometimes effective in clustering texts by a single author and discriminating those texts from other texts by other authors, such measures cannot provide a consistent, reliable, or satisfactory means of identifying an author or describing a style. There is so much intratextual and intertextual variation among texts and authors that measures of vocabulary richness should be used with great caution, if at all, and should be treated only as preliminary indications of authorship, as rough suggestions about the style of a text or author, as characterizations of texts at the extremes of the range from richness to concentration. Perhaps their only significant usefulness is as an indicator of

Figure 3. Principal components analysis plot based on Holmes’s vocabulary richness measures. Although texts from Joseph Smith and Isaiah are easily distinguishable from Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price texts, Holmes’s method could not distinguish among the purported authors within the Book of Mormon nor in comparison to the other scriptural texts.
what texts or sections of texts may repay further analysis by more robust methods. Unfortunately, the long-cherished goal of a measure of vocabulary richness that characterizes authors and their styles appears to be unattainable. The basic assumption that underlies it is false.37

The results of the Holmes study certainly do not nullify the results of the Larsen and Hilton studies nor portend any grave implications for Mormon doctrine, as Holmes suggested. The Holmes study shows only that the Book of Mormon texts, although consistently distinct in terms of noncontextual word usage and word-pattern ratios, display similar vocabulary richness. This might reflect simply that the Book of Mormon texts are the work of a single translator, as Joseph Smith claimed, and thus were limited by his vocabulary.

The Jockers Study

The weakest of the four major Book of Mormon stylometric studies is presented in a recent paper by Matthew Jockers, Daniela Witten, and Craig Criddle38—respectively an English lecturer, a statistics graduate student, and a civil engineering professor at Stanford University. Their study is innovative in that the statistical method they used was “nearest shrunken centroid classification” (NSC), a multivariate classification method based on Bayesian statistics developed for the classification of tumors in genomics research.39

In statistics, shrinkage is a way to reduce the uncertainty about an estimated quantity by combining information from multiple sources in making the estimate. The more information that is included in making an estimate, the less uncertainty there will be about that estimate. A centroid is the center of a multidimensional cluster of data points. Think of it as the center of gravity of a disperse collection of related items with varying sizes. When applied to stylometry, the NSC method uses the stylistic characteristics (such as word frequencies) found in the texts of a set of candidate authors to create a rule for determining the authorship of unknown texts. That rule is then used to assign a text of questioned authorship to the author whose cluster of texts has the nearest centroid. The closer a test text of an unknown author is to the centroid of a known author’s texts, the greater the likelihood that the style of the test text matches the writing style of the known author. Using Bayes’ theorem from statistics, the NSC method updates initial probability estimates (called “prior probabilities”) to calculate final probability estimates (called “posterior probabilities”) based on newly obtained sample information. For example, without the sample information, the prior probability estimates would be that all candidate authors are equally likely to be the author of a text of unknown authorship. But after the writing style in the text (sample information) is compared with the writing style of each candidate author, the posterior probability estimates might show that one author is more likely the author of the text than the other candidates because of closer similarity of writing style. It is vitally important to note that NSC is a closed-set method, which means it assumes the set of candidate authors definitely includes the true author to the exclusion of any other possible candidates.

In the Jockers study, the researchers’ hypothesis was that the Book of Mormon is the collaborative work of multiple nineteenth-century authors. They specifically sought to find support for the Spalding-Rigdon theory. Therefore their set of candidate authors included text blocks by Solomon Spalding, Sidney Rigdon, Oliver Cowdery, and Parley P. Pratt. Biblical texts by Isaiah and Malachi (combined as one author) were included as a positive control, and contemporary nineteenth-century texts by Henry Longfellow and Joel Barlow were included as negative controls. The texts varied greatly in size, ranging from 114 to 17,797 words in length.

Even though chapter designations were not added to the Book of Mormon until 1879 (when all of their candidate authors were dead), Jockers chose to use the current chapter structure to define the test text blocks for the Book of Mormon, reasoning rather dubiously that the chapters might have been contributed individually by their panel of suspected authors and thus might provide evidence of “correct” authorship. The Book of Mormon chapters also varied widely in length from 95 to 3,752 words.

As stylistic features, Jockers used relative frequencies of the most common 110 words in the Book of Mormon that were used at least once by each purported author. From this list they removed four words that they felt were contextual in relating to biblical subject matter (God, ye, thy, and behold), but without justification they retained fifteen other contextual nouns: children, day, earth, father, hand, king, land, man, men, name, people, power, son, time, and
words. For some unknown reason they apparently wanted their definition of authorial style to include some lexical words—other than biblical-sounding words—rather than just function words.

The results of Jockers et al.’s application of NSC classification to assigning Book of Mormon chapters to their set of candidate authors are tabulated in figure 4.

There are eight serious flaws with the Jockers study methodology that render the results moot. First and most obviously, Joseph Smith was excluded as a candidate author, even though as the book’s translator he is the most likely author. His candidacy was considered in each of the previous studies. The Jockers researchers incorrectly claim that Joseph Smith could not be included because he frequently used scribes when preparing written documents and left inadequate samples of his personal writings. Dean Jessee has compiled a comprehensive set of Joseph Smith’s writings, many of which are holographic (written solely in his own hand). Because NSC is designed to pick one of the members of a closed set of candidates, excluding Joseph Smith from the analysis seems like an attempt to stack the deck in favor of the Spalding-Rigdon theory authors.

Second, and even more important, the set of candidate authors for the Book of Mormon cannot reasonably be considered closed. To employ a closed-set technique, a researcher must be assured by external evidence such as well-established, non-controversial historical information that all possible candidate authors have been identified and included. For The Federalist studies, there was no question that the true author was included as a candidate. The question was only whether the writing style of a specific paper favored Hamilton or Madison; there were no other possible candidates. However, for the Book of Mormon the situation is not so simple—there is no substantiating historical or biographical information to justify a constrained set of candidates. In fact, the principal components plot of the Jockers study shown in figure 5 provides confirming evidence that their candidate set cannot be considered to be comprehensive since the styles of the vast majority of Book of Mormon chapters differ markedly from the styles of any of Jockers et al.’s candidates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Author</th>
<th>Percentage of Book of Mormon Chapters Assigned to an Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sidney Rigdon</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Isaiah / Malachi</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solomon Spalding</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Cowdery</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parley Pratt</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Longfellow</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joel Barlow</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Smith</td>
<td>Not Included</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Percentage of Book of Mormon chapters assigned to each author by Jockers et al. based on nearest shrunken centroid (NSC) classification probability estimates, including Isaiah/Malachi as positive controls and Longfellow and Barlow as negative controls, but not including Joseph Smith.

Their candidate set cannot be considered to be comprehensive since the styles of the vast majority of Book of Mormon chapters differ markedly from the styles of any of Jockers et al.’s candidates.
made them very suspicious that the ninety-three attributions to Rigdon must also be grossly overstated. If the same proportion of misattributions occurred for Rigdon as for Isaiah and Malachi, then the correct rate of attribution would be only about thirty-one chapters. As Jockers et al. point out, a mere random assignment of chapters would have resulted in thirty-four chapters attributed to each author. Just as a stopped clock is right twice a day, NSC should be viewed as performing no better than attributing chapters by throwing darts at the list of candidate authors.

Figure 5. Principal components analysis plot for Jockers et al.’s data showing that the cluster for Book of Mormon chapters (black dots) is clearly separate from the cluster for candidate authors’ texts (red dots).

Just as a stopped clock is right twice a day, NSC should be viewed as performing no better than attributing chapters by throwing darts at the list of candidate authors.

Jockers et al. should have realized therefore that the thirty-one chapters that might have been correctly attributed to Rigdon were only what would be expected by random assignment. Just as a stopped clock is right twice a day, NSC should be viewed as performing no better than attributing chapters by throwing darts at the list of candidate authors.

Fourth, even though the NSC method can identify the cluster of texts a test text is relatively closest to, that does not mean it is close in an absolute sense. The test text and the closest cluster could still be a great distance apart. This would allow for the possibility that an excluded author is actually closer. As an analogy, let us ask the question, “Considering the cities New York, Chicago, and Salt Lake City, which city is closest to Los Angeles?” We could correctly answer that Salt Lake City is closest. But Salt Lake City is seven hundred miles from Los Angeles, so it is only relatively close to Los Angeles—relative to Chicago and New York. Further, even though Salt Lake City is the closest of the candidate set, it is not the closest city of all cities in the United States of America. Many cities were not included as candidates—Las Vegas, Tucson, San Diego, and so on. To reliably use a closed-set method such as NSC in stylometry, a researcher must know with reasonable certainty that there are no other possible candidate authors. Without such assurance, the only conclusion that can be drawn is which candidate is the closest from among the set of candidates tested. Because not all possible candidates were included in the Jockers study, statements that make claims about which candidate is the closest of all possible candidates would be unsubstantiated extrapolations and would overstep the
bounds of the evidence. In addition, just because San Diego is close to Los Angeles, that does not mean it is the same as Los Angeles. To claim they are the same city requires more evidence than just a measure of relative proximity. Likewise, in stylometry, relative proximity only connotes similarity of style, not necessarily the same authorship.

Fifth, the NSC probabilities are presented by Jockers et al. as absolute probabilities. This is misleading since, in fact, they are relative probabilities related only to the specific set of candidate authors tested. Suppose that for some Book of Mormon chapter Rigdon’s probability is calculated as 80%, Pratt’s probability is calculated as 20%, and each remaining candidate’s probability is calculated as nearly 0%. The most that can be concluded from these numbers is that Rigdon’s probability of a matching style is four times greater than Pratt’s. One could say that the odds are “four to one” (4:1) in favor of Rigdon over Pratt, but one could not meaningfully state Rigdon’s calculated likelihood without a comparison to Pratt’s. While in a relative sense the probability calculated for Rigdon might be 80% within a limited set of authors, in an absolute sense it might be only 8%, for example, if all possible authors were included.

Sixth, the NSC procedure assumes that the variation of the word frequencies in the text blocks is the same for all text blocks. This requirement of equal variance—called homogeneity of variances—is grossly violated in the Jockers study due to the highly disparate sizes of the text blocks. It is completely unreasonable to assume that the variances of word frequencies in text blocks of 100 words are the same as the variances of word frequencies in text blocks of 5,000 words or 15,000 words. Hence the authorship probabilities calculated by NSC make even less sense.

Seventh, the authorship probabilities have still less meaning individually since so many texts (239 chapters) are classified simultaneously in a single statistical procedure. When making a multitude of comparisons within a single test procedure, some of the calculated probabilities will appear to indicate items that are significantly different from each other even though their difference occurred simply by chance. These differences can be spurious and signify nothing. This is a well-known hazard in statistical practice and is referred to as the multiplicity problem.

Naïve or inexperienced analysts frequently make the mistake of overlooking the effects of multiplicity—that is, claiming that a random event has meaning when in reality it is just the result of normal variation in a process.

Eighth, Jockers et al. represented Rigdon’s writing style using fourteen articles published in newspapers between 1833 and 1835, as well as nine revelations authored by Rigdon beginning in 1863. The problem is that the styles of these two sets of writings show evidence of being distinctly different, as shown in figure 6, which is based on Jockers et al.’s data.

To confirm this observation, we took all newspaper articles and pamphlets known to have been authored by Sidney Rigdon between 1831 and 1846 to create twenty-five composite texts ranging in size from 2,214 to 8,747 words. We also created fifteen composite texts ranging in size from 3,678 to 6,784 words from all of the sections authored by Sidney Rigdon or jointly by Sidney and Phebe Rigdon in the Book of the Revelations of Jesus Christ to the Children of Zion through Sidney Rigdon, Prophet, Seer and Reveulator. The texts were combined in chronological

Sidney Rigdon.
order, and no section was split between two text blocks. Figure 6 shows the distinct difference in style between the two sets of texts. It is unknown whether Rigdon’s style actually changed over the seventeen intervening years, or whether his revelations reflect the contributions of others such as his wife. In any case, in a study of Book of Mormon authorship, Rigdon’s style should be characterized only by documents written in his early style—the time period closest to the publication of the Book of Mormon. The Rigdon texts used in the Jockers study confound the two Rigdon styles.

The Jockers study concluded:

Our analysis supports the theory that the Book of Mormon was written by multiple nineteenth-century authors, and more specifically, we find strong support for the Spalding-Rigdon theory of authorship. In all the data, we find Rigdon as a unifying force. His signal dominates the book, and where other candidates are more probable, Rigdon is often hiding in the shadows.

In actual fact, the Jockers study has shown nothing. The study design was biased to produce a desired result; the closed-set classification methodology is completely unsuitable for inferring authorship of the Book of Mormon; the full results for the control texts were ignored; the calculated probabilities were misinterpreted; the chapter-by-chapter probabilities of authorship are not even useful as relative probabilities; the effect of hugely different sample sizes was disregarded; the multiplicity effect of multiple simultaneous testing was ignored; and, finally, Rigdon’s two differing writing styles were confounded into one composite style.

The only idea in the Jockers study that is of some value regarding the Book of Mormon is actually not in their paper, but is based on data listed on their website that we used to produce figure 6. However, it points to a very different conclusion from that drawn by Jockers et al.

Most Recent Study Using ENSC

In response to the Jockers study, we recently conducted a new study correcting the methodological flaws in the Jockers study. Most important, we developed a modification to the closed-set nearest shrunken centroid (NSC) classification method to enable it to be applied to open-set classification.
problems. We refer to this method as extended nearest shrunken centroid (ENSC) classification. In doing so, we modified the NSC formulas to allow for some other author—that is, to allow for the possibility that an excluded author might have written the text whose authorship is in question. This open-set modification allows for the existence of an unidentified author with writing characteristics nominally consistent with the test text and incorporates this possibility into the probability calculations. Without including the possibility of someone else as the author, if the candidate set does not include the true author (using a closed-set approach for an open-set situation), the probability of similar writing style can be grossly overstated and lead to entirely erroneous interpretations.

For purposes of comparability with the Jockers study, we used the same list of 110 characteristic words as Jockers et al. as well as their chapter-by-chapter designation of text blocks from the Book of Mormon. We first reproduced the Jockers study results using the same set of candidate authors to confirm that our implementation of NSC was consistent with theirs. We then repeated the NSC analysis including Joseph Smith in the set of candidate authors. Finally, we applied the open-set ENSC technique allowing for the possibility of some other author. In addition, when we used the ENSC method, we took into account differences in sample sizes, adjusted for multiplicity, and recognized the distinction between Rigdon’s time-separated writing styles. Figure 7a displays the results of applying NSC per the Jockers study and applying NSC with Joseph Smith included but without the possibility of someone else as the author. Figure 7b displays the results of applying ENSC allowing for the possibility of some other author.

First, examining the NSC graph in figure 7a, we notice that the percentage of chapters NSC assigned to Rigdon is about the same with or without Joseph Smith in the candidate set (39% and 40%, respectively), while the ENSC graph in figure 7b shows far fewer chapters assigned to Rigdon (7%). Interestingly, the ENSC percentage for Rigdon is the sum of roughly equal percentages for early and late Rigdon sample texts.

Next we notice that the percentage for Isaiah/Malachi (26%) as assigned by NSC (fig. 7a) is obviously much too large (as discussed earlier), and the misattribution to Isaiah/Malachi actually increased when Joseph was a candidate author since then NSC assigned 28% of the chapters to Isaiah/Malachi. However, the ENSC-assigned percentage of 15% (fig. 7b) is much closer to the correct percentage (12%).

Considering Spalding without Joseph Smith as a candidate author, NSC assigned 22% of the chapters to Spalding, yet only 15% to him when Joseph Smith was included (fig. 7a). Obviously, when Joseph Smith is included in the analysis, any supposed support for the Spalding-Rigdon theory diminishes. With Joseph Smith in the candidate author set, we see that NSC assigned 12% of the chapters to Joseph Smith because of chapter reassignment away from Spalding, Cowdery, and Pratt. This seems consistent with the claim that Joseph Smith, as translator, dictated the text of the Book of Mormon, and in doing so perhaps had some influence on the structure of language in the document.

In contrast, when applying ENSC, the combined total for Spalding-Rigdon drops to only 8%, with ENSC assigning a mere 3% to Joseph Smith (fig. 7b). The few chapters that ENSC indicated to be closest to Rigdon, Spalding, Cowdery, and Smith are randomly dispersed throughout the 239 chapters,
Figures 7a and 7b. Nearest shrunken centroid (NSC) and extended nearest shrunken centroid (ENSC) classification methods applied to Book of Mormon authorship. Although the closed-set NSC technique assigns a majority of chapters to Spalding and Rigdon within a constrained set of candidate authors, when allowing for the possibility that the candidate set is incomplete, the open-set ENSC technique assigns an even larger majority of the chapters to an unidentified author who was not included in the NSC candidate set. Percentages are based on the number of chapters that are deemed closest to a candidate author’s style.
indicating that they should be considered random misclassifications.

Most interesting, though, the ENSC method (fig. 7b) assigned 73% of the chapters to “Someone Else.” Further, excluding the Isaiah/Malachi chapters and looking only at the non-Isaiah/Malachi Book of Mormon chapters, ENSC assigned 93% of those chapters to “Someone Else” with a few chapters randomly assigned to Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith, as would be expected if Joseph Smith had translated the text with Oliver Cowdery as his scribe.

Clearly Jockers et al.’s claim of astronomical probabilities in support of the Spalding-Rigdon theory is a great exaggeration. The ENSC results confirm our analysis that the Jockers study was fatally flawed in concept and execution. Contrary to their contention, the evidence does not provide credible support for the claim that the writing styles exhibited in the Book of Mormon match any of their candidate authors—Spalding, Rigdon, Cowdery, or Pratt. In fact, the evidence from a correctly conducted analysis clearly supports the claim that someone other than their set of candidate authors wrote the book. Therefore, based on these findings, we conclude that stylometric evidence does not support the Spalding-Rigdon theory of Book of Mormon authorship.

Conclusion

Stylometric analyses of the Book of Mormon have generated much interest over the past thirty years. Some of these analyses have produced interesting information, but some of the studies have been characterized by hyperbole, faulty reasoning, and misapplication of statistical methods. When examining all the evidence, our overall conclusion is that the Book of Mormon displays multiple writing styles throughout the text consistent with the book’s claim of multiple authors and that the evidence does not show the writing styles of alleged nineteenth-century authors to be similar to those in the Book of Mormon. Further, the claims thus far put forward for alternative authorship of the Book of Mormon, other than as described by Joseph Smith, are untenable.

Matthew Roper [MA, Brigham Young University] is a research scholar for the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, Brigham Young University.

Paul J. Fields [PhD, Pennsylvania State University] is a consultant specializing in research methods and statistical analysis. He has extensive experience in textual analysis and linguistic computing.

G. Bruce Schaalje [PhD, North Carolina State University] is a professor of statistics at Brigham Young University.

NOTES

2. Eber D. Howe, Mormonism Unvailed, or, a Faithful Account of That Singular Imposition and Delusion, from Its Rise to the Present Time (Painesville, OH: Printed and Published by the Author, 1834).
6. Reginald C. Churchill, Shakespeare and His Betters: A History and a Criticism of the Attempts Which Have Been Made to Prove That Shake-
the author does not use rather than a single dot, since an writing, the counts form a cluster in multiple samples of the author’s therefore an author uses the word example, when counting how frequently an author uses the word word-use preferences are can be precisely measured, an a multivariate statistical technique Principal components analysis is a statistical procedure that uses multiple variables (in this case, word frequencies) to classify new observations (text blocks of unknown authorship) using mathematical functions that weight each of the variables to maximize the differences between known groups (text blocks of known authorship) while minimizing the differences within the groups. Thus, dissimilar groups can be distinguished (discriminated) from similar groups.


Larsen, Rencher, and Layton, “Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?,” 245. The reprinted article toned down the claim to read, “The evidence to date is that many authors wrote the Book of Mormon.” Larsen and Rencher, “Who Wrote the Book of Mormon?,” 180.


This has now been published as Royal Skousen, ed., The Printer’s Manuscript of the Book of Mormon:
proach to measuring vocabulary richness successfully discriminates between samples from within the same genre. Both the personal writings and the prophetic voice of Joseph Smith differ from those of Joanna Southcott in the element of style represented by vocabulary richness.” David I. Holmes, author’s reply, Journal of the Royal Statistical Society A 156, part 1 (1993): 116. Apparently Holmes was unwilling to acknowledge that one successful application of a method in a specific situation does not prove the method to be generally powerful in all situations. See Holmes, “Vocabulary Richness and the Prophetic Voice,” 259–68.


44. A probability can be absolute only if it includes all possible outcomes. The probability of rolling a 2 on a six-sided die is 1 out of 6 (approximately 17%). This is an absolute probability since the event of rolling a 2 is one of six possible outcomes among the complete set of events—rolling a 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, or 6. But when considering the events of rolling a 1 or rolling a 2 as the only admissible outcomes and thereby ignoring the events of rolling a 3, 4, 5, or 6, the probability of rolling a 2 is 1 out of 2 (50%). While the absolute probability of rolling a 2 among all possible events is 17%, the relative probability of rolling a 2 among the limited set of events of rolling a 1 or rolling a 2 is 50%. Confusing an event’s relative probability with its absolute probability can greatly exaggerate the perceived likelihood of that event.

45. When making multiple comparisons simultaneously, a researcher can make an error in statistical inference by claiming two things are significantly different when in fact they are not. When viewed individually, a pair of items may appear to be different, yet when viewed in the full context of all possible comparisons in the study, their difference can be negligible. The probability of making such an error increases as the number of multiple comparisons increases. Consequently, the more complex a problem is, the greater the potential to make such an error. Standard statistical techniques have been developed and are used by competent researchers to compensate for the effects of multiplicity and to guard against making such inferential errors. The multiplicity problem is a major issue to guard against in genetic association studies wherein millions of genetic markers can be analyzed simultaneously. Researchers in one study may report statistically significant results, yet subsequent researchers will not be able to reproduce those results. One of the possible reasons for such conflicting outcomes is the failure of the first researchers to account for multiplicity. Since NSC is a classification procedure originally intended for use in genomics applications, the failure of Jockers et al. to recognize the potential for multiplicity to produce misleading results indicates that the researchers were unfamiliar with the tool (NSC) they were using and unskilled in its proper use.

46. Please note that the presence of a few extreme values—either high or low—would be expected in any data set, even if the data come from a process that is truly random. Their presence does not necessarily signify anything unusual in the data. Researchers who ignore the multiplicity problem are prone to finding evidence in the data that supports their preconceived notion of what “should be” in the data. This is often referred to as data snooping, in contrast to data analysis. Such researchers are determined to find in the data what they want to be in the data regardless of facts and reason.

47. Located in Stephen Post Papers, folders 11 and 12, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.


51. The fundamental fallacy in the Jockers study was that they equated genomics problems to stylometry problems. Although NSC has proven to be highly successful in genomics classification problems, stylometric problems are much different: a large set of texts is usually the subject of classification, the sample sizes vary over a wide range, and most important, the set of candidate authors usually cannot be assumed to be closed. These characteristics are not present in the typical genomics analysis. Consequently, naïve application of NSC, as in the Jockers study, can produce highly misleading results. A reanalysis of the Book of Mormon using ENSC produced dramatically different results from the NSC method.
For many scholars of religion, both inside and outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, discourse on the meaning of scripture tends to focus on words. Performing word studies, cross-referencing phrases, and tracing quotations to their sources are usually priorities in the analysis of a sacred text. Although manners and movements—whether explicitly recorded or repeatedly imagined anew—always accompany the revealed word, only rarely do these manners and movements take an overt role in our analyses.

Nevertheless, many aspects of our Latter-day Saint faith dispose us to reflect on the nonverbal dimension of communication in scripture. For example, we believe in a God with a physical body that can be seen. When the Father and Son appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith in the first vision, the Father’s words to the Prophet were accompanied with a gesture:

One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—This is My Beloved Son. Hear him! (Joseph Smith—History 1:17, italics in the original)

Joseph Smith’s report that the Father’s first action was to point to his Beloved Son is not insignificant. The latter-day doctrine that “the Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s” (D&C 130:22) means that God’s communicative body movements, as well as his words, have theological importance. Further, it means that not only his words but also his actions can be repeated by humans—he can be emulated as well as quoted.

FROM THE EDITOR:

David Calabro, doctoral candidate at the University of Chicago, has applied his dissertation research findings on hand gestures in the Hebrew Bible to the Book of Mormon. It will be no surprise to the faithful that the Book of Mormon, as well as presenting its own unique meanings to certain hand gestures, exhibits many of the same understandings, often hidden to the casual reader, of these hand gestures in the Hebrew Bible.
“STRETCH FORTH THY HAND AND PROPHESY”:
HAND GESTURES IN THE BOOK OF MORMON

DAVID CALABRO

In addition, gestures feature prominently in many of the ordinances we perform in the church. One may think, for example, of the uplifted hand gesture used to sustain leaders and to baptize people. Since Latter-day Saints believe that ordinances performed in the church today were also performed among the Lord’s people in ancient times,1 we may look to the scriptures to illuminate these ordinances and their gestures. Latter-day Saints, then, have both reason and opportunity to reflect on nonverbal matters in holy writ.

In what follows, I will explore the use of hand gestures in a book of scripture that stands at the roots of our tradition, the Book of Mormon. I will make two main points. First, each gesture mentioned in the Book of Mormon is consistently associated with a particular meaning and context. These meanings and contexts often differ from both the Bible and other restoration scripture (the Doctrine and Covenants and the Pearl of Great Price), but because there are connections between the traditions, studies of gestures in these books of scripture can be mutually instructive. Second, the gestures described in passages of scripture, rather than being just incidental ornaments, contribute to the meanings of those passages; understanding the meanings of gestures therefore leads to a fuller understanding of the scriptural message.

Stretching Forth the Hand(s)

The most common use of the idiom stretch forth one’s hand(s) in the Book of Mormon occurs immediately preceding a description of speech:

And the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thy hand and prophesy, saying . . . (Mosiah 12:2)

After Abinadi had spoken these words he stretched forth his hands and said . . . (Mosiah 16:1, printer’s manuscript)

But Amulek stretched forth his hand, and cried the mightier unto them, saying . . . (Alma 10:25)

When Alma had said these words unto them, he stretched forth his hand unto them and cried with a mighty voice, saying . . . (Alma 13:21)

And when he saw them he stretched forth his hand, and besought them that they would heal him. (Alma 15:5)

And as he arose, he stretched forth his hand unto the woman, and said . . . (Alma 19:12)

Therefore he did say no more to the other multitude; but he stretched forth his hand, and cried unto those which he beheld, which were truly penitent, and saith unto them . . . (Alma 32:7)
Therefore he went and got upon the wall thereof, and stretched forth his hand and cried with a loud voice, and prophesied unto the people whatsoever things the Lord put into his heart. (Helaman 13:4)

And it came to pass that he stretched forth his hand and spake unto the people, saying... (3 Nephi 11:9)

He stretched forth his hand unto the multitude, and cried unto them, saying... (3 Nephi 12:1)

In Mosiah 16:1, the current text has the singular hand. However, the earliest extant text (the printer’s manuscript) has the plural. Other passages describing the same or similar gestures in the Book of Mormon also vary between singular and plural hand(s). For this reason, I retain the original plural reading in Mosiah 16:1.

In all these instances, the phrase stretch forth one’s hand(s) precedes a verb describing speech (prophesy, say, cry, beseech, speak), usually followed by direct speech introduced by a form of the verb say. Where the singular hand is used, this may be similar to the ancient Egyptian speech gesture often depicted in art in which an individual stretches forth the hand in vertical position toward the addressee.

However, it is not sufficient to conclude that the purpose of this gesture is to accompany speech. Individuals in the Book of Mormon obviously sometimes speak without stretching forth their hand(s), just as Amulek had been speaking before he stretched forth his hand in Alma 10:25. So the question arises, what specifically does this gesture contribute to the utterance? In many of the examples cited above, the gesture seems to increase the force or urgency of the speech. This can be seen when we compare the verbs of speech used by the narrator before the gesture with those used immediately after (see table 1).

In five cases, a generic verb like say or speak before the gesture is followed after the gesture by a stronger verb such as cry, sometimes with an additional qualifier like mighty or loud. Thus the outstretched-hand gesture, at least in these cases, seems to signal a greater force or urgency with which the speaker desires to get his message across.

Significantly, this gesture often accompanies the initiation of speech (Alma 15:5; 19:12; Helaman 13:4; 3 Nephi 11:9) or a switch in addressees (Alma 32:7; 3 Nephi 12:1). When the gesture is employed in the midst of speaking, it may be interpreted as renewing the communication on a more forceful level.

When we examine the content of speech immediately following the outstretched-hand gesture, we can see that it varies corresponding to the possible shifts in speaker and addressee. There are three types of scenarios: (1) A new speaker arrives on the scene; stretching forth his hand, he proclaims his identity. (2) A speaker turns to (re)address a (new) person or group; stretching forth his hand, the speaker refers to this new addressee by using second-person pronouns, usually in a blessing formula (except in the case of Alma 10:25, where the people of Ammonihah, the new addressees, are apparently not worthy of a blessing). (3) Both the speaker and the addressee remain the same; the speaker stretches forth his hand and makes a statement about the current moment or a prediction about the future. Examples of these three types are shown in table 2.

In the case of Mosiah 12:2, the change in participant format is not a change in the actual participants but a change in the speaker’s role. Here Abinadi switches from referring to the Lord in the third person to speaking on behalf of the Lord. Since this
introduces God as the speaker, the speech following the outstretched-hand gesture both proclaims the identity of the new participant (“the Lord”) and includes a prediction about the future (“It shall come to pass that this generation . . . shall be brought into bondage”).

Beyond investigating the functional meaning of this speech gesture in terms of its use in context, one can investigate its symbolic meaning in terms of how one might interpret it and react to it. For example, the gesture may be interpreted as a symbol of the relationship between the speaker and the addressee—partially bridging the distance between them and thereby forming, for the moment at least, a closer physical and also social relationship. Such an interpretation is clearly at work in the narrative in Alma 15:5–6, where the previously hostile and now repentant Zeezrom stretches forth his hand (see above), asking Alma and Amulek to heal him. Alma’s response involves a contact gesture:

And it came to pass that Alma said unto him, **taking him by the hand**: Believest thou in the power of Christ unto salvation? (Alma 15:6)

One can sense the implied reconciliation and goodwill of Alma’s gesture when he takes hold of Zeezrom’s outstretched hand. This sequence of outstretched hand followed by contact seems to indicate that the gesture expresses not only a partial bridging of social distance but also a desire for acceptance through contact. One can posit that the desire for contact as a symbol of acceptance is a consistent aspect of this gesture in the Book of Mormon. In every instance of this gesture, the one performing it is presenting a message whose acceptance is critical to the welfare of either the addressee or himself. In cases in which the addressee rejects the message, there is no subsequent gesture on the part of the addressee. Rather than reciprocating with a hand gesture, King Noah commands Abinadi to be put to death (Mosiah 17:1); the people of Ammonihah cry out against Amulek (Alma 10:28) and eventually bind Alma and Amulek (Alma 14:3–4); and the people of Zarahemla cast stones and arrows at Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 16:2). These are not only reactions to the speakers’ words but also repudiations of the plea for acceptance indicated by the gesture. Further, in each instance of gesture followed by contact, the one performing the gesture presents a message whose acceptance is critical to the welfare of the other. In every case in which the addressee rejects the message, there is no subsequent gesture on the part of the addressee. Rather than reciprocating with a hand gesture, King Noah commands Abinadi to be put to death (Mosiah 17:1); the people of Ammonihah cry out against Amulek (Alma 10:28) and eventually bind Alma and Amulek (Alma 14:3–4); and the people of Zarahemla cast stones and arrows at Samuel the Lamanite (Helaman 16:2). These are not only reactions to the speakers’ words but also repudiations of the plea for acceptance indicated by the gesture. Further, in each instance of gesture followed by contact, the one performing the gesture presents a message whose acceptance is critical to the welfare of the other.
of these cases of prophetic speech, it is not only the prophet’s but also the Lord’s plea for acceptance that is at stake.

The use of two hands in the earliest text of Mosiah 16:1 raises the possibility that other passages that mention stretching forth two hands, or that show variation in the number of hands used, should also be associated with this speech gesture. In Alma 31:14, we have a description of the Zoramites’ manner of prayer. While standing upon a high podium, each person offering prayer was to raise his hands to heaven and utter a set formula. This recalls the prayer gesture of raising the hands found in the Bible and in many ancient cultures; in Hebrew the usual phrase is pāraś kappayim “spread the hands.”9 However, when we look at the phraseology of the text, we notice a striking similarity to other instances of stretching forth the hand(s) to speak:

Therefore, whosoever desired to worship must go forth and stand upon the top thereof, and stretch forth his hands towards heaven, and cry with a loud voice, saying . . . ” (Alma 31:14)

Here we have the phrase stretch forth one’s hand(s), the verb cry modified by the prepositional phrase with a loud voice, and the quotation marker saying—exactly as in other instances of the speech gesture. The prescribed speech immediately following the Zoramites’ prayer gesture refers to the addressee of the prayer: “Holy, holy God” (Alma 31:15). While it is quite typical to begin a prayer by calling upon God, this phrase can also be understood in terms of the functional meaning of stretching forth the hand(s) as described above, addressing God as a new participant in the encounter.

In two other Book of Mormon examples, the Lord tirelessly stretches forth his hand(s) to his people. Here the verb of speech is not explicit, yet ministering with the spoken word could be implied:

But what could I have done more in my vineyard? Have I slackened mine hand, that I have not nour-

---

Table 2. Types of scenarios for stretching forth the hand(s).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Reference</th>
<th>Change in speaker</th>
<th>Change in addressee</th>
<th>Speech immediately following gesture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Type 1</td>
<td>Mosiah 12:2</td>
<td>no/yes (change in role)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>“Thus saith the Lord”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Helaman 13:4</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>“Behold, I, Samuel, a Lamanite, do speak the words of the Lord”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Nephi 11:9–10</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>“Behold, I am Jesus Christ”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 2</td>
<td>Alma 10:25</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>“O ye wicked and perverse generation”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alma 15:5</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>(uncertain: direct speech not reported)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alma 19:12</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>“Blessed be the name of God, and blessed art thou”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alma 32:7</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>“I behold that ye are lowly in heart; and if so, blessed are ye”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Nephi 12:1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>“Blessed are ye if ye shall give heed”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type 3</td>
<td>Mosiah 12:2</td>
<td>no/yes (change in role)</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>“It shall come to pass that this generation, because of their iniquities, shall be brought into bondage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mosiah 16:1</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>“The time shall come when all shall see the salvation of the Lord”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alma 13:21</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>“Now is the time to repent”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a. The addressees, Alma and Amulek, have newly arrived on the scene; however, the speaker has already been addressing them indirectly through a relayed message (v. 4).
ished it? Nay, I have nourished it, and I have digged about it, and I have pruned it, and I have dunged it; and I have stretched forth mine hand almost all the day long, and the end draweth nigh. (Jacob 5:47)

And how merciful is our God unto us, for he remembereth the house of Israel, both roots and branches; and he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long. (Jacob 6:4)

In Jacob 5:47, the speaker is the Lord of the vineyard, who symbolizes God in Zenos's allegory of the olive tree quoted here. Following closely Jacob's quotation of the allegory and continuing the imagery of “roots and branches,” Jacob 6:4 quite likely refers to the earlier passage, despite the variation in number of hands. Thus these two passages seem to refer to the same action of the Lord. Since the meaning in both cases is allegorical, the fact that this gesture most often accompanies speech in the Book of Mormon could indicate that Zenos and Jacob are referring to the Lord's tireless imparting of the word of God to his people. The Lord's actions toward his people, who are represented allegorically as an olive tree, are described as nourishing, digging about, pruning, dunging, and remembering. The image of nourishing is, in particular, compatible with the notion of teaching the word of God (see Deuteronomy 8:3 and Moroni 6:4). The connection between the Lord stretching forth his hand(s) “all the day long” and nourishing through the word, in the context of the allegory, is clearly implied in Jacob 6:7:

For behold, after ye have been nourished by the good word of God all the day long, will ye bring forth evil fruit, that ye must be hewn down and cast into the fire? (Jacob 6:7)

In the three instances in which the outstretched-hand gesture accompanying speech employs two hands in the earliest extant reading—Mosiah 16:1, Alma 31:14, and Jacob 6:4—the use of two hands as opposed to one does not appear to impact the meaning of the gesture. Note that in Jacob 5:47 and 6:4 the same action of the Lord is described with the singular hand in the former passage and the plural hands in the latter. However, in the case of Alma 31:14, it could be that the use of two hands in the prayer gesture is a fixed form, similar to the uniform use of two hands in the biblical prayer gesture, since the forms of gestures used in ritual often become set through repetition and prescription.

Aside from these examples in which stretching forth the hand correlates with speech, there are two instances in Book of Mormon narrative where this phrase describes a gesture of supernatural destructive power:

And it came to pass that the Lord said unto me: Stretch forth thine hand again unto thy brethren, and . . . I will shake them. . . . And it came to pass that I stretched forth my hand unto my brethren, and . . . the Lord did shake them . . . And now, they said: We know of a surety that the Lord is with thee, for we know that it is the power of the Lord that has shaken us. (1 Nephi 17:53–55)

Therefore let us stretch forth our hands, and exercise the power of God which is in us, and save them from the flames. But Alma said unto him: The Spirit constraineth me that I must not stretch forth mine hand.11 (Alma 14:10–11)

The use of an outstretched hand to destroy or exert supernatural power is very common in the Hebrew Bible; the most frequently used idiom to describe this gesture in Hebrew is nāṭâ yād “extend the hand.”12 This idiom is also found in biblical passages quoted in the Book of Mormon, such as in Nephi's long quotation from the book of Isaiah.13 These passages contain the repeating sentence “For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand stretched out still.” (the word is between hand and stretched, which is italicized in the King James Version,14 was originally omitted in the Book of Mormon passages). The gesture in each of these passages is clearly connected with judgments and destruction that God is said to inflict on Judah and Jerusalem. It will suffice to quote the first of these passages:

Therefore is the anger of the Lord kindled against his people, and he hath stretched forth his hand against them and hath smitten them. And the hills did tremble and their carcasses were torn in the midst of the streets. For all this his anger is not turned away, but his hand stretched out still. (2 Nephi 15:25, printer's manuscript)

One of the most interesting contributions of the Book of Mormon to biblical interpretation is found in the different accounts of what Moses did at the Red Sea.

Interestingly, the variation between *stretch forth* and *stretch out* in this passage (both phrases translating the Hebrew expression *nāṭâ yād* in Isaiah 5:25) shows that the two English phrases are synonymous in the seventeenth-century idiom used in the King James Bible and in the Book of Mormon.¹⁵

The one performing the gesture in these Isaiah passages is the Lord, unlike in 1 Nephi 17:53–55 and Alma 14:10–11, where the agent of the gesture is a prophet. However, the idea of a prophet performing this gesture is quite in harmony with biblical narratives in which Moses and Joshua perform the gesture, always following a direct commandment from the Lord (Exodus 7–14; Joshua 8).

It is possible that the gesture of stretching forth the hand to exercise supernatural power was accompanied by a verbal curse or command. If so, one might identify this gesture with the speech gesture described above. However, it is unlikely that this is the case. Of the forty-three biblical instances in which the idiom *nāṭâ yād* “extend the hand” refers to a gesture of destruction or exertion of supernatural power (as in 1 Nephi 17 and Alma 14), not one mentions speech, while other gestures that accompany speech almost always mention the speech act explicitly.¹⁶ This argues that the omission of verbs of speech in these two Book of Mormon instances is significant and that we are dealing with a different gesture here, one whose function was to exert supernatural power without the use of speech.

**Moses’s Gesture at the Red Sea**

One of the most interesting contributions of the Book of Mormon to biblical interpretation is found in the different accounts of what Moses did at the Red Sea. The description of this event in Exodus mentions a gesture of stretching out the hand:

And *Moses stretched out his hand* over the sea; and the Lord caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. . . . And *Moses stretched forth his hand* over the sea, and the sea returned to his strength when the morning appeared; and the Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of the sea. (Exodus 14:21, 27)

In two passages in 1 Nephi, the prophet Nephi refers to this event in exhortations to his brothers. However, he does not mention the gesture but instead adds a different detail to the event:

Therefore let us go up; let us be strong like unto Moses; for *he truly spake unto the waters of the Red Sea* and they divided hither and thither, and our fathers came through, out of captivity, on dry ground, and the armies of Pharaoh did follow and were drowned in the waters of the Red Sea. (1 Nephi 4:2)
Now ye know that Moses was commanded of the Lord to do that great work; and ye know that by his word the waters of the Red Sea were divided hither and thither, and they passed through on dry ground. (1 Nephi 17:26)

According to Nephi’s understanding of the event, Moses engaged in speaking, and his gesture is apparently interpreted as a gesture of speech. Nephi’s understanding of what Moses did at the Red Sea thus accords with the Book of Mormon’s prominent use of the phrase stretch forth the hand to accompany speech. Other restoration scriptures agree with this interpretation of the event at the Red Sea:

Blessed art thou, Moses, for I, the Almighty, have chosen thee, and thou shalt be made stronger than many waters; for they shall obey thy command as if thou wert God. (Moses 1:25)

For I am the Lord thy God. . . . I stretch my hand over the sea, and it obeys my voice. (Abraham 2:7)

A similar idea may also be alluded to in the apocryphal Hebrew book of Ben Sira:

With his (Moses’s) word he (the Lord) swiftly brought about [signs], he strengthened him before the king. (Ben Sira 45:3)

In light of these data, a different description of the same event by another prophet named Nephi (Nephi2) later in the Book of Mormon is all the more striking:

Behold, my brethren, have ye not read that God gave power unto one man, even Moses, to smite upon the waters of the Red Sea, and they departed hither and thither, insomuch that the Israelites, which were our fathers, came through upon dry ground, and the waters closed upon the armies of the Egyptians and swallowed them up? (Helaman 8:11, printer’s manuscript)

Here Nephi2 mentions neither the outstretched hand nor the speech act, but a completely different detail, an act of smiting the water. This interpretation of the outstretched-hand gesture as a prelude to smiting accords well with biblical tradition. In a great number of instances in the Hebrew Bible, the extended-hand gesture of destruction is followed by an act of “smiting” (in most cases, this “smiting” may be understood as figurative, an exertion of divine power on a person, group, or natural element). Interpreting, Nephi2’s description closely parallels the biblical account of Elijah crossing the Jordan, especially as worded in the King James Bible:

And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. (2 Kings 2:8)

The similarity in language here (compare also 1 Nephi 17:26, quoted above) is unmistakable and can hardly be ascribed to coincidence, especially in view of its wide divergence from the biblical account of Moses. Both 2 Kings and Nephi2 give the same sequence: a person smiting the waters, the waters departing or dividing hither and thither, and people walking through on dry ground. One other passage in restoration scripture also agrees with the idea that Moses smote the waters:

I will raise up Moses, and a rod shall be in his hand, and he shall gather together my people, and he shall lead them as a flock, and he shall smite the waters of the Red Sea with his rod. (Genesis 50:24 JST)

Finally, it may be mentioned that at least two ancient, nonbiblical sources, namely Josephus and the Qur’an, also say that Moses smote the waters:

Having thus called upon God, he (Moses) smote the sea with his staff. At this stroke, it recoiled and, withdrawing into itself, left the earth bare to be a road and an escape to the Hebrews. (Josephus, Antiquities 2.338)

We gave inspiration to Moses: “Travel by night with my servants, then smite for them a dry path through the sea; do not fear being overtaken, and do not be afraid.” (Qur’an 20:77)

Then we gave inspiration to Moses: “Smite the sea with your rod.” Then it was divided, and each part was like a great mountain. (Qur’an 26:63)

From the perspective of gesture symbolism, the interesting thing about the diverging accounts of the two Nephis in 1 Nephi 4:2 and Helaman 8:11 is that they can both be understood as interpreting the outstretched-hand gesture of Moses mentioned in Exodus 14. Speaking is substituted for the gesture in one case, and smiting is substituted for it in another, showing that the gesture was interpreted in two different ways, both of which accord with usage elsewhere in scripture. The fact that both interpretations are also found in other restoration scripture and in nonbiblical ancient sources shows that
these interpretations are not unique to the Book of Mormon. This is one instance in which the study of gestures in the Book of Mormon, in other restoration scripture, and in literature from the biblical world can be mutually instructive. In this instance, the Book of Mormon proves to be a good laboratory, since it reflects the diversity of interpretations found in other sources.

The Extended Arm(s) of Mercy

Several passages in the Book of Mormon have reference to the Lord’s extended arm(s) of mercy. This gesture is distinct from the stretched-forth hand accompanying speech. The arm and not the hand is always mentioned, and the gesture is often correlated with mercy but not with speech.23

For notwithstanding I shall lengthen out mine arm unto them from day to day, they will deny me; nevertheless, I will be merciful unto them, saith the Lord God, if they will repent and come unto me; for mine arm is lengthened out all the day long, saith the Lord God of Hosts. (2 Nephi 28:32)

And while his arm of mercy is extended towards you in the light of the day, harden not your hearts. (Jacob 6:5)

For I say unto you, that if he had not extended his arm in the preservation of our fathers they must have fallen into the hands of the Lamanites, and become victims to their hatred. (Mosiah 1:14)

Having gone according to their own carnal wills and desires; having never called upon the Lord while the arms of mercy was extended towards them; for the arms of mercy was extended towards them, and they would not. (Mosiah 16:12, printer’s manuscript)

And thus doth the Lord work with his power in all cases among the children of men, extending the arm of mercy towards them that put their trust in him. (Mosiah 29:20)

Behold, he sendeth an invitation unto all men, for the arms of mercy is extended towards them, and he saith: Repent, and I will receive you. Yea, he saith, Come unto me and ye shall partake of the fruit of the tree of life. (Alma 5:33–34, printer’s manuscript)

And thus the work of the Lord did commence among the Lamanites; thus the Lord did begin to pour out his Spirit upon them; and we see that his arm is extended to all people who will repent and believe on his name. (Alma 19:36)

And behold, when I see many of my brethren truly penitent, and coming to the Lord their God, then is my soul filled with joy; then do I remember what the Lord has done for me, yea, even that he hath heard my prayer; yea, then do I remember his merciful arm which he extended towards me. (Alma 29:10)

Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive; and blessed are those who come unto me. (3 Nephi 9:14)

Though this gesture is clearly distinct from the stretched-forth hand accompanying speech, it is similar to the latter in one respect—namely, that in some examples (Mosiah 16:12; Alma 5:33–34) where the arms (plural) are stretched out, the use of one or both limbs has no apparent impact on the meaning of the gesture.24 Further, in Mosiah 16, it seems likely that there is an intended connection between Abinadi’s stretched-forth hands (v. 1) and the Lord’s extended arms (v. 12).25 It is as if Abinadi, through his own intensifying and pleading gesture of stretching forth the hands, is providing an illustration of the Lord’s extended arms of mercy. In Jacob 6:5, the imagery of the Lord’s “arm of mercy . . . extended towards you in the light of the day” plays on the imagery in verse 4, “he stretches forth his hands unto them all the day long.” The fact that the two gestures are distinct, therefore, does not prevent their similarities from being exploited for literary purposes.

Interestingly, this phrase focuses on the arm(s) and not the hand(s). In many cultures, including that of ancient Israel, the arm is symbolic of strength. In the Book of Mormon, some passages speak of the folly of “trusting in the arm of flesh” or “making flesh one’s arm” or, in other words, trusting in one’s own merely human strength instead of in God’s power and precepts (2 Nephi 4:34; 28:31). This symbolism of the arm as strength may be present in some of the passages quoted above, particularly Mosiah 1:14, where the arm is associated with the “preservation” of people against their enemies, and Mosiah 29:20, where “extending the arm of mercy” is parallel to the Lord’s “work[ing] with his power.”

However, other symbolic associations are consistently present in the nine verses cited above dealing with extended arm(s). One of these is the notion of mercy, which is explicit in the phrases arm(s) of mercy (Jacob 6:5; Mosiah 29:20; Alma 5:33–34; 3 Nephi 9:14) and merciful arm (Alma 29:10). Another is the invitation to “come” and be “received,” which is given explicitly in Alma 5:33–34 and 3 Nephi 9:14. The verbs deny and come are used in 2 Nephi 28:32 to describe contrasting reactions to the gesture of lengthening out the arm, suggesting that an invita-
tion to come is implied in the gesture. One can also compare Mormon 6:17: “how could ye have rejected that Jesus, who stood with open arms to receive you?” In these cases, the fact that it is specifically the arm(s) and not the hand(s) that are mentioned makes it very likely that the gesture expresses the desire to embrace the addressee, just as the speech gesture of stretching forth the hand(s) expresses the desire for a handclasp or other physical contact. The Lord’s protective and redemptive embrace is described in the Book of Mormon as being “encircled” or “clasped” in the Lord’s arms:

But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell; I have beheld his glory, and I am **encircled about eternally in the arms of his love.** (2 Nephi 1:15)

And thus mercy can satisfy the demands of justice, and **encircles them in the arms of safety**, while he that exercises no faith unto repentance is exposed to the whole law of the demands of justice. (Alma 34:16)

They will sorrow that this people had not repented that they might have been **clasped in the arms of Jesus.** (Mormon 5:11)

The embracing arms in these passages and the extended arm(s) of mercy both depend on the human addressee’s repentance (compare 2 Nephi 28:32; Alma 5:33–34; 19:36), which increases the likelihood that the two gestures are related.

Both the extended arm(s) and the embracing arms are often described in relationship to one of the Lord’s attributes: mercy, love, or safety. While these expressions could be attributing figurative arms to the personified attributes, it seems more likely, both from a semantic standpoint and in keeping with the overall style of the Book of Mormon, that this type of phrase is to be interpreted as a Hebraism. In this interpretation, *arm of mercy* simply means “merciful arm.”

The more idiomatic phrase *merciful arm* actually occurs in Alma 29:10. In the case of 2 Nephi 1:15, where a possessive determiner *his* occurs before *love*, the possessive determiner should be taken as modifying the whole phrase, as “his loving arms.”

Another passage that may refer to an embrace is found in 2 Nephi 4:33. Here the verb *encircle* is used, but the person is encircled not in “arms” but in a “robe”:

O Lord, wilt thou **encircle me around** in the robe of thy righteousness! (2 Nephi 4:33)

Hugh Nibley, in a 1989 article, referred to this passage as describing an embrace. The embrace is not explicit here. However, the phrase *the robe of thy righteousness*, like the phrases with *arm* discussed above, can be interpreted as a Hebraism, in which case the meaning is something like “thy saving robe.” If this is the case (that is, if the robe is worn by the one performing the gesture), then the gesture of encircling would imply a kind of embrace. In any case, the context in 2 Nephi 4:31–33, in which Nephi is pleading for deliverance from his enemies, makes clear the
association of encircling in the robe with providing safety (compare Alma 34:16, cited above).34

"She Clapped Her Hands, Being Filled with Joy"

Another gesture in the Book of Mormon that can be consistently correlated with a meaning is that of clapping the hands. In the two passages where it occurs, this gesture indicates overflowing joy:35

And now when the people had heard these words, they clapped their hands for joy and exclaimed: This is the desire of our hearts! (Mosiah 18:11)36

And when she had said this, she clapped her hands, being filled with joy, speaking many words which were not understood. (Alma 19:30, printer’s manuscript)

In the second of these instances, the current text reads clasped instead of clapped. However, thanks to the work of Royal Skousen, it is now well known that the original text read clapped, spelled as claped by Oliver Cowdery in the printer’s manuscript (the earliest textual source for this passage). Skousen’s prose on this is worth quoting: “The 1830 typesetter accidentally misread claped as clasped, which ended up removing the more emotional, even pentecostal, clap of the original event in favor of the rather anemic clasp.”37

In the Hebrew Bible and other ancient Near Eastern sources, clapping the hands is a sign of intense emotion, but it is anger or derision at least as often as joy.38 Too few examples of the gesture exist in the Book of Mormon to be sure whether the gesture indicated joy exclusively or was a more general indicator of intense emotion. If used solely to denote joy, this would be a unique feature of Book of Mormon culture compared to ancient Israel and other Near Eastern cultures.

Conclusions

I have discussed four distinct gestures found in the Book of Mormon, some of which have echoes in the Hebrew Bible and elsewhere in restoration scripture. These are tabulated in table 3.

Understanding how these gestures function helps to illuminate the scriptural passages in which they are mentioned. For example, knowing that the stretched-forth hand accompanying speech is a plea for contact and acceptance makes Abinadi’s use of the gesture while delivering a message that would lead to his martyrdom especially vivid. Similarly, knowing the symbolism of God’s extended arm(s) and this gesture’s relationship to a protective and loving embrace helps us to understand his repeated statements that his arms are extended toward his people.

In this paper, I have maintained a somewhat narrow focus on a few explicit gestures involving the hands and arms in the Book of Mormon.39 A more thorough study of nonverbal communication in restoration scripture would be an enormous and very fruitful undertaking. Future studies could, for example, illuminate the functions and symbolism of postures, proxemics (the distance between participants in an interaction), and use of objects.40 In addi-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gesture</th>
<th>Function</th>
<th>Symbolism</th>
<th>References</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>stretching forth the hand(s)</td>
<td>intensifying speech, initiating new instance of speech, or marking a shift in participants</td>
<td>partially bridging physical and social distance, inviting handclasp as symbol of acceptance</td>
<td>Jacob 5:47; 6:4; Mosiah 12:2; 16:1; Alma 10:25; 13:21; 15:5; 19:12; 31:14; 32:7; Helaman 13:4; 3 Nephi 11:9; 12:1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stretching forth/ out the hand</td>
<td>exercising the power of God without speech</td>
<td>supernatural destructive power</td>
<td>1 Nephi 17:53–54; 2 Nephi 15:25 (twice); 19:12, 17, 21; 20:4; 24:26–27; Alma 14:10–11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lengthening out/ extending the arm(s)</td>
<td>a “reaching out” of God to humans, as situated within prophetic imagery</td>
<td>protection, mercy, love, invitation to come and be embraced</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:32 (twice); Jacob 6:5; Mosiah 1:14; 16:12 (twice); 29:20; Alma 5:33; 19:36; 29:10; 3 Nephi 9:14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clapping the hands</td>
<td>expression of intense emotion</td>
<td>joy [and other emotions?]</td>
<td>Mosiah 18:11; Alma 19:30</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Book of Mormon hand and arm gestures.
an infinite number of studies could be devoted to revealing what our interpretations of scripture presuppose about unexpressed nonverbal aspects of the text. Studies such as these would help scholars to elaborate their interpretations and render them more consistent with the cultural worlds of the texts themselves. In short, I hope that the present modest beginning points out a long and fruitful path of investigation.

NOTES

1. Compare Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1938), 168: “Now the purpose in Himself in the winding up scene of the last dispensation is that all things pertaining to that dispensation should be conducted precisely in accordance with the preceding dispensations. . . . Therefore He set the ordinances to be the same forever and ever, and set Adam to stand by . . . took up the scalp from a sword instead of a hand: “And it also consider the special case of Alma 44:13–14, where a soldier speaks while stretching forth a sword instead of a hand: “And it went forth and answered for himself” (v. 52). Another special case is Alma 30:51–52, in which the chief judge and the mute Korihor use similar gestures not to speak but to write to each other: “And Korihor saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak” (v. 52). Another special case is Alma 44:13–14, where a soldier speaks while stretching forth a sword instead of a hand: “And it came to pass that the soldier who stood by . . . took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice: Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth . . .”
2. For discussion, see Royal Skousen, *Analysis of Textual Variants of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2004–9), part 2:1342–45. Skousen prefers to restore the earlier reading here, though he notes that “it could very well be an error for hand.” The change to the singular, as maintained in the current text, was made by John Gilbert in his typesetting for the 1830 edition.
3. One might also consider the special case of Alma 30:51–52, in which the chief judge and the mute Korihor use a similar gesture not to speak but to write to each other: “And Korihor put forth his hand and wrote, saying: I know that I am dumb, for I cannot speak” (v. 52). Another special case is Alma 44:13–14, where a soldier speaks while stretching forth a sword instead of a hand: “And it came to pass that the soldier who stood by . . . took up the scalp from off the ground by the hair, and laid it upon the point of his sword, and stretched it forth unto them, saying unto them with a loud voice: Even as this scalp has fallen to the earth . . .”
7. To use Goffman’s terminology, Abinadi here switches from the role of author to the role of animator (Goffman, *Forms of Talk*, 226); compare the terms author and relayer in Levinson, “Putting Linguistics on a Proper Footing,” 170–72.
11. Note that Alma’s response indicates that our hands means “one hand of each of us” since he says “mine hand” (singular). This rules out the possibility that the reference is to a prayer gesture like that in Alma 31:14, as suggested by John A. Tvedtnes, “Temple Prayer in Ancient Times,” in *The Temple in Time and Eternity*, ed. Donald W. Parry and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999), 82.
12. Exodus 7:5, 19; 8:1, 2, 12, 13; 9:22, 23; 10:12, 13, 21, 22; 14:16, 21, 26, 27;

In one instance of the idiom nāṭā yād where the context is not that of destruction or exertion of supernatural power, namely Proverbs 1:24, a speech act is mentioned: “For I called, but you refused; I extended my hand (nāṭātī yādāt), but none gave heed.” The agent of the gesture here is the personified Lady Wisdom, whose role in this passage is portrayed as similar to that of a prophet, speaking in the streets and gates (vv. 20–21) and pronouncing judgments against those who will not hear (vv. 26–32). Compare Harold C. Washington, “Proverbs, Sirach,” in New Oxford Annotated Bible, ed. Michael D. Coogan, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), Hebrew Bible section, 906. Considering the close cultural link between ancient Egyptian wisdom and the book of Proverbs, it is not unlikely that this is an example of the Egyptian-like gesture of stretching out the hand to accompany speech. The Book of Mormon use of the phrase stretch forth the hand is exactly the reverse of the biblical use of nāṭā yād: in those passages of the Book of Mormon that are not quoted from the Bible, it is predominantly a speech gesture and only rarely a gesture of destruction.

This speech of Jehovah is set in an earlier era than the exodus from Egypt. However, while it may not have specific reference to the (then future) crossing of the Red Sea, it clearly refers to the same kind of gesture. Note that the gesture of stretching out the hand at the Red Sea, while actually carried out by Moses, was considered to be the Lord’s gesture. See, for example, Exodus 15:11–12 KJV: “Who is like unto thee, O Lord, among the gods? who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? Thou stretchedst out thy right hand, the earth swallowed them.” Compare also Exodus 7:4–5; Isaiah 10:26.

Part of “his word” is missing in the Hebrew text (manuscript B). However, dbrw “his word” is written in the margin, supporting the restoration. See Pancratius C. Beentjes, The Book of Ben Sira in Hebrew (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 79. Some translations (like the New Revised Standard Version) base the Greek version, restore the noun as plural, dbryw “his words.” The identification of Moses as the antecedent of “his” follows the New Jerusalem Bible. The translation from the Hebrew is my own.

The current text of Helaman 8:11 reads “parted,” but the earliest textual witness, the printer’s manuscript, reads “departed,” perhaps with the archaic meaning “parted, divided.” The word was changed to “parted” by John Gilbert in the typesetting of the 1830 edition. See Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants, part 5:3011–13.

Nephi begins his summary of Moses’ action by asking his audience, “Have ye not read . . . . ,” implying that he is referring to an already existing text. It is possible that he is simply giving a loose account of the narrative in Exodus, using language from 2 Kings 2. However, it is also possible that Nephi here refers to another ancient text, one in which similar language is used in the description of the events at the Red Sea and at the Jordan River. The latter possibility would compare well with 1 Nephi 5:10–13, which relates that the brass plates (the Nephites’ scriptures that they took with them from Jerusalem) contained both a historical record spanning “from the beginning” to the reign of King Zedekiah and a prophetic record covering the same time span, both of these records being distinct from the “five books of Moses.”

It is noteworthy that the Jewish commentator Abraham ibn Ezra (ca. AD 1100–1160), in his commentary on Exodus 14, seemingly reacts against the tendency to interpret Moses’s gesture as one of smiting: “But as for you . . .” (Exodus 14:16): God said to Moses, ‘Lift up your staff and divide the sea before they take their journey,’ for he did not say to him that he should strike the sea, only that he should stretch out his hand against the sea with his staff, in the same manner as ‘And Moses stretched forth his staff toward heaven’ (Exodus 10:22), and we understand that the staff did not divide the sea, but at the very moment that Moses stretched out his hand against the sea, God made the sea move by a strong east wind, then the waters were divided, for thus it is written.” See Jacob ben Hayim ibn Adoniya, ed., Biblia Rabbinita (Jerusalem: Makor, 1972), 1:158. The translations from Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic are my own.

In Jacob 6:4, the Lord’s remembering the house of Israel and his stretching “forth his hands to them” are described as evidence of his mercy. Nevertheless, mercy is more often connected explicitly with the phrase extend one’s arm(s) than with the phrase stretch forth one’s hand(s): Jacob 6:4 is the only example of the latter connection. In addition, the idiom arm(s) of mercy has no equivalent using the word hands(s).

In the printer’s manuscript (the earliest source for these passages), the verb that goes with arms is singular: was in Mosiah 16:12 (twice), is in Alma 5:33. These readings continued in the 1830 edition but were all changed to are in Joseph Smith’s editing for the 1837 edition. Based on this, it would be possible to posit that arms is an error for the singular arm. However, since there is variation in the original text for the number of hands or arms used in other gestures, it seems advisable to allow variation in this case, according to the reading of the earliest extant text. On the use of was with plural subjects in the original text, see Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants, part 1:101–5.

Note that restoring the original
plural reading hands in verse 1 helps to make this connection clear.

26. This imagery begins even earlier in this chapter, in verse 2: “the day that he shall set his hand again the second time to recover his people.” Jacob here quotes from Isaiah 11:11, also quoted by him in 2 Nephi 6:14 and by his brother Nephi in 2 Nephi 21:11; 25:17; and 29:1. In the case of 2 Nephi 29:1, the use of this image immediately follows the mention of God’s arm being “lengthened out all the day long” in 2 Nephi 28:32 (there was no chapter division between these verses in the original text). The linking together of different gestures under a unified theme is thus a recurring technique in the books of 2 Nephi and Jacob. Compare David Rolph Seely, “The Image of the Hand of God in the Book of Mormon and the Old Testament,” in Rediscovering the Book of Mormon, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 144, 147–48.


28. Recent studies on Hebraisms in the Book of Mormon text include the following: Brian D. Stubs, “Book of Mormon Language,” in Encyclopedi[2]a of Mormonism, 1:179–81; Royal Skousen, “The Original Language of the Book of Mormon: Upstate New York Dialect, King James English, or Hebrew?” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 3/1 (1994): 28–38; and Donald W. Parry, “Hebraisms and Other Ancient Peculiarities in the Book of Mormon,” in Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2002), 155–89. Earlier foundational studies can be found referenced in the works just cited and in the note just below. Overall, the literature on this topic is quite large, though the general theme of the robe in the Book of Mormon is not employed consistently throughout the Book of Mormon text. One example of this is the use of and to transition from a circumstantial or conditional clause to a main clause, which occurs sporadically, sometimes varying with more idiomatic English usage within the same passage. See Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants, part 5; 3068–69.


30. There are other cases where a Hebraism is not employed consistently throughout the Book of Mormon text. One example of this is the use of and to transition from a circumstantial or conditional clause to a main clause, which occurs sporadically, sometimes varying with more idiomatic English usage within the same passage. See Skousen, Analysis of Textual Variants, part 5; 3068–69.

31. Waltke and O’Connor, Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax, 150–51. Waltke and O’Connor cite four examples; especially convincing is Psalm 42:9, literally “to the God of my life,” but clearly meaning “to my living God.” For a biblical example involving the noun arm, compare “his holy arm” (literally “the arm of his holiness”) in Psalm 98:1. Also compare “my saving right hand” (literally “the right hand of my righteousness”) in Isaiah 41:10.


34. For the general theme of the robe of righteousness, compare Job 29:14; Psalm 132:9; Isaiah 61:10; Baruch 5:2; 2 Nephi 9:14; Doctrine and Covenants 29:12; 109:76. In each of these passages, the robe is referred to as “a robe” or “the robe” rather than “God’s robe,” and one is clothed in the robe rather than encircled in it.

35. As an anonymous reviewer of this article has noted, in Alma 31:36, the similar expression “clap the hands upon (another person)” is used twice. This appears to be a different gesture than that denoted by “clap the hands” in Mosiah 18:11 and Alma 19:30, where there is no prepositional phrase describing an addressee. The result of the gesture in Alma 31:36 is that the addressees are “filled with the Holy Ghost,” which suggests that this could be related to “laying the hands upon (a person)” to give him/her the Holy Ghost (Mormon 2:2).

36. I have modified the punctuation slightly from how it reads in the current text. The period after “This is the desire of our hearts” in the current text dampens the fervor that is implied by the gesture and by the verb exclaimed.


38. Anger: Numbers 24:10; compare the Egyptian Tale of Two Brothers, Papyrus D’Orbigny 6:7–8. Derision: Job 27:23; Lamentations 2:15; Nahum 3:19. Clapping hands is associated with joy, either through poetic parallelism or by means of the context, in Psalms 47:1; 98:8; and Isaiah 55:12. The gesture in Ezekiel 25:6 could be interpreted from context as indicating either joy or derision. The gesture in 2 Kings 11:12 occurs within the context of a coronation ceremony, perhaps as an expression of joy (as in Mosiah 18:11) or perhaps as a formal ritual gesture.

39. Other hand gestures include the laying on of hands (Alma 6:1; 31:36; 3 Nephi 18:36; Mormon 9:24; Moroni 2:1–2; 3:2; Doctrine and Covenants 20:41, 58, 68, 70, 362; 42:43–44; Articles of Faith 1:4, 5), “putting forth the hand” (Alma 47:23), putting the hand over another’s eyes (Abraham 3:12), and putting the hand under another’s robe (Genesis 24:2, 9 JST).

FORMULAS AND FAITH

JOHN GEE

While one might like a simple or simplistic argument about the historicity of the Book of Abraham, such arguments tend to be complex. Sometimes they become so complex that individual discussants lose the thread of the argument and consequently end up undermining their larger argument to attack a certain smaller argument. This paper will discuss one such argument. But first, it is necessary to set the argument in context.

One of the more prominent issues with the Book of Abraham is the relationship of the Book of Abraham to the Joseph Smith Papyri. There are three basic positions here:

1. The text of the Book of Abraham was translated from papyri that we currently have. (Or, from the unbelieving perspective, Joseph Smith thought that the text of the Book of Abraham was on papyri that we currently have.)
2. The text of the Book of Abraham was translated from (or Joseph Smith thought the text of the Book of Abraham was on) papyri that we do not currently have.
3. The text of the Book of Abraham was received by revelation independent of the papyri.

Of these three positions, the first seems to be a minority viewpoint espoused by few if any members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Of the remaining two options, the last is preferred.

FROM THE EDITOR:

One of the questions that swirls around the Book of Abraham is the role that the papyrus scrolls played in the translation process. A corollary to that question is, was one or more of the scrolls long enough to contain the Book of Abraham as we now have it? The extant fragments certainly are not long enough to have contained the current text. But, how long were the scrolls originally? John Gee has tackled this relative question with objectivity and precision.
by a majority of the members of the church who care about this issue. Most members find the issue unimportant. Such readers might be forgiven for deeming this a trivial matter. Yet some are interested in which of the foregoing theories best fits the available evidence.

Joseph Smith once had possession of at least five papyrus documents:

- A scroll belonging to Horos, son of Osoroeris, that contained, at a minimum, a text now called the Document of Breathings Made by Isis.
- A scroll belonging to Semminis, daughter of Eschons, containing, at a minimum, a text now called the Book of the Dead.
- A scroll belonging to Neferirtinoub, containing, at a minimum, a vignette from the Book of the Dead.
- A scroll belonging to Amenothis, son of Tanoub, containing, at a minimum, portions of the Book of the Dead together with other texts.
- A hypocephalus belonging to Sesonchis.

Nineteenth-century eyewitnesses, however, did not have training in Egyptology and did not provide descriptions of the papyri that accord with modern Egyptological notions. Instead they recalled

a. some papyri “preserved under glass,” described as “a number of glazed slides, like picture frames, containing sheets of papyrus, with Egyptian inscriptions and hieroglyphics”;  

b. “a long roll of manuscript”;

c. “another roll”; and

d. “two or three other small pieces of papyrus with astronomical calculations, epitaphs, &c.”

If one follows position 1 or 2, one might like to know which papyrus contained the Book of Abraham. (If one follows position 3, which is the majority position, then the point is moot since the answer is none of the papyri.) If one looks to nineteenth-century eyewitnesses for information about which of these types of papyri might have contained the Book of Abraham, one finds that these accounts—including those both friendly and hostile to Joseph Smith—are consistent in identifying the “long roll” (b) as the source of the Book of Abraham. Adherents of the minority theories (1 and 2) have sometimes sought to identify which of the papyri was the long roll.

Unfortunately, of the five papyrus documents that Joseph Smith had, only fragments of the first three have survived. The fragments of the scroll of Semminis are the most extensive, and comparison with Books of the Dead from the same time period indicates it could have originally been about seven meters (roughly twenty-three feet) long. But we know that not all the papyri were intact by the time they reached Joseph Smith (as in example d), and we do not know if the papyrus fragments were part of one of the scrolls at all. Indeed, it seems that only the fragments that were mounted and preserved (as in example a) were passed back to the church in 1967. This alone would seem to rule out position 1, since it requires that the Book of Abraham be on the mounted fragments, although the eyewitnesses say it was on the “long roll” (b). How long, then, was that long roll?

Since none of the surviving fragments represents a complete scroll, we cannot measure the missing portion. Instead, different methods of estimating the length of a partially preserved scroll have been employed. These methods consist of formulas that attempt to calculate the missing interior portion of a scroll using the extant exterior portions. The exterior portion of a scroll is not measurable by these methods.

Checking the Formulas

Two different formulas have been published for estimating the original length of a scroll, given the length of each winding of the preserved intact exterior portions. One has been proposed by the Egyptologist Friedhelm Hoffmann and one by Andrew Cook (a theoretical physicist) and Christopher Smith (a former Unitarian ministerial student). The two formulas are similar, differing primarily in minor details. Cook and Smith use the thickness of the papyri (which they did not measure but only estimated) as an indication of the change in diameter to calculate the difference between the lengths of successive windings in the scroll. Hoffmann—knowing that most papyri are already mounted, thus rendering it impossible to measure the thickness—uses the average difference between successive windings for the same purpose.
Applying the formulas to the Joseph Smith Papyri presumes the following logic:

I. If the long roll mentioned by the witnesses (b) is the interior part of one of the mounted portions of the scroll (a),
II. and if a method accurately calculates the missing interior portion of the scroll,
III. and if that method is applied equally to all the remaining scrolls of the Joseph Smith Papyri,
IV. then it might be able to tell us which was the long roll (b) and potentially which was the other scroll (c).

Conditions I–III must be met in order to reach conclusion IV.

Although both formulas have been applied to the fragmented scroll of Horos, neither has previously been applied to an actual intact scroll to confirm the accuracy of predicted length, thus failing to fulfill condition II and invalidating conclusion IV. This has been a war of theories fought on a field lacking empirical facts.

In 2001, in the back rooms of the Royal Ontario Museum, I encountered a rolled scroll whose diameter was about three centimeters. The scroll—ROM 978x43.1, a Ptolemaic period Book of the Dead—has since been unrolled; its length (including the fragmented portions) is about seven meters (roughly twenty-three feet).14 In November of 2010, I had the privilege of measuring the interior seventy-three windings of that scroll15 (after that point the scroll is no longer contiguous).

With the data gleaned from this intact roll in Toronto (that is, the individual winding lengths), I applied each of the mathematical formulas, using the assumptions made by the authors of the formulas concerning papyrus thickness, air-gap size, and size of smallest interior winding. I then compared the outcome with the actual interior length of the scroll. The results are shown on the graph (see p. 63).

The fewer the windings that have been measured from the outside of the scroll, the greater the remaining interior scroll length that must be estimated with even less data to predict it. Thus, the predictions of Hoffmann’s formula become particularly erratic. It does so precisely in those places where the assumptions of the formula fail to coincide with reality and where the paucity of data magnifies the problem. As can be seen, Hoffmann’s formula ap-
proximates the actual length of the papyrus, though it performs better the more data it has to work with. Cook and Smith’s formula also improves with more data, ranging from about a quarter of the correct length to about a third of the correct length; nonetheless, this formula glaringly underestimates the length of the scroll. There seem to be some errors in it or in the assumptions upon which it is based.

While Cook and Smith’s formula predicts a highly inaccurate length, Hoffmann’s formula provides a rough approximation. On the basis of observations I have made while measuring various scrolls, I am not convinced that these formulas can ever yield anything more than rough approximations. More empirical data is needed to make refinements in the formulas.

Implications

Although the Cook and Smith method of determining scroll length is anything but accurate (and thus fails condition II), even if it had been successful, it would have created other problems. Cook and Smith fail to establish which was the long roll because they applied their formula only to the Horos scroll; they did not apply it to any of the other extant scrolls and thus fail to meet another of the necessary conditions (III). They measured only the Horos scroll because they assumed it to be the source of the Book of Abraham. Yet the eyewitnesses identify the long roll as the source. Bent on proving that the Horos scroll was not the long roll, they overlooked the implications of such a view. If the scroll of Horos is not the long roll, it simply cannot be the source of the text of the Book of Abraham (according to the accounts of the eyewitnesses). By endeavoring to prove that the Horus scroll was not the long roll, they would have undermined their own case, which depended on the Horos scroll being the proposed source of the text of the Book of Abraham.

Cook and Smith would like to minimize the length of the Horos scroll because they believe that finding would eliminate the possibility that the Book of Abraham was translated from a scroll that we do not currently have (theory 2). Even if their calculations had been correct and thus had shown that the scroll of Horos was not the long roll observed by the
witnesses, that simply would have meant that another scroll would have been the scroll containing the Book of Abraham. So their attempt to eliminate theory 2 as a possibility would not, in fact, have actually been successful even had their formula correctly predicted a short length for the scroll of Horus.

Furthermore, their attempt, even if successful, would not have eliminated the most popular theory—that Joseph Smith received the Book of Abraham by revelation unconnected with the papyri (theory 3). It certainly cannot force anyone to accept the theory that the Book of Abraham was translated from the extant fragments of the Joseph Smith Papyri (theory 1) since that theory is excluded by the historical evidence. So for those who care about such matters, there are still two theories (2 and 3) that are not excluded from consideration.

Another overlooked possibility concerns the assumption (I) that the long roll (b) is the interior portion of any of the fragmentary scrolls (a). This assumption cannot be proven one way or the other but undergirds all attempts to calculate the interior portions of the scrolls. Unfortunately, there is no way to verify this assumption. If the assumption is untrue, then the various attempts to calculate the interior portion of the fragmentary scrolls are, at best, a moot point as far as identifying the Book of Abraham is concerned. Some evidence indicates that this might have been the case. An account from 1846 reports that Lucy Mack Smith “produced a black looking roll (which she told us was papyrus). . . . The roll was as dark as the bones of the Mummies, and bore very much the same appearance; but the opened sheets were exceedingly like thin parchment, and of quite a light color. There were birds, fishes, and fantastic looking people, interspersed amidst hieroglyphics.” While fine papyrus was typically light colored, blackened outsides are characteristic of scrolls that were included in burials and thus were in contact with embalming fluids. This description matches the distinctive characteristics for a scroll with its outer coat still intact. The reported statement that “part of [the scroll] the Prophet had unrolled and read” and that Lucy “had pasted the deciphered sheets on the leaves of a book which she showed us” must mean that the deciphered sheets were the translation rather than part of the scroll, since the roll should have been intact, just as the darkened outer portion was intact. While this witness’s statement raises more questions than it answers, it might
indicate the presence of a completely intact scroll after the death of Joseph Smith.

**Conclusions**

From this a number of conclusions can be drawn. First, Hoffmann’s method of calculating the interior portion of a scroll provides only rough approximations at best. The method of Cook and Smith tends to greatly underestimate the actual length.

Second, there are a number of possibilities for the long roll mentioned by nineteenth-century observers as being associated with the text of the Book of Abraham. While the Horos scroll is possible, other options include the Semminis scroll, the Amenothis scroll, the Neferirtnoub scroll, or another intact scroll. Historical methods, and even mathematical formulas applied to the historical evidence, are not sufficient to prove conclusions.

Those interested in these sorts of questions should constantly bear in mind that the historical evidence is limited and that limitations on the evidence often preclude definitive answers, or sometimes any answers, to the types of questions that we ask.19 Scholarship can be useful but is often incapable of answering particular questions. But faith does not require everything to be proved. Ironically, the relationship between the Joseph Smith Papyri and the Book of Abraham is a situation in which both believers and detractors must rely on their faith.

---

**John Gee** is a senior research fellow and the William (Bill) Gay Professor of Egyptology at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship at Brigham Young University, and chair of the Egyptology and Ancient Israel section of the Society of Biblical Literature. He is the author of numerous articles on Egyptology and has edited several books and journals.

---

**NOTES**

6. Josiah Quincy, *Figures of the Past from the Leaves of Old Journals* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1883), 386.
9. Haven, letter to her mother, 19 February 1843, 624.
14. To be published by Irmtraut Munro.
15. I would like to thank Krzysztof Grzymski, Bill Pratt, Janet Cowan, and Gale Gibson of the Royal Ontario Museum for their assistance in this matter.
16. M., *Friends’ Weekly Intelligencer* 3/27 (3 October 1846): 211. I would like to thank Matthew Roper for bringing this source to my attention.
OME who term themselves believing Latter-day Saints are advocating that Latter-day Saints should “abandon claims that [the Book of Mormon] is a historical record of the ancient peoples of the Americas.” They are promoting the feasibility of reading and using the Book of Mormon as nothing more than a pious fiction with some valuable contents. These practitioners of so-called higher criticism raise the question of whether the Book of Mormon, which our prophets have put forward as the preeminent scripture of this dispensation, is fact or fable—history or just a story.

The historicity—historical authenticity—of the Book of Mormon is an issue so fundamental that it rests first upon faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the first principle in this, as in all other matters. However, on the subject of the historicity of the Book of Mormon, there are many subsidiary issues that could each be the subject of a book. It is not my purpose to comment on any of these lesser issues, either those that are said to confirm the Book of Mormon or those that are said to disprove it.

Those lesser issues are, however, worthy of attention. Elder Neal A. Maxwell quoted Austin Farrer’s explanation: “Though argument does not create conviction, the lack of it destroys belief. What
seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.”

In these remarks I will seek to use rational argument, but I will not rely on any proofs. I will approach the question of the historicity of the Book of Mormon from the standpoint of faith and revelation. I maintain that the issue of the historicity of the Book of Mormon is basically a difference between those who rely exclusively on scholarship and those who rely on a combination of scholarship, faith, and revelation. Those who rely exclusively on scholarship reject revelation and fulfill Nephi’s prophecy that in the last days men “shall teach with their learning, and deny the Holy Ghost, which giveth utterance” (2 Nephi 28:4). The practitioners of that approach typically focus on a limited number of issues, like geography, horses, angelic delivery, or nineteenth-century language patterns. They ignore or gloss over the incredible complexity of the Book of Mormon record. Those who rely on scholarship, faith, and revelation are willing to look at the entire spectrum of issues—the content as well as the vocabulary, the revelation as well as the excavation.

Speaking for a moment as one whose profession is advocacy, I suggest that if one is willing to acknowledge the importance of faith and the reality of a realm beyond human understanding, the case for the Book of Mormon is the stronger case to argue. The case against the historicity of the Book of Mormon has to prove a negative. You do not prove a negative by prevailing on one debater’s point or by establishing some subsidiary arguments.

For me, this obvious insight goes back over forty years to the first class I took on the Book of Mormon at Brigham Young University. The class was titled, somewhat boldly, the “Archaeology of the Book of Mormon.” In retrospect, I think it should have been labeled something like “An Anthropologist Looks at a Few Subjects of Interest to Readers of the Book of Mormon.” Here I was introduced to the idea that the Book of Mormon is not a history of all of the people who have lived on the continents of North and South America in all ages of the earth. Up to that time I had assumed that it was. If that were the claim of the Book of Mormon, any piece of historical, archaeological, or linguistic evidence to the contrary would weigh in against the Book of Mormon, and those who rely exclusively on scholarship would have a promising position to argue.

The opponents of historicity must prove that the Book of Mormon has no historical validity for any peoples who lived in the Americas in a particular time frame, a notoriously difficult exercise.

In contrast, if the Book of Mormon only purports to be an account of a few peoples who inhabited a portion of the Americas during a few millennia in the past, the burden of argument changes drastically. It is no longer a question of all versus none; it is a question of some versus none. In other words, in the circumstance I describe, the opponents of historicity must prove that the Book of Mormon has no historical validity for any peoples who lived in the Americas in a particular time frame, a notoriously difficult exercise. One does not prevail on that proposition by proving that a particular Eskimo culture represents migrations from Asia. The opponents of the historicity of the Book of Mormon must
prove that the people whose religious life it records did not live anywhere in the Americas.

Another way of explaining the strength of the positive position on the historicity of the Book of Mormon is to point out that we who are its proponents are content with a standoff on this question. Honest investigators will conclude that there are so many evidences that the Book of Mormon is an ancient text that they cannot confidently resolve the question against its authenticity, despite some unanswered questions that seem to support the negative determination. In that circumstance, the proponents of the Book of Mormon can settle for a draw or a hung jury on the question of historicity and take a continuance until the controversy can be retried in another forum.

In fact, it is our position that secular evidence can neither prove nor disprove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. Its authenticity depends, as it says, on a witness of the Holy Spirit. Our side will settle for a draw, but those who deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon cannot settle for a draw. They must try to disprove its historicity—or they seem to feel a necessity to do this—and in this they are unsuccessful because even the secular evidence, viewed in its entirety, is too complex for that.

Hugh Nibley made a related point when he wrote: “The first rule of historical criticism in dealing with the Book of Mormon or any other ancient text is, never oversimplify. For all its simple and straightforward narrative style, this history is packed as few others are with a staggering wealth of detail that completely escapes the casual reader. . . . Only laziness and vanity lead the student to the early conviction that he has the final answers on what the Book of Mormon contains.”

Parenthetically, I would cite as an illustration of this point the linguistic, cultural, and writing matters described in support of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon in Orson Scott Card’s persuasive essay “The Book of Mormon—Artifact or Artifice?”

I admire those scholars for whom scholarship does not exclude faith and revelation. It is part of my faith and experience that the Creator expects us to use the powers of reasoning he has placed within us, and that he also expects us to exercise our divine gift of faith and to cultivate our capacity to be taught by divine revelation. But these things do not come without seeking. Those who utilize scholarship and disparage faith and revelation should ponder the Savior’s question, “How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh from God only?” (John 5:44).

God invites us to reason with him, but I find it significant that the reasoning to which God invites us is tied to spiritual realities and maturity rather than to scholarly findings or credentials. In modern revelation the Lord has spoken of reasoning with his people (see D&C 45:10, 15; 50:10-12; 61:13; see also Isaiah 1:18). It is significant that all of these revelations were addressed to persons who had already entered into covenants with the Lord—to the elders of Israel and to the members of his restored church.

In the first of these revelations, the Lord said that he had sent his everlasting covenant into the world to be a light to the world, a standard for his people: “Wherefore, come ye unto it,” he said, “and with him that cometh I will reason as with men in days of old, and I will show unto you my strong reasoning” (D&C 45:10). Thus, this divine offer to reason was addressed to those who had shown faith in God, who had repented of their sins, who had made sacred covenants with the Lord in the waters of baptism, and who had received the Holy Ghost, which testifies of the Father and the Son and leads us into truth. This was the group to whom the Lord offered (and offers) to enlarge their understanding by reason and revelation.

Some Latter-day Saint critics who deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon seek to make their proposed approach persuasive to Latter-day Saints by praising or affirming the value of some of the content of the book. Those who take this approach assume the significant burden of explaining how they can praise the contents of a book they have dismissed as a fable. I have never been able to understand the similar approach in reference to the divinity of the God invites us to reason with him, but I find it significant that the reasoning to which God invites us is tied to spiritual realities and maturity rather than to scholarly findings or credentials.
Savior. As we know, some scholars and some ministers proclaim him to be a great teacher and then have to explain how the one who gave such sublime teachings could proclaim himself (falsely they say) to be the Son of God who would be resurrected from the dead.

The new-style critics have the same problem with the Book of Mormon. For example, we might affirm the value of the teachings recorded in the name of a man named Moroni, but if these teachings have value, how do we explain these statements also attributed to this man? “And if there be faults [in this record] they be the faults of a man. But behold, we know no fault; nevertheless God knoweth all things; therefore, he that condemneth, let him be aware lest he shall be in danger of hell fire” (Mormon 8:17). “And I exhort you to remember these things; for the time speedily cometh that ye shall know that I lie not, for ye shall see me at the bar of God; and the Lord God will say unto you: Did I not declare my words unto you, which were written by this man, like as one crying from the dead, yea, even as one speaking out of the dust?” (Moroni 10:27).

There is something strange about accepting the moral or religious content of a book while rejecting the truthfulness of its authors’ declarations, predictions, and statements. This approach not only rejects the concepts of faith and revelation that the Book of Mormon explains and advocates, but it is also not even good scholarship.

Here I cannot resist recalling the words of a valued colleague and friend, now deceased. This famous law professor told a first-year class at the University of Chicago Law School that along with all else, a lawyer must also be a scholar. He continued, “That this has its delights will be recalled to you by the words of the old Jewish scholar: ‘Garbage is garbage; but the history of garbage—that’s scholarship.’” This charming illustration reminds us that scholarship can take what is mundane and make it sublime. So with the history of garbage. But scholarship, so called, can also take what is sublime and make it mundane. Thus, my friend could have illustrated his point by saying, “Miracles are just a fable, but the history of miracles, that’s scholarship.” So with the Book of Mormon. Those who only respect this book as an object of scholarship have a very different perspective than those who revere it as the revealed word of God.

We must not be so committed to scholarship that we close our eyes and ears and hearts to what cannot be demonstrated by scholarship or defended according to physical proofs and intellectual reasoning.

Scholarship and physical proofs are worldly values. I understand their value, and I have had some experience in using them. Such techniques speak to many after the manner of their understanding. But there are other methods and values too, and we must not be so committed to scholarship that we close our eyes and ears and hearts to what cannot be demonstrated by scholarship or defended according to physical proofs and intellectual reasoning.

To cite another illustration, history—even church history—is not reducible to economics or geography or sociology, though each of these disciplines has something to teach on the subject. On the subject of history, President Gordon B. Hinckley commented on the critics who cull out demeaning and belittling information about some of our forebears:

We recognize that our forebears were human. They doubtless made mistakes. . . . But the mistakes were minor, when compared with the marvelous work which they accomplished. To highlight the mistakes and gloss over the greater good is to draw a caricature. Caricatures are amusing, but they are often ugly and dishonest. A man may have a blemish on his cheek and still have a face of beauty and strength, but if the blemish is emphasized unduly in relation to his other features, the portrait is lacking in integrity. . . .

I do not fear truth. I welcome it. But I wish all of my facts in their proper context, with emphasis on those elements which explain the great growth and power of this organization.

In the sixteenth chapter of Matthew, we read how Jesus taught Peter the important contrast between acting upon the witness of the Spirit and acting upon his own reasoning in reliance upon the ways of the world:

When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of man am?
And they said, Some say that thou art John the
Baptist: some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of
the prophets.
He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am?
And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art
the Christ, the Son of the living God.
And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed
art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath
not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in
heaven.
Then charged he his disciples that they should
tell no man that he was Jesus the Christ. (Matthew
16:13–17, 20)

That was the Lord’s teaching on the value of
revelation by the Spirit (“Blessed art thou, Simon
Bar-jona”). In the next three verses of this same
chapter of Matthew we have the Savior’s blunt teach-
ing on the contrasting value of this same apostle’s
reasoning by worldly values:

From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto
his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem,
and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests
and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the
third day.
Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him,
saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be
unto thee.
But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee
behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for
thou savourest not the things that be of God, but
those that be of men. (Matthew 16:21–23)

I suggest that we do the same thing and deserve the
same rebuke as Peter whenever we subordinate a
witness of the Spirit (“the things that be of God”)
to the work of scholars or the product of our own
reasoning by worldly values (the things that “be of
men”).

Human reasoning cannot place limits on God or
dilute the force of divine commandments or reve-
lations. Persons who allow this to happen identify
themselves with the unbelieving Nephites who re-
jected the testimony of the prophet Samuel. The
Book of Mormon says, “They began to reason and
to contend among themselves, saying: That it is not
reasonable that such a being as a Christ shall come”
(Helaman 16:17–18). Persons who practice that kind
of “reasoning” deny themselves the choice experi-
ence someone has described as our heart telling us
things that our mind does not know.

Sadly, some Latter-day Saints ridicule others for
their reliance on revelation. Such ridicule tends to
come from those whose scholarly credentials are
high and whose spiritual credentials are low.

The Book of Mormon’s major significance is its
witness of Jesus Christ as the only begotten Son of
God the Eternal Father who redeems and saves us
from death and sin. If an account stands as a pre-
eminent witness of Jesus Christ, how can it possibly
make no difference whether the account is fact or
fable—whether the persons really lived who proph-
esied of Christ and gave eye witnesses of his ap-
pearances to them?

Professor John W. Welch pointed out to me that
this new wave of antihistoricism “may be a new kid
on the block in Salt Lake City, but it has been around
in a lot of other Christian neighborhoods for several
decades.” Indeed! The argument that it makes no
difference whether the Book of Mormon is fact or
fable is surely a sibling to the argument that it makes
no difference whether Jesus Christ ever lived. As we
know, there are many so-called Christian teachers
who espouse the teachings and deny the teacher. Be-
yond that, there are those who even deny the exis-
tence or the knowability of God. Their counterparts
in Mormondom embrace some of the teachings of
the Book of Mormon but deny its historicity.

Recently, as I was scanning the magazine
Chronicles, published by the Rockford Institute, I was
the Historical Jesus?,” and by the formidable repu-
tation of its author. Jacob Neusner, who is doctor,
rabbi, and professor, reviewed two books whose
titles both include the phrase “the historical Jesus.”
His comments are persuasive on the subject of histo-
ricity in general.

Neusner praises these two books, one as “an in-
tensively powerful and poetic book . . . by a great
writer who is also an original and weighty scholar” and
the other as “a masterpiece of scholarship.” But
notwithstanding his tributes to their technique,
Neusner forthrightly challenges the appropriateness of the effort the authors have undertaken. Their effort, typical in today’s scholarly world, was to use a skeptical reading of the scriptures rather than a believing one to present a historical study that would “distinguish fact from fiction, myth or legend from authentic event.” In doing so, their “skeptical reading of the Gospels” caused them to assume that the Jesus Christ of the Gospels was not the Jesus who actually lived. It also caused them to assume that historians can know the difference.

I now quote Neusner’s conclusions:

No historical work explains itself so disingenuously as does work on the historical Jesus: from beginning, middle, to end, the issue is theological. Surely no question bears more profound theological implications for Christians than what the person they believe to be the incarnate God really, actually, truly said and did here on earth. But historical method, which knows nothing of the supernatural and looks upon miracles with unreserved stupefaction, presumes to answer them.

But statements (historical or otherwise) about the founders of religions present a truth of a different kind. Such statements not only bear weightier implications, but they appeal to sources distinct from the kind that record what George Washington did on a certain day in 1775. They are based upon revelation, not mere information; they claim, and those who value them believe, that they originate in God’s revelation or inspiration. Asking the Gospels to give historical rather than gospel truth confuses theological truth with historical fact, diminishing them to the measurements of this world, treating Jesus as precisely the opposite of what Christianity has always known him to be, which is unique.

When we speak of “the historical Jesus,” therefore, we dissect a sacred subject with a secular scalpel, and in the confusion of categories of truth the patient dies on the operating table; the surgeons forget why they made their cut; they remove the heart and neglect to put it back. The statement “One and one are two,” or “The Constitutional Convention met in 1787,” is simply not of the same order as “Moses received the Torah at Sinai” or “Jesus Christ is Son of God.”

What historical evidence can tell us whether someone really rose from the dead, or what God said to the prophet on Sinai? I cannot identify a historical method equal to the work of verifying the claim that God’s Son was born to a virgin girl. And how can historians accustomed to explaining the causes of the Civil War speak of miracles, or men rising from the dead, and of other matters of broad belief? Historians working with miracle stories turn out something that is either paraphrastic of the faith, indifferent to it, or merely silly. In their work we have nothing other than theology masquerading as “critical history.” If I were a Christian, I would ask why the crown of science has now to be placed upon the head of a Jesus reduced to this-worldly dimensions, adding that here is just another crown of thorns. In my own view as a rabbi, I say only that these books are simply and monumentally irrelevant.

Please excuse me for burdening you with that long quote, but I hope you will agree with my conclusion that what the rabbi/professor said about the historical Jesus is just as appropriate and persuasive on the question of the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

To put the matter briefly, a scholarly expert is a specialist in a particular discipline. By definition, he knows everything or almost everything about a very narrow field of human experience. By definition, he knows everything or almost everything about a very narrow field of human experience. To think that he can tell us something about other scholarly disciplines, let alone about God’s purposes and the eternal scheme of things, is naïve at best.

Good scholars understand the limitations of their own fields, and their conclusions are carefully limited to the areas of their expertise. In connection with this, I remember the reported observation of an old lawyer. As they traveled through a pastoral setting with cows grazing on green meadows, an acquaintance said, “Look at those spotted cows.” The cautious lawyer observed carefully and conceded, “Yes, those cows are spotted, at least on this side.” I wish that all of the critics of the Book of Mormon, including those who feel compelled to question its historicity, were even half that cautious about their “scholarly” conclusions.

In this message I have offered some thoughts on matters relating to the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

1. On this subject, as on so many others involving our faith and theology, it is important to rely on faith and revelation as well as scholarship.
2. I am convinced that secular evidence can neither prove nor disprove the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.

3. Those who deny the historicity of the Book of Mormon have the difficult task of trying to prove a negative. They also have the awkward duty of explaining how they can dismiss the Book of Mormon as a fable while still praising some of its contents.

4. We know from the Bible that Jesus taught his apostles that in the important matter of his own identity and mission they were blessed for relying on the witness of revelation (“the things that be of God”), and it is offensive to him for them to act upon worldly values and reasoning (“the things . . . that be of men”) (Matthew 16:23).

5. Those scholars who rely on faith and revelation as well as scholarship, and who assume the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, must endure ridicule from those who disdain these things of God.

6. I have also illustrated that not all scholars disdain the value of religious belief and the legitimacy of the supernatural when applied to theological truth. Some even criticize the “intellectual provincialism” of those who apply the methods of historical criticism to the Book of Mormon.

I testify of Jesus Christ, whom we serve, whose church this is. I invoke his blessings upon you, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

---

Elder Dallin H. Oaks, member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since 1984, previously served as a professor of law at the University of Chicago Law School, as president of Brigham Young University, and as a justice of the Utah Supreme Court. He presided over the Philippines area of the Church between 2002 and 2004.
The Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship encourages and supports research on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, the Bible, other ancient scripture, and related subjects. The Maxwell Institute publishes and distributes titles in these areas for the benefit of scholars and interested Latter-day Saint readers.

Primary research interests at the Maxwell Institute include the history, language, literature, culture, geography, politics, and law relevant to ancient scripture. Although such subjects are of secondary importance when compared with the spiritual and eternal messages of scripture, solid research and academic perspectives can supply certain kinds of useful information, even if only tentatively, concerning many significant and interesting questions about scripture.

The Maxwell Institute makes reports about this research available widely, promptly, and economically. These publications are peer-reviewed to ensure that scholarly standards are met. The proceeds from the sale of these materials are used to support further research and publications.