Jacob, the brother of Nephi, appears between the tree of life and the viewer; between prophetic vision and the word by which that vision is conveyed to mankind. The light in the painting, into which the prophet looks, is the Light from which the prophet receives his commission and in which he works as he strives to fulfill it.
The Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture (ISSN 1948-7487 [print], 2167-7565 [online]) is a peer-reviewed journal dedicated to promoting understanding of the history, meaning, and significance of the scriptures and other sacred texts revealed through the Prophet Joseph Smith. These include the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible.

Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture is published twice a year. For subscription information, see maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/subscribe

Back issues of the Journal are on the Internet at publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodicals/jbms/

SUBMITTING ARTICLES
Contributions dealing with all aspects of these texts and their contents are invited, including textual, historical, cultural, archaeological, and philological studies. To be considered for publication, submissions must be consistent with a faithful Latter-day Saint perspective and make a significant contribution to our understanding. Only completed manuscripts will be considered for publication. Manuscripts should be submitted electronically to jbms@byu.edu.

Submission guidelines are found at publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/periodicals/jbms/jbmsguidelines/
Journal of the Book of Mormon
AND OTHER RESTORATION SCRIPTURE

VOLUME 22 • NUMBER 2 • 2013

THE CULTURAL TAPESTRY OF MESOAMERICA
Mark Alan Wright
Wright explores the unique artistic, religious, and linguistic evidence surrounding the many cultural groups of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

COUNCIL, CHAOS, AND CREATION IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM
Stephen O. Smoot
The creation as depicted in the Book of Abraham dovetails nicely with the creation portrayed in Near Eastern cultural texts and the Hebrew Bible.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN THE BOOK OF MORMON
Steven L. Olsen
Olsen shows how memory, identity, and covenants define the Nephite people, who recognized their responsibility as a covenant people and preserved their record for posterity.

JACOB'S TEXTUAL LEGACY
John Hilton III
Though often overlooked as a great writer in the Book of Mormon, Jacob contributed over 15,000 words, many of which were quoted by well-known Book of Mormon prophets.

PRESERVING THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI FRAGMENTS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PAPER ON WHICH THE PAPYRI WERE MOUNTED?
Kerry M. Muhlestein and Alexander L. Baugh
The backing material of the Joseph Smith Papyri answers questions about early efforts to preserve these sacred fragments.

SOBEK: THE IDOLATROUS GOD OF PHARAOH AMENEMHET III
Quinten Barney
This article sheds historical light on the relationship between "the idolatrous god of pharaoh" in Facsimile 1 with the Egyptian crocodile god, Sobek.

THE CULTURAL TAPESTRY OF MESOAMERICA
Mark Alan Wright
Wright explores the unique artistic, religious, and linguistic evidence surrounding the many cultural groups of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

COUNCIL, CHAOS, AND CREATION IN THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM
Stephen O. Smoot
The creation as depicted in the Book of Abraham dovetails nicely with the creation portrayed in Near Eastern cultural texts and the Hebrew Bible.

MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN THE BOOK OF MORMON
Steven L. Olsen
Olsen shows how memory, identity, and covenants define the Nephite people, who recognized their responsibility as a covenant people and preserved their record for posterity.

JACOB'S TEXTUAL LEGACY
John Hilton III
Though often overlooked as a great writer in the Book of Mormon, Jacob contributed over 15,000 words, many of which were quoted by well-known Book of Mormon prophets.

PRESERVING THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI FRAGMENTS: WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE PAPER ON WHICH THE PAPYRI WERE MOUNTED?
Kerry M. Muhlestein and Alexander L. Baugh
The backing material of the Joseph Smith Papyri answers questions about early efforts to preserve these sacred fragments.

SOBEK: THE IDOLATROUS GOD OF PHARAOH AMENEMHET III
Quinten Barney
This article sheds historical light on the relationship between "the idolatrous god of pharaoh" in Facsimile 1 with the Egyptian crocodile god, Sobek.
HAS OLISHEM BEEN DISCOVERED?
John Gee
Gee discusses the 2013 news reports on the archaeological site of Oylum Höyük and discusses its possible identification with Olishem of Abraham 1:10.

EVALUATING THE SOURCES OF 2 NEPHI 1:13–15: SHAKESPEARE AND THE BOOK OF MORMON
Robert F. Smith
Though critics claim that Joseph Smith quoted Shakespeare in the Book of Mormon, the Bible and ancient Near Eastern literature are more likely sources for the text of the Book of Mormon.

LETTER FROM HEBER J. GRANT
Heber J. Grant shares his firm belief in the Book of Mormon with the winner of an oratorical contest.
The Mesoamerican landscape was home to countless cultures throughout its pre-Columbian history. As anthropologist Vernon Scarborough noted, it is “one of the most diverse cultural and geographical areas of the world.” Some of these cultures are well known, such as the Olmec, Maya, and Aztecs, but the majority of these ancient societies remain obscure. The major cultural zones in Mesoamerica include the Central Highlands, Oaxaca, Maya Highlands, Northern Maya Lows, Southern Maya Lows, Gulf Coast, North Central Mexico, Northwest Mexico, Northeastern Mexico, Western Mexico, and Southeastern Mesoamerica. There was a great deal of interaction within and between these zones over the centuries and millennia. Space does not permit even a cursory overview of all these areas, but I will briefly explore some of the more significant regions and the attributes that made their cultures unique. My purpose here is to stimulate a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the great diversity of cultures that inhabited pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.


From the Editor:

With this article, Mark Wright dispels some common assumptions about Mesoamerican history, language, and culture. In my own youthful naivete, I grew up thinking that the Maya and the Aztecs made up the sum of Mesoamerican life. Mark paints a compelling and much more nuanced tapestry of this part of the “promised land.” No monolithic societies here.
Chronology

Mesoamerican prehistory is sometimes very roughly lumped into three categories—the Preclassic (2000 BC–AD 250), Classic (AD 250–900), and Postclassic (AD 900–1519) periods, but it is far more complicated than that. To get a complete picture of Mesoamerica, we must also take into account the Paleo-Indian and Archaic periods and subdivide all later periods into even smaller units (see table 1). Somewhat confusingly, the Preclassic is also known as the Formative period, which is often subdivided into Early, Middle, and Late Formative periods. These periods are followed by the Early Classic, Late Classic, Epi-Classic (which primarily affected the Central Mexican area), Terminal Classic, Early Postclassic, and Late Postclassic periods (see table 1). As we shall see, a myriad of cultures expanded and contracted across the landscape within and between these periods, some with widespread and enduring influence, others being more ephemeral.

Defining Mesoamerica

The term Mesoamerica (“Middle America”) was first coined in 1943 by the German-Mexican anthropologist Paul Kirchhoff. The area is not defined by strict geographic boundaries but rather refers to dozens of distinctive cultures (that nevertheless shared certain traits) that inhabited large portions of Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, and to a lesser degree extended down into El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Archaeologists and anthropologists debate exactly how far the boundaries stretched north and south, as frontier zones are typically complex mixtures of multiple cultures that defy easy classification. The diagnostic traits that Kirchhoff identified as markers of Mesoamerican culture include the production of ceramic goods, advanced agricultural techniques (with heavy reliance on corn, beans, and squash), obsidian tools and weaponry, developed writing systems, bark paper, time reckoning according to the solar calendar, ritual human sacrifice, stepped pyramids, a game played with a rubber ball on L-shaped courts, and long-distance trade networks (which were used not only for the exchange of goods but also for the spread of ideology).

Because of the extraordinarily diverse cultural landscape and the challenges of interpreting the archaeological record, scholars debate the precise chronologies, spheres of influence, and cultural boundaries of Mesoamerica. Literally thousands of archaeological sites dot the Mesoamerican landscape, the vast majority of which we know virtually nothing about, other than their locations. In the Maya area alone are approximately six thousand known sites, of which fewer than fifty have undergone systematic archaeological excavation. Classic period sites have traditionally been the focus of excavations, while Preclassic/Formative sites have largely been ignored by archaeologists and looters alike since the artifacts tend to be less valuable or exciting. Likewise, archaeologists have always had a bias toward excavating large capital cities that are known to have large temples, palaces, tombs, and monumental inscriptions while neglecting small or even medium-sized settlements. Archaeologists estimate that less than 1 percent of ancient Mesoamerican ruins have been uncovered and studied, leaving much yet to learn.

Identifying Cultures

We do not know the ancient names of the vast majority of ancient Mesoamerican cities. We have deciphered the original names of a handful of the great Classic-period Maya cities, but precious few monuments with legible inscriptions that would enable us to determine the original names of the sites survive. We know that Palenque, for example,

Table 1. Periods in Mesoamerican prehistory

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Dates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Paleo-Indian</td>
<td>10,000–3500 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Archaic</td>
<td>3500–1800 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Formative</td>
<td>2000–1000 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Formative</td>
<td>1000–400 BC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Formative</td>
<td>400 BC–AD 250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Classic</td>
<td>AD 250–600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Classic</td>
<td>AD 600–900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epi-Classic (Central Mexico)</td>
<td>AD 650–900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terminal Classic</td>
<td>AD 900–1000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Postclassic</td>
<td>AD 1000–1200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Postclassic</td>
<td>AD 1200–1519</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
was anciently called Lakamha' ("Great Waters"), and Tikal was known as Mutal. The vast majority of site names are modern designations, however, often relying on Spanish or local indigenous languages to describe an attribute of the site. Kaminaljuyu, for example, was named in 1936 by the early Guatemalan archaeologist J. Antonio Villacorta; he based the name on the K'iche’ Mayan term meaning "Mounds of the Dead." Assigning names to nameless ruins is not a modern innovation, however. The great city Teotihuacan was actually named by the Aztecs nearly a millennium after it had been abandoned, and the name has been variously translated as "place of the gods," "the place where gods are born," or "the place where men become gods." Likewise, the names we attribute to entire cultures are not the names by which they knew themselves. The Olmec did not refer to themselves as the Olmec, the Maya did not call themselves the Maya, and the Aztecs did not identify themselves as the Aztecs. For that matter, the thousands of separate ancient cities that we label as "Maya" never conceptualized themselves as being part of a single culture (incidentally, even the origin of the word Maya is uncertain). They were never unified under a single ruler, as the Egyptians were under their Pharaohs. Rather, each polity was a nation unto itself, ruled by its own holy king, and the polities went to great lengths to differentiate themselves from their closest neighbors. The ancient Maya world has been described as "a mosaic of interrelated but diverse regions and traditions," and the same is true for the dozens of other cultures that dot the Mesoamerican landscape.

To identify distinct ancient cultures, we must rely primarily on archaeologically recoverable materials, everything from small potsherds to massive pyramidal structures. In this paper, I will take a brief glimpse at the distinctive ceramic complexes, architectural styles, iconographic conventions, and linguistic and epigraphic information that are used to distinguish Mesoamerican cultures.

Ceramics

Mesoamerican cultures are often distinguished by the types of pottery and ceramics they used. Fortunately for archaeologists, fired ceramic, as a material, is nearly indestructible, and artifacts such as potsherds and figurines are abundant in the

This map outlines the general cultural areas of Mesoamerica. Each of these regions was populated by a diverse range of peoples and cultures. © 2013. Walter R. T. Witschey and Clifford T. Brown, The Electronic Atlas of Ancient Maya Sites.
archaeological record. Since they are made of clays, which contain organic materials, they can be dated through radiocarbon analysis. Qualities such as size, shape, color, texture, and decoration are used to determine when and where a particular piece was created. This is useful in retracing ancient trade routes, as ceramics crafted in one region are often discovered hundreds of miles away from their place of origin, suggesting that they were transported there for either trade or tribute.

Ceramics made their debut in Mesoamerica rather suddenly. Rather than demonstrating a slow progression in the craft over generations, the earliest surviving ceramic evidence demonstrates considerable skill and refinement. This suggests the technology spread from another area, likely from South America where ceramic traditions had been developing for centuries. One of the earliest ceramic-making groups in Mesoamerica has been dubbed the Barra culture. The Barra date to the Early Formative period (ca. 1850–1650 BC) and were quite precocious, often credited with being the innovators of agriculture, settled village life, and long-distance trade, as well as hard-fired and painted ceramics. They primarily lived along the Pacific coast but also inhabited water-rich environments such as river deltas and mangrove swamps from Chiapas, Mexico, throughout Guatemala, and down to El Salvador. The Ocos pottery tradition arose after the Barra phase went into decline. Ocos ceramics were produced primarily along the Pacific coast in Chiapas and Guatemala, but they have been discovered all over Mesoamerica. Around 900 BC, a number of distinctive ceramic styles began to crop up in Mesoamerica. In the Maya area alone, we find the Swasey complex in northern Belize, the Cunil complex in west-central Belize, the Eb complex in the Peten region of Guatemala, and the Xe complex in the Usumacinta region. By the Early Postclassic period, the Maya near the Pacific coast of Guatemala had developed the technology to create glazed ceramics known as Plumbate pottery. The wide variety of ceramic traditions gives us but a glimpse into the cultural diversity of the region.

**Architecture**

Like ceramics, architectural conventions also serve as diagnostic features in identifying distinct cultures. The different regions and subregions of Mesoamerica each have their own unique style, and stylistic conventions within a single region changed through time as well. Formative period structures from the Gulf Coast region tended to be made of adobe or clay and stood atop low platforms. By the Middle Formative, regional styles began to be more pronounced—for example, very distinctive styles began cropping up in the Central Highlands of Mexico, West Mexico, Oaxaca, Veracruz, and among the Highland and Lowland Maya areas.

Architectural complexes known as E-Groups were a diagnostic feature of the Late Formative Lowland Maya area, for example. An E-Group was composed of a radial pyramid (typically with four stairways) that faced a long building a short distance to the east. As viewed from the radial pyramid, the north and south corners of the long building in the east were markers of the solstices, and on the equinoxes the sun would rise over its center point, indicating that E-Groups functioned as rudimentary solar observatories. E-Groups all but disappeared in the Classic period, and the corbeled vault (sometimes called the Maya arch) became one of the primary diagnostic architectural features of this time and region.

Architectural styles from Teotihuacan in Central Mexico permeated down into the Maya area during the Early Classic period. The most easily identifiable of these is the talud-tablero platform façade. Talud-tablero–style step pyramids are essentially composed of alternating rectangular terraces (tableros) that rest on trapezoidal layers (taluds); the
Tableros jut out over the upper edges of the taluds, both of which taper in size with each successive layer to create an overall pyramidal shape (although this style was used even for low platforms with a single talud topped by a tablero). Teotihuacan-style talud-tablero façades eventually came to be found all over the Maya area, from Dzibilchaltun in the northern Yucatan in Mexico, Copan in Honduras, in the Lowlands of Guatemala at Tikal, and in the Guatemalan Highlands at Kaminaljuyu, to name but a few.

Each of the Maya regions had its own distinct architectural style. The Southern style included sites such as Copan in Honduras and Quirigua in Guatemala. This style is characterized by skilled sculptural work that adorns the building façades, including sculpture in the round (which is virtually unknown anywhere else among the Maya). The Central or Peten style, represented by sites like Tikal in Guatemala or Xunantunich in Belize, is noteworthy for the steep and towering pyramids that dominate the landscape. The temples of this style are often adorned with tall, solid stone roof combs, whose primary function was to maximize the height of the building. The structures are constructed from meticulously squared limestone blocks and held together by high-quality limestone mortar. The Western style is typified by Palenque, which was unmatched in its use of stucco to adorn building façades and to create intricate bas-relief panels with beautiful art and finely rendered hieroglyphic writing. Similar to the Central or Peten style, their temples were also generally adorned with roof combs, but they used a perforated pattern rather than a solid surface, giving them a light and graceful appearance.

The corbeled vault, or Maya arch, was a common feature in Classic period Maya structures. Courtesy of Brian Hoffsis, bfhstudios.com.
Other distinct regional styles include the Usumacinta, Rio Bec, Chenes, and Puuc. Mayanist Richard Leventhal commented, “These regional styles force us to utilize a broad definition of Maya culture rather than a narrow one” and argued that “Maya culture is actually a broad façade that ties together and covers local regional cultures.”

Central Mexican architecture is stylistically quite different from those of the Maya subregions. Where Maya buildings tend to be squared, those of Central Mexico are generally rounded. Central Mexican buildings often incorporated columns (both structural and decorative), and the sides of staircases were lined with balustrade-like features known as alfardas, which are virtually absent among the Maya. In Late Postclassic Central Mexican cities, large pyramidal bases were topped by two temples, each dedicated to a different god. At the top of the grandiose Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan, for example, were two separate temples: one dedicated to the Aztec god of war, Huitziopochtli, and the other to Tlaloc, the god of rain. Ritual human sacrifices—which consisted of victims getting their hearts ripped out by a priest and subsequently having their bodies rolled down the precariously steep frontal staircase—were performed at the top of these pyramids. The bodies tumbled down nearly 200 feet before their broken corpses reached the base of the pyramid.

Language

Language is perhaps one of the more obvious markers of cultural identity in the ancient world, but it is also one of the more difficult aspects of Mesoamerican research to conduct with confidence because of the paucity of ancient linguistic data. Fourteen pre-Columbian scripts are currently known, but most of them have resisted decipherment. Exciting recent advancements have allowed us to understand Aztec writing for the first time, although the majority of their writing is simply composed of the names of individuals or cities. The most fully developed script—and the one that can
be read with the greatest confidence—is that of the Classic period Maya (although 10–20 percent of their glyphs are still undeciphered).18

Linguists hypothetically reconstruct ancient languages using lexicostatistical glottochronology, which essentially attempts to trace related living languages back to common roots by analyzing elements such as syntax and cognate words. Linguists do not agree as to exactly how many languages were spoken anciently in Mesoamerica, but even conservative estimates suggest there were scores of them by the beginning of the Classic period. By AD 100, some of the major language groups were Nahuatl, Huastecan, Mixean, Mixe-Zoquean, and Mamean, to name but a few. Each of these families would have had several distinct languages belonging to it. For example, just within the Mayan language family were likely at least nineteen distinct languages being spoken by AD 500.19 Today thirty-one distinct Mayan languages are spoken by approximately four million Maya people.

A number of smaller language families and even some isolates, which are languages unrelated to any other known language, have been identified. Historically known but now extinct isolate languages include Cuitlatec from Guerrero, Mexico; Xinca from Guatemala; and Lencan from southwest Honduras and El Salvador. Some isolate languages still survive in Mexico, however, such as Purhepecha in Michoacan and Huave in Oaxaca.

Localized Diversity

Cultural diversity in Mesoamerica is evident even at the local level. It is not uncommon to find evidence for different ethnic groups residing in different barrios within a single city. At Teotihuacan in Central Mexico, for example, there is confirmation that particular quadrants were each occupied by diverse groups such as the Maya, Zapotec, and Gulf Coast cultures.20 A similar situation is found in the Southeastern Maya area. The diversity of material culture unearthed at Copan, Honduras, indicates that the kings ruled over a multiethnic population, a melting pot of cultures from the Maya heartland in the west to Central American cultures in the east.21

We also find cultural diversity at the same settlement with the passage of time. For example, in examining the ceramic wares from the Belize Valley that were used around 950–500 BC, archaeologists Joseph Ball and Jennifer Taschek caution that to ascribe certain ceramic assemblages from this region within this timeframe “to a single producer community, economy, or even ethnic group or culture is neither justified nor correct.”22 Some sites were occupied for extraordinarily long sequences, and shifting cultural traits can be detected through time. Chiapa de Corzo in Chiapas, Mexico, for example, was likely originally occupied by Mixe-Zoquean peoples in the Formative period, but throughout the history of this area we see influence from the Olmec in the Gulf Coast of Mexico.
and the Maya from the Lowlands of Guatemala; later the people appear to have been conquered by the Chiapenec from Central Mexico during the Postclassic period.

An illustrative example of cultural diversity comes from the southeast periphery of the Maya area. Copan in Honduras and Quirigua in Guatemala are about twenty miles apart, and the route between the two sites passes directly through the Paraíso Valley. Within this valley are two contemporaneous sites that nicely demonstrate the cultural heterogeneity that was possible within even a very limited area. Around the seventh century AD, the cities of El Paraiso and El Cafetal stood on opposite banks of the Ocote River, a little over one mile apart. Based on its architecture and ceramics, El Paraiso is very clearly a Maya site, perhaps even an outpost established by Copan. El Cafetal, in contrast, is just as clearly a non-Maya site, with drastically different material culture. Yet nothing indicates any conflict between these sites; they appear to have maintained a peaceful coexistence. Curiously, despite being large centers that lay directly on the route between Copan and Quirigua, neither El Cafetal nor El Paraiso is ever mentioned in the texts of Copan or Quirigua, even though Copan and Quirigua regularly mention each other in their monumental inscriptions. It may seem odd that a large foreign culture could exist in the midst of the Maya area with no mention of its existence, but such is clearly the case with El Cafetal.

A nearly identical example is found along the Chamelecon River at the contemporaneous sites of El Abra and El Puente, which are separated by less than one mile. El Abra is easily identifiable as a Classic Maya polity based on its site-planning principles, architectural styles, and material remains, whereas El Puente appears to have been established and inhabited by the Lenca culture of Honduras. Like El Cafetal and El Paraiso, it appears that they coexisted peacefully, despite being different cultures that practiced different religions and spoke different languages. The archaeologist Samuel K. Lothrop noted that in this region of Honduras “Mayan and non-Mayan finds are intermingled over a strip of territory at least fifty miles wide.” Such intermingling is not limited to the southeastern periphery during the Classic period. For example, evidence confirms that multiethnic cultures date back to the Middle to Late Preclassic in areas such as Belize.

**Gulf Coast**

The Gulf Coast was home to the Olmec, arguably the earliest (1200–500 BC) and most influential of all Mesoamerica civilizations. The name Olmec is a modern corruption of the Nahuatl word Olmeca, which the Aztec used to refer to inhabitants of Olman (“Land of Rubber”). The Aztecs, who existed nearly two millennia after the Olmec, dubbed them such in honor of their innovation of latex rubber, most famously used in the production of large balls that were used to play a still poorly understood game. We do not know what the Olmec called themselves, and we are not certain what language the Olmec spoke. The only example of what may be Olmec writing comes from the Cascajal Block (thought to date to ca. 900 BC), though some scholars question whether it is a legitimate artifact or a modern hoax.

The Olmec are often regarded as the first complex society in Mesoamerica, meaning social stratification was present between elites and commoners. Their monumental architecture and elaborate artwork indicate the existence of craft specialists. In other words, not everyone was a farmer whose life was consumed...
by the demands of producing just enough food to live on day by day. To the contrary, farmers must have produced enough surplus to enable them to provide sustenance to those engaged in other occupations.

The Olmec are perhaps most famous for the colossal basalt heads they sculpted. Ranging in size from six to forty tons, these massive stones were transported to the Gulf Coast from the Sierra de los Tuxtlas Mountains of Veracruz, which would have required the efforts of an estimated 1,500 individuals spanning three to four months.\textsuperscript{31} These massive heads were likely portraits of Olmec rulers. Each sculpture is unique, and the distinctive headbands they wear serve as identifiers and may even contain clues as to the names of these individuals.

Olmec cultural traits and material culture spread broadly throughout Mesoamerica. Archaeologists have been able to determine, based on the type of clay that was used, that some early ceramics found widely dispersed across Mesoamerica were created at the Olmec site of San Lorenzo. In some areas, it appears the Olmec may have acted as colonizers, whereas in other areas their ideology appears to have been adopted and modified by existing cultures by choice rather than by force.

The Olmec flourished from around 1200 through 400 BC in southern Veracruz and northwestern Tabasco, but other Gulf Coast cultures rose and fell throughout the centuries. Between the first and tenth centuries AD, numerous cultures in central Veracruz flourished. From the ninth through thirteenth centuries, El Tajin was the most dominant city in the region. The Huastec culture of southern Tamaulipas and northern Veracruz and Totonac cultures arose in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and were in full swing when the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century. A number of smaller groups lived between the Huastecs and Totonacs, such as the Tepehua, Nahua, and Otomi.

Izapa

The southern Mexican site of Izapa appears to be a critical link in the chain that connects the earlier Olmec civilization with that of the later Maya. Although the site was established at least as early as the Middle Formative period, its florescence did not occur until the Late Formative (ca. 300–50 BC). The site is perhaps most well known for its elaborately carved stelae, but it deserves recognition for its large temples, plazas, and ball courts as well. It was a major center for its time, with 160 structures within a fairly compact site core occupying less than one square mile.

Although Izapan art incorporated some elements of Olmec iconography, compositionally it was completely innovative. Olmec art tends to be static and uncluttered, often featuring a single individual with
a minimal amount of regalia. Izapan art, in contrast, is characterized by scenes crowded with all manner of figures—gods, humans, and animals—holding or otherwise interacting with a wide variety of objects and assuming poses that are intended to tell a story. Many of the scenes appear to depict narratives from the K’iche’ epic known as the Popol Vuh, which was recorded nearly two millennia after the Izapan art was created. Other scenes, however, depict narratives that have been lost to history, and we can only speculate as to their meaning.

Maya Highlands

Contemporary with Izapa was Kaminaljuyu in the Maya Highlands of Guatemala. Kaminaljuyu has been described by archaeologists as “the greatest highland Maya center in all of Maya history,” and for good reason. Guatemala City is built directly on this ancient capital city, which covered over five square miles at its peak in the first and second centuries AD. Its influence was widespread and can be detected as far south as El Salvador and up to the Guatemalan-Mexican border. It was a fairly cosmopolitan center, with evidence of inhabitants from Teotihuacan from Central Mexico and others from the Maya Lowlands. Over two hundred temples, palaces, and other structures composed its urban core by 200 BC–AD 100. Their artisans created hundreds of carved monuments with elaborate scenes and even nascent writing. They engaged in long-distance trade of prestige goods such as obsidian, jade, and seashells. Although it remained occupied throughout the Classic period, Kaminaljuyu’s power waxed and waned through the centuries and was ultimately abandoned beginning around AD 800.

In the Late Postclassic period, the Maya Highlands were occupied by a large number of different linguistic and cultural groups, including the Cakchikel, Ixil, Jacaltec, Kekchi, Mam, Pocomchi, and Tzotzil, to name but a few. The Highland Maya did not build great city-states but rather were characterized by weakly organized territorial groups led by aristocratic families. The great Maya cities are instead found in the Southern Lowlands.

Southern Maya Lowlands

The Southern Lowlands are home to the vast majority of Classic period Maya cities. Many of the great Classic period cities have their roots deep in the Preclassic, however. For example, Calakmul, the great enemy of Tikal throughout the Classic period, already had large and elaborately decorated temples by 350 BC. Curiously, however, as Maya archaeologists Arlen and Diane Chase note, no solid archaeological evidence has yet been encountered for in situ developmental precedents for these village groups, causing some researchers to argue for an influx of other Mesoamerican populations, such as the Mixe-Zoque from Veracruz and Chiapas, into the Maya area at this early date (Ball and Taschek 2003). Whatever the case, a series of diverse village communities dotted the landscape of the Maya southern lowlands in the first half of the first millennium BC. Sometime after 600 BC, the cultural remains associated with these communities became more standardized, especially in terms of ceramics and architecture, becoming readily identifiable as “Maya.”

Several massive cities dotted the Maya Lowlands during the Preclassic period, such as El Mirador, Tintal, Wakna, Uaxactun, Cival, Cerros, and Bécan. These sites were typically oriented according to an east-west axis (which may indicate migrations from the highlands of Chiapas, where such orientation was used earlier). Architecturally they are typified by Triadic-Group architecture and the presence of E-Groups, both of which served ritual purposes.

Many of these Preclassic Lowland Maya centers were linked together by a system of roads or causeways. Enhanced satellite imagery has revealed that El Mirador served as a central hub, with roads leading to other cities like spokes. The roads were elevated and enabled easy travel over difficult terrain, including extensive wetland areas. Although they varied in height and width, their construction was generally composed of rubble lined with large stones at the edges and large cobblestones in the interior, progressively getting smaller from bottom to top, finally grading to fine gravel near the surface and topped with fine powdered limestone (called sascab), which was pressed smooth with stone rollers. Remains of these roads can still be found connecting El Mirador to Nakbe (7.5 miles to the southeast) and to Tintal (11 miles to the south), as well as to other cities to the west and northwest that are yet unknown archaeologically. There even appears to have been a lengthy road connecting El Mirador to Calakmul, 25 miles to the north.
Unlike El Mirador, which was abandoned in the early centuries AD, Calakmul became a major force in the Classic period, along with Tikal, its rival to the south. Other major Lowland Maya cities of the Classic period, such as Naranjo, Caracol, Yaxchilan, Piedras Negras, Tonina, and Copan swore allegiance to either Tikal or Calakmul, and the history of the Lowlands is defined primarily by the conflicts between these kingdoms.39

Each major Lowland polity was ruled by a divine king during the Classic period. Upon accession to the throne, each king would receive the title K’uhul Ajaw, which literally means “Holy Lord” or “God-like Lord” (the root word k’uh means “god”). These rulers were believed to have a special connection to the divine realm and were tasked with performing rituals on behalf of their people that would incur the favor of the gods and keep the cosmos in order. Most Classic period cities had lengthy dynasties that spanned centuries, and rulership typically passed from father to firstborn son. In a very literal sense, rulers were larger-than-life individuals. The stone monuments that dot each city typically carry portraits of the king, and these effectively multiplied his presence as they were believed to be living, breathing objects.40 The cultural identity of a given polity, then, was often intricately tied to the person of the king or his lineage.

Cultural identity was fundamentally important to these different Lowland Maya polities. They went to great lengths to distinguish themselves from other cities in the region, though to modern eyes the differences may seem minor. For example, the accession ritual and regalia employed at Piedras Negras in Guatemala is distinct from that of Yaxchilan, Mexico, their neighbor and rival along the banks of the Usumacinta River.41 Their kings hearkened unto different gods to validate their authority (as did the rulers of all Maya cities), and worshipped locally specific pantheons. As discussed earlier, architectural features and site-planning principles were also employed to set themselves apart from other Maya cities. Whereas modern observers may see a fairly homogenous region populated by the Maya, to the ancient inhabitants the Lowlands was an extraordinarily heterogeneous landscape.

**Central Mexico**

The region of Central Mexico is significant because it contains some of the earliest evidence for agriculture and ceramics in Mesoamerica. Amaranth, chili peppers, squash, and a predecessor to the maize plant were all domesticated in this area, and by 3000 BC a significant portion of their food was coming from such cultivated crops. With agriculture comes sedentism, and by 2500 BC settled communities began to appear in Central Mexico. They did not subsist exclusively upon their crops; they continued to hunt, fish, and gather from nondomesticated plants. Sedentism typically led to the development of pottery,42 and by 2300 BC crudely made pottery began to appear in the Tehuacan Valley of Central Mexico.

Small sedentary communities gradually grew larger, and by 2500 BC large villages such as Zohapilco became established in the Basin of Mexico. Increasing population sizes stimulated the need for political organization. Although the evidence is sparse that the Olmec established colonies in Central Mexico, their influence was felt and perhaps evidenced in the social stratification that was adopted in this region throughout the Formative period.

By the Middle Formative period, large regional centers such as Cuicuilco and Chalcatzingo became established in Central Mexico. By the Late Formative, Teotihuacan began to assert its dominance in this region. At its zenith, Teotihuacan covered over twenty square miles and had a population upwards of 200,000. Rather than growing slowly from village.
to city to metropolis, it was a master-planned city from its inception. Features included multistory apartment complexes; ethnic barrios for foreigners from Oaxaca, the Maya area, and elsewhere; as well as massive pyramidal structures that bookended the main north-south axis.

Teotihuacan stands out from other Mesoamerican cultures in a number of ways. Perhaps most strikingly, we know very little about their hierarchical organization because they did not memorialize their rulers in their art or writing as was typical of other societies in Mesoamerica. The details concerning the most well-known ruler of Teotihuacan actually come from the Maya site of Tikal, approximately 600 miles to the east in Guatemala. In AD 378, a military leader named Siyaj K’ahk’ left Teotihuacan and cut a swath across Mesoamerica. He arrived at Tikal and promptly dispatched their king, Chak Tok Ich’aak. Acting under the auspices of Spearthrower Owl (the emperor of Teotihuacan), Siyaj K’ahk’ installed a puppet king named Yax Nuun Ayiin to replace the murdered Chak Tok Ich’aak. From that point forward, many Classic period Maya rulers began to hark back to Teotihuacan in an effort to legitimize their authority. Some even claimed to make pilgrimages there as part of their enthronement process. For example, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ of Copan (a capital city at the southeastern extreme of the Maya area) journeyed there in AD 426, according to the inscription on the top of Altar Q from Copan. Through ritual action at Teotihuacan, the royal theonym K’inich (lit. “sun-eyed”) was bestowed upon him, and he became K’inich Yax K’uk’ Mo’ and returned to Copan to establish a dynasty that would last for centuries. K’inich is the name of the Maya sun god, and rulers using that title effectively claimed to be possessed of divine “heat” or spiritual energy, far above and beyond that of commoners.

Teotihuacan fell into decline approximately AD 600, and its collapse initiated the Epi-Classic period in Central Mexico. This created a power vacuum across the Mesoamerican landscape, which was subsequently filled by the Lowland Maya cultures. The great resurgence of Central Mexican states would not occur until centuries later with the establishment of the Aztec Empire.

The Aztecs were the dominant culture in Central Mexico during the Late Postclassic and were likely just hitting their stride when the Spaniards appeared on the scene in the early 1500s. Unlike their Maya neighbors to the south, the Aztecs were truly a political and economic empire, establishing colonies as far away as Panama and trading goods into the American Southwest. The empire had a centralized government, headquartered at their capital city of Tenochtitlan, which ruled over a wide array of territories and ethnicities.

The Aztec were not always a mighty empire, however. They claimed to be descendants of the Chichimecs, a fabled northern Mexican tribe of hunter-gatherers memorialized in pictorial codices as skin-clad wanderers who were famed for their skill with the bow and arrow. However, several other groups that migrated to the Valley of Mexico in the thirteenth century were instrumental in the genesis of the empire. The Tepanecs, the Alcolhua, and the Mexica, all from different regions and different cultural backgrounds, migrated to the Valley of Mexico during this period. The rapid urbanization of the area created a dynamic environment in which the different groups needed to compete for resources, which led to jockeying for regional domination.

North Central Mexico

North Central Mexico is generally considered the northern extremity of Mesoamerica and the frontier region between Mesoamerican cultures and those of the American Southwest. The region was occupied by a wide range of cultures, from nomadic hunter-gatherers to settled agriculturalists. Despite its cultural diversity, North Central Mexico appears to have been a generally peaceful region characterized by sociopolitical stability. Four primary cultures can
be identified from this region based on their distinct architectural and ceramic styles, but the archaeological record tells us virtually nothing concerning their languages, origins, or fate. Even their names are lost to history.

Although the four different subregions in North Central Mexico are distinguishable, their ceramics exhibit some level of uniformity. Pottery was typically red-on-buff and decorated with geometric designs, similar to the Hohokam of the American Southwest; both were likely influenced by the Chupicuaro culture from Western Mexico.

The Zapotec

While the Olmec are generally credited with being the first complex civilization in Mesoamerica, they appear to have been organized according to chiefdoms rather than functioning as state-level civilizations. The Zapotec, in contrast, clearly were a state-level civilization, likely the first to achieve such a status in Mesoamerica. 46 The term Zapotec refers to speakers of the Otomanguean language family, although the distinct languages within this family were mutually unintelligible (analogous to the Romance language family that includes Spanish, French, Romanian, etc.). The Zapotec developed one of the earliest known hieroglyphic writing systems in Mesoamerica, dating around the seventh century BC.47

The Zapotec heartland was in the fertile Oaxaca Valley, but the empire extended to the Pacific Ocean and into the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. They were one of the most enduring of all Mesoamerican civilizations, lasting for approximately two and a half millennia.

During the Formative village stage (1600–500 BC), the Zapotec site of San Jose Mogote was one of the earliest settlements in the Oaxaca Valley and grew to be the largest in the area. Situated adjacent to the Atoyac River, it was built on a low rise that kept it just above the flood zone; these conditions made it an ideal location for farming. The inhabitants of San José Mogote were relatively advanced technologically for their time. They were skilled agriculturalists, constructed subsurface pits for grain storage, used grinding stones to process dried corn kernels, and produced ceramics that were used in storing, cooking, and serving their foodstuffs.

Architecturally, they innovated what would later become the standard Zapotec residential floor plan, in which multiple rooms surrounded a central patio area. By about 1200 BC, a group of buildings was elaborately constructed that appears to be a residential

These carvings from the Zapotec city of Monte Alban were initially dubbed Danzantes ("Dancers"), but the gruesome reality is much worse—they are depictions of slain captives. Image copyright SFU Museum of Archaeology & Ethnology, Canada. Used with permission.
compound for high-status people, indicating they had a socially stratified society. The village likely served as a central gathering place where occupants of other settlements in the valley would come for markets and ceremonial purposes. Between about 700−500 BC a temple was built on an elevated stone platform that was accessible by a stairway.

Another Zapotec site, Monte Alban, was the first major urban center in the Oaxaca Valley. Founded around 500 BC, it was built on a hilltop 350 meters above the valley floor. Astonishingly, the hilltop was artificially leveled prior to the construction of the city, which would have been a massive undertaking in the absence of draft animals or advanced technology. The city is strategically located at the convergence of three branches of the Valley of Oaxaca, an ideal location for controlling trade routes between Central Mexican cities such as Teotihuacan to the west and the Maya area to the east. Artistically, Monte Alban is most well known for a series of bas-relief carvings of human figures known collectively as the Dancers ("Los Danzantes"). Although they were initially believed to be images of dancing individuals, advances in iconographic interpretation have led to the realization that these were likely war captives and sacrificial victims whose bodies had suffered mutilation prior to (or in the process of) death.

The final Zapotec capital city was Zaachila, whose ruins lie about ten miles south of the modern city of Oaxaca. It appears to have been founded sometime after the fall of Monte Alban but was ultimately conquered by the Mixtec, who occupied it until the time of the Conquest. The Mixtec subsequently occupied the site and repurposed buildings and even tombs according to their own stylistic conventions.

The Mixtec

Like the Zapotec, the Mixtec are also part of the Otomanguean language family. The three main languages in the Mixtecan branch (Cuiicatec, Trique, and Mixtec) are further subdivided into many distinctive dialects. The various dialects arose because of the rugged terrain of Oaxaca, Guerrero, and Puebla, which makes interaction between settlements difficult. Because of their prominence in the Late Postclassic period, some presume that the Mixtec were relative latecomers on the Mesoamerican landscape, but they actually trace their origins back to the Late Formative period. By 100 BC, the cities of Tilantongo and Monte Negro were established in the Mixteca Alta region of western Oaxaca. Tilantongo’s population waxed and waned throughout the centuries, likely because of warfare and shifting power relations among contemporaneous Mesoamerican cultures. The city remained primarily a Mixtec ritual and political center until the time of the Conquest.

West Mexico

The coastal region of West Mexico has evidence of occupation dating back to the Paleoindian period, but the early inhabitants were primarily nomadic and subsisted on maritime resources, supplemented by hunting and gathering. In the Formative they began to cultivate crops and establish more permanent settlements. This region is best known for its Late Formative and Early Classic cultures of Colima, Nayarit, and Jalisco. These sites are characterized by the shaft and chamber tombs they constructed for
their dead, which not only indicate a deep reverence for their ancestors but also validate their territorial claims.49

The West Mexican cultures are perhaps most well known for their distinctive ceramic styles. Their figurines tend to have a natural, even playful style and give glimpses into everyday life that are rarely found elsewhere. Nayarit is known for its complex ceramic models that feature several different individuals engaged in group activities. Some depict exciting ball games that convey a surprising sense of movement and energy, complete with spectators in the stands. But they also made somber models of burial processions that include such details as pallbearers conveying the dead to a burial tomb beneath a residential compound. The artisans at Colima had an affinity for creating animal figurines, especially dogs, which are portrayed in all manner of activities, such as sleeping, grooming themselves, fighting, or simply standing. Colima dog figurines are virtually always depicted as being fat, indicating their value as a food source, although they were also used in hunting deer and were ritually sacrificed for burials.50 The ceramic figurines in Jalisco, in contrast, tend to feature humans with elongated heads and large, almond-shaped eyes. Jalisco is more well known for its use of shells in creating jewelry and art. Small shells were intricately threaded together to create unique garb, such as a burial skullcap made from thousands of small, freshwater snail shells. Larger shells were carved, drilled, and painted with a variety of geometric motifs.

Like most other Mesoamerican cultures, West Mexico was influenced by the Olmec during the Formative period and later by Teotihuacan in the Early Classic period. By the Late Classic the Teuchitlan tradition had made an incursion, and West Mexico was ultimately inhabited by Tarascans in the Late Postclassic. Interestingly, West Mexico engaged in long-distance trade relations with the cultures of northern South America, almost certainly by way of boat. These distantly separated areas show remarkable similarities in their burials, pottery styles, manufacturing techniques, and even in the use of metals and alloys.51

Conclusion

This overview was necessarily brief and admittedly incomplete. We could virtually go through the alphabet naming peoples, cultures, and places that were not discussed in this short treatment, from Acanceh, Balamku, and Chalcatzingo through Xochicalco, Yaxuna, and Zempoala. While many of these groups are generally lumped by modern scholars into categories such as “Maya” or “Huastec,” we must bear in mind that individual cities did not view themselves as a part of a larger whole; each of the thousands of different cities across the Mesoamerican landscape viewed themselves as a unique people and culture and often went to great lengths to differentiate themselves from even their closest neighbors.52 Thanks to
advances in satellite imaging, we have been able to identify over 6,000 sites in the Maya area alone, each composed of dozens, if not hundreds, of buildings. Of these thousands of known sites, each is unique in one way or another. From those polities whose artistic programs and hieroglyphic inscriptions have survived the ravages of time, we have discovered that each city worshipped its own unique pantheon of gods, typically a blending of pan-cultural deities with locally significant patron gods.

The title of this article pays homage to the many traditional Mesoamerican communities that continue to practice the ancient art of weaving. The beautiful textiles they produce are used for artistic, ceremonial, and commercial purposes. Each thread is critical, contributing color and texture to the elaborate and beautiful patterns that emerge as each is interlaced into the fabric. Such is the case with the thousands of distinct peoples and cultures of ancient Mesoamerica. Though each was unique in its own way, they can all be woven together to create a beautiful tapestry of culture that continues to adorn the landscape today.

Mark Alan Wright is an assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He earned his bachelor’s degree from UCLA and his master’s and PhD from UC Riverside, all in anthropology with a subfield of specialization in Mesoamerican archaeology. His research focuses on Classic period Maya ritual and religion, as well as on issues concerning the historicity of the Book of Mormon.


5. George Stuart, personal communication, 16 April 2011, Davidson, North Carolina.

6. Although we can phonetically read the ancient name for Tikal (Mutal/Mutaal), it is unclear what the name actually means. It is often represented as a logogram that appears to represent a bundle of hair known as a top knot as viewed from behind.


8. The first known recorded occurrence seems to be from the journal of Christopher Columbus’s son Bartolomeo (Brinton 1882:10 [the Maya Chronicles]), in which he describes an indigenous ship loaded with trade goods that they encountered near the Bay Islands of Honduras: In questo loco pigliarono una Nave loro carica di mercantia et merce la quale dicevano veniva da una certa provincia chiamata Maiam vel luncatam con molte veste di bambasio de le quale ne eron il forco di sede di diversi colori. (In this place they [the Spanish] seized a ship of theirs [the natives] loaded with merchandise and wares which they say comes from a certain province called Maiam or luncatam with many garments of cotton-wool which some mistake for . . . silk of diverse colors.)


14. Arlen Chase and Diane Chase, “Complex Societies in the Southern Maya Lowlands: Their Development and Floreescence in the Archaeological Record,” in The Oxford Handbook of Mesoamerican Archaeol-
26. The Popol Vuh narrative itself is undated, but the extant written version was likely completed between 1554 and 1558; Allen J. Christensen, *The Popol Vuh: The Sacred Book of the Maya* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 37.
39. Upon accession, many rulers would receive both the theonym *K'inich* and the royal title *K'uhul Ajaw*. For example, Yax K’uk’ Mo’ became *K'inich Yax K'uk' Mo’* and was referred to as the *K'uhul Ajaw* of Copan.
42. Scholars debate when Zaachila was first established. Some put it as early as AD 1100; others argue it was as late as 1399.
46. Wright, “Study of Classic Maya Rulership.”
FROM THE EDITOR:

Facsimile 1 in the Pearl of Great Price notes that the crocodile was an “idolatrous god of Pharaoh.” Quinten Barney has collected the already well-known (at least in Egyptological circles) instances of the crocodile’s religious significance in ancient Egypt and here presents the material for those of us who are not Egyptologists.
Many Latter-day Saint scholars have connected the crocodile god Sobek of Egypt’s Middle Kingdom period with the “idolatrous god of Pharaoh” depicted as a crocodile in Facsimile 1, figure 9, of the Book of Abraham. Exploring this identification further, I look at textual and archaeological evidence that helps illuminate who Sobek was and how he was worshipped. I also document that the Middle Kingdom period (in which Abraham is thought to have lived) saw the Sobek cult rise in popularity, specifically during the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhet III. This background study puts us in a better position to consider whether the reptilian god Sobek can be plausibly identified as the idolatrous god of figure 9 in Facsimile 1.

The word sobek literally means “crocodile.” When referring to Sobek as an Egyptian god, the word contains a hieroglyphic determinative of a seated god. Sobek is depicted primarily in two ways, either as a man with a crocodile head or just simply as a crocodile. His place in Egyptian worship appears to have been most prevalent in the Middle Kingdom, even before the days of Amenemhet III. The first mention of Sobek is in the Old Kingdom Pyramid Texts of Unas, which refer to him by name three times. The texts speak of Unas as if he has become Sobek, the son of the war goddess Neith. Utterance 317 recounts that Unas (Sobek) “came out of the overflow of the flood” and that he “causes the grass to become green,” bringing “green brilliance.” Thus the oldest-known textual evidence for Sobek associates him with water and fertility, characteristics that, as will be shown, were of critical importance during the reign of Pharaoh Amenemhet III.

The textual and archaeological evidence for Sobek multiplies during the Middle Kingdom. The Coffin Texts mention him by name thirty-nine different times, and cylinder seals and figurines of Sobek have been found throughout Egypt. Theophoric elements in Middle Kingdom personal names—for example, Sobekneferu (“beautiful of Sobek”) and Sobekhotep (“Sobek is satisfied”)—further attest an increase in Sobek’s popularity, Sobekhotep being the name of four different rulers of the Thirteenth Dynasty.

What is this rise in Sobek’s popularity attributed to? One factor that cannot be ignored is the relocation of Egypt’s capital. During the reign of Amenemhet I, the capital was moved from Thebes to Ijtawy, an unknown location in the Fayyum. The Fayyum was the only oasis in Egypt that depended on the Nile for its fertility. Crocodiles were most certainly native to the land, and a large number of crocodile mummies have been unearthed in the region. Here, as anywhere else in Egypt, the Nile was of extreme importance for sustaining life. Moving
away from the Nile and relying on canals and irrigation posed a big risk, which might explain Pharaoh Amenemhet III’s careful attention to measuring the water levels of the Nile. In addition to building canals and retention walls, Amenemhet III had a Nilometer installed at the Second Cataract in order to record the peak water height each year. This enabled the pharaoh to estimate the coming season’s harvest and understand the needs of the area.

Important as the construction of aqueducts and canals were, the amount of water brought in by the Nile was ultimately believed to be up to the gods, not the pharaoh. Sobek’s relation with water and the Nile leave no question as to why he would take on such an important role for Amenemhet III. From as early as the Pyramid Texts, we have seen that Sobek was associated with fertility and the Nile. The Coffin Texts, which will be discussed later, also establish Sobek as being “Lord of Water.” Without the favor of Sobek, Amenemhet III believed his capital and kingdom would be vulnerable to destruction.

The construction of a temple for Sobek was eventually underway. The Hammamat Inscriptions from the Twelfth Dynasty speak of a “house of Sobek” that was commissioned by the pharaoh. In the nineteenth year of his reign, the pharaoh sent for material to be brought back from Hammamat to “Ankh-Amenemhet,” most likely the mortuary temple of the king located in Hawara. The inscription reads as follows: “His majesty sent to bring for himself) monuments from the valley of Hammamat, of beautiful black (basaltic) stone as far as ‘Ankh-Amenemhet,’ living forever and ever; at the house of Sobek of Crocodilopolis: 10 statues of 5 cubits, upon a throne.” If following the Nile, this journey would have been roughly seven hundred miles roundtrip.

The early historian Herodotus visited the Fayyum in the fifth century and wrote of the mortuary complex as being “greater than can be described.” He noted that it had twelve enclosed courts, as well as fifteen hundred rooms aboveground and fifteen hundred rooms below ground level. The Egyptians would not allow Herodotus to enter the underground rooms because they were “the sepulchers of the kings who originally built [the] labyrinth, and of the sacred crocodiles,” but he was able to see the rooms aboveground and the walls “full of sculptured figures.”

Herodotus was not the only one interested in the labyrinth at Hawara. Some of those sculptured figures most likely seen by Herodotus, as well as other important findings, were later excavated by Flinders Petrie between 1887 and 1911. A recent publication by Tine Bagh shows a few of Petrie’s important finds from his excavations of the temple complex that date to the Twelfth Dynasty reign of Amenemhet III. The abundance of evidence pointing to Sobek worship led Bagh to the opinion that we should be able to “easily visualize large motifs of King Amenemhat III offering to Sobek.” Along with the many reliefs and inscription fragments that concern Sobek, Petrie uncovered some broken pieces of stone that originally belonged to statues of Sobek. In total, parts belonging to three different Sobek statues were found. The statues provide at least two, and possibly three, pieces of evidence that illuminate Sobek’s role as a god: a feathered crown, the was scepter, and possibly an ankh.

The feathered crown uncovered by Petrie has two tall plumes (Egyptian šwty) on top of a base. Bagh interpreted the base to be the “red crown of Lower Egypt” (Egyptian deshret) because of a protruding part sticking up out of the middle. Also on this crown are the sun disk, uraeus, and cow and ram horns. A reconstructed statue depicts Sobek with the was scepter (representing power and dominion) as well as an ankh (representing life). In addition, Nigel Strudwick has published a translation of a lintel inscription of Amenemhet III that parallels the statues found by Petrie in date and design. The lintel, which Strudwick believes to have originated in the Fayyum, includes the phrase “King of Upper and Lower Egypt, Lord of the Two Lands, Nimaatre (Amenemhet III), Beloved of Sobek of Shedyt.” The translation by itself is important, as it provides evidence that the pharaoh had found favor
in the eyes of the god and was thus seen as “beloved” of him. Also significant, and in close relation to the statues found by Petrie, the determinative sign following the name Sobek is not the usual crocodile. Instead, it is a crocodile adorned as the statues are with crown, sun disk, scepter, and even an ankh. These two examples together attest to a powerful Sobek who oversees the protection and life of Lower Egypt.

Archaeological evidence is not the only source for understanding Sobek’s importance to the Egyptians of the Middle Kingdom. Two textual sources from the Middle Kingdom add insight into Sobek’s role and provide more evidence that Amenemhet III worshipped this god. An ancient Egyptian myth in spell 158 of the Coffin Texts has Sobek playing a key role. Re announces that Horus is injured because his mother, Isis, has cut off his hands and cast them into the river. Re suggests that Sobek might fish them out again. This Sobek does by devising a fish trap to retrieve the hands of Horus.  

Sobek here is undoubtedly shown as having power over the waters. It is interesting to note that Re himself did not retrieve the hands but summoned Sobek to do it. Re later says, “Hidden are the mysteries concerning this fish-trap,” suggesting that Re is not as familiar with the things related to water as Sobek is. This example in the Coffin Texts shows that while Re was the solar deity, Sobek was the god of the water and thus of great importance to Amenemhet III in his Fayyum capital.

There are two more spells, however, that add even more compelling reasons for Amenemhet III’s interest in Sobek. Both spells 268 and 285 of the Coffin Texts speak of “becoming Sobek, Lord of the winding waterway.” Although “winding waterway” accurately describes the Nile, that is not the only possible interpretation. In ancient Egyptian religion, when people die, their souls cross a winding

Amenemhet’s name appears in the cartouches on either side of the lintel. His other royal name, Nimaatre, is centered between the unusual depictions of the god Sobek. bpk, Berlin / Aegyptisches Museum, Staatliche Museen / Art Resource, NY.
canal in what seems like an aquatic obstacle course as they establish themselves in the afterlife.27 This is of interest because suddenly Sobek becomes the lord not only of the waterway of the Nile but also of the winding waterway of the heavens.

Spell 636 is a spell for a man to establish himself in the realm of the dead. It speaks of a person’s “double” (or ka) as being in the water with Sobek and as traveling in the sky with him. The role of the “Lord of the winding waterway” as mentioned in spells 268 and 285 is here shown as being a companion in the water to the soul that is crossing the great waterway of the heavens into the afterlife. These examples from the Coffin Texts affirm Sobek’s role in relation to the waters of the earth, but they also establish that his role does not end there. His connection with the heavens and afterlife is another reason why Amenemhet III would dedicate his worship to Sobek, because Sobek could help the pharaoh not only in this world but also in the next world as well. In this light it is interesting to note that the depiction of the crocodile in Facsimile 1 is interpreted therein as being in the heavens (see the explanation in fig. 12 of the facsimile).

Another example of Sobek’s importance to the Middle Kingdom pharaoh comes in the form of a papyrus titled “Hymns to Sobek.” This papyrus (containing two hymns) was found in a box with other papyri at the bottom of a Thirteenth Dynasty tomb shaft at the Ramesseum.28 Translator Alan Gardiner concluded that the hymns were copies of an original that came from the Fayyum. Addressing Sobek, these hymns contain much of what we find in the Pyramid and Coffin Texts, but they also offer unique material on Sobek’s relationship to the pharaoh.

The hymns begin by hailing Sobek as he who “did shine forth from the Primeval Waters,” followed by various other epithets referring to his power and majesty.29 We read further of Sobek “coming when summoned,” bringing “the gods all at once,” and taking “rulership of heaven.”30 These hymns depict a reliable god ruling the heavens with authority to summon all other gods to a divine council.

We find mention of the pharaoh toward the end of the first hymn:

King Amenemhet III has given this thy beautiful face so that thou may look at thy [mother] Neith and so that thou may show mercy to the gods. (Incense on the fire!) It is for Sobek the Shedytite, Horus dwelling in Shedyt, lord of myrrh, delighting in the giving of incense. May thou be merciful to King Amenemhet, through whom thy face is happy on this day.31

A few interesting things about the connection between Sobek and the pharaoh can be drawn from this passage. First, we see that Pharaoh Amenemhet III has given Sobek a face, meaning he formed the face of Sobek through the creation of some sort of divine image. We note that the hymns are directed to the image of Sobek, and the parenthetical statement “Incense on fire!” further indicates that this is a formal temple ceremony taking place. We can easily visualize the possible scene in which these hymns were involved: Pharaoh Amenemhet III had instructed a statue of Sobek to be made for the “house of Sobek” located in the Fayyum. After the completion of this statue (or statues), Amenemhet III then had hymns written in order to give praise to the god and plea for mercy on his behalf. The recitation of these hymns (presumably by the priests) and the burning of incense are key elements of an important ritual dedicated to the god Sobek. The anticipated result of the ritual was the god’s granting of mercy to the pharaoh and protection and fertility for Egypt.

The archaeological and textual evidence combine to establish the highly important role of Sobek for the Middle Kingdom pharaoh Amenemhet III. If Abraham did indeed live during the Middle Kingdom, then the title given to the crocodile in Facsimile 1 would by no means be out of place. With Egyptology being in its infancy in Joseph Smith’s day (and him lacking any education in that field), it is remarkable that Smith
Jean Yoyotte, “Le Soukhos de la Pharaon” during the time of Abraham, with Sobek being a very likely candidate. This study supports the idea of a crocodile being an “idolatrous god of Pharaoh” during the time of Abraham, with Sobek being a very likely candidate.

NOTES


8. Shaw, History of Ancient Egypt, 158.


12. At least two Egyptian gods, Sobek and Hapy, have much to do with the Nile waters and fertility. Although they have much in common, it is not hard to see why Sobek took precedence for Amenemhet III. Whereas Hapy was associated more specifically with the inundation of the Nile and vegetative fertility, Sobek was associated with water in general (including locations where crocodiles would reside) and with procreation and vegetation. See Wilkinson, Gods and Goddesses, 106, 218–19.


15. Archaeological finds by Flinders Petrie show that epithets and reliefs of Sobek are not limited to his temple in Crocodilopolis but extend to the mortuary complex of Amenemhet III as well. See Tine Bagh, Finds from W. M. F. Petrie’s Excavations in Egypt in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, ed. Anne Marie Nielsen (Copenhagen: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, 2011), 105–7.

16. “Hammatam Inscriptions,” in Ancient Records of Egypt, trans. James H. Breasted (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 1:313. The term Ankh-Amenemhet is most likely referring to the pyramid-temple at Hawara. The phrase of Crocodilopolis is not used here as a proper noun to indicate the location of the temple, but as an adjective belonging to Sobek.


18. Grene, Herodotus, 140.


27. For a detailed description of the journey of the deceased, see Gregory Shusha, Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations (London: Continuum, 2009), 54–60.


29. This is my own translation from the first column of transcription provided in Gardiner, Hymns, 57. Gardiner translates the verb as “did arise,” while I translate it as “did shine forth” owing to the determinative for sunlight.

30. My own translations here do not differ from those provided by Gardiner. The transcriptions for these attributes can be found in columns 17, 70, and 105 of Gardiner, Hymns, 57–58.

31. My own translation from the transcription of columns 36–42 in Gardiner, Hymns, 57.
Nun, the god of the primeval waters (though the waters are not represented in this colorful depiction), lifts a ship bearing the scarab beetle, who is pushing the rising sun, symbolic of birth and transition. Book of the Dead of Anhai (ca. 1050 BC).
"I, Abraham": Introduction

The Book of Abraham has an intriguing history and serves as a repository for many of the more unique doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. For instance, although the doctrine of the premortal existence of mankind is spoken of elsewhere in Mormon scripture (Alma 13:3; Doctrine and Covenants 138:53–55; Moses 3:5; 4:1–3; 6:51), it is in the Book of Abraham that this teaching is more fully elucidated (Abraham 3:18–28). Furthermore, important teachings about the relationship between the priesthood and the Abrahamic covenant (Abraham 2:6–11), man’s relationship to God (Abraham 3:22–28), and the creation (Abraham 4–5) are vividly detailed within the pages of this book.

Hugh Nibley has articulated a very fruitful methodology in studying the Book of Abraham. Nibley has argued that while studying the Joseph Smith Papyri and the method of the translation of the Book of Abraham is indeed important, of equal if not greater importance is to judge the Book of Abraham’s contents against ancient Near Eastern traditions about the life of Abraham and thus discern whether we can find confirmatory evidence for its antiquity. Although Latter-day Saint commentators on the Book of Abraham have focused primarily on the doctrinal richness found therein, a few have also paid attention to the details of the text that bespeak its ancient origin. Following Nibley’s lead, several scholars have offered analyses of the narrative of the Book of Abraham that demonstrate many convergences between the text and the ancient Near East. In addition, scholars have also drawn attention to the many parallels between the Book of Abraham and other Jewish, Christian, Muslim, and even pagan traditions about the life of Abraham.

The chapters in the Book of Abraham (Abraham 3–5) focusing on the premortal council and the creation offer especially intriguing details that link the Book of Abraham with the ancient world. A few scholars have dissected these chapters, usually in discussing the depiction of the cosmos in Abraham 3. Given the many details that confirm the Book of Abraham’s ancient cosmology, an additional look at these chapters is warranted. Specifically, upon close inspection, the Book of Abraham reveals a grand cosmological vision involving a council of gods, primordial chaos, and creation out of preexisting matter.

“The Gods Took Counsel among Themselves”: The Divine Council

Although this important motif is often missed by modern readers whose theological lenses frequently predispose them to see only strict monotheism in the Bible, the scriptural depiction of God dwelling in the midst of an assembly of other divine beings is essential to recognize in order to have a proper, nuanced, and complete understanding of the nature of deity. When read with the proper hermeneutical tools, it becomes clear that this teaching not only appears in multiple places in the Hebrew Bible, but also in other Latter-day Saint scriptural works, including the Book of Abraham.

The biblical depiction of the divine council, as summarized succinctly by Stephen A. Geller, portrays God “seated among the assembly of divine beings, who are sometimes . . . called bene ‘efim’ (‘the sons of gods’) [and] kedoshim (‘holy ones’), among other terms.” The Prophet Joseph Smith definitively taught this concept in 1844.

The head God called together the Gods and sat in grand council to bring forth the world. The grand
councilors sat at the head in yonder heavens and contemplated the creation of the worlds which were created at the time. . . . In the beginning, the head of the Gods called a council of the Gods; and they came together and concocted [prepared] a plan to create the world and people it.9

Many passages from the Hebrew Bible demonstrate the presence of a divine plurality. The textbook example from the Hebrew Bible is Psalm 82, which Michael S. Heiser uses as his primary text to assert that “it is not difficult to demonstrate that the Hebrew Bible assumes and affirms the existence of other gods.”10 This psalm vividly depicts God (ʾĕlōhîm) in his place “in the divine council [ba-ʾădat ʾēl]; in the midst of the gods [bĕ-qereb ʾĕlōhîm] he holds judgment” (Psalm 82:1 NRSV).11 After reprimanding these gods for neglecting their duty to protect the vulnerable of humanity, God affirms the divine nature of the members of the council while simultaneously issuing a dire threat should they persist in their malfeasance. “I say, ‘You are gods [ʾĕlōhîm], children of the most high [bĕnê ʾelyôn], all of you; nevertheless, you shall die like mortals, and fall like any prince” (Psalm 82:6–7 NRSV).

The use of the plural in these verses may leave some modern readers perplexed. After all, such seems to indicate a pluralistic depiction of God contrary to modern Judeo-Christian theological sensitivities. Christians therefore routinely read the Trinity into these verses, or, along with Jewish readers, suggest a “plurality of majesty” to account for the presence of the plural.12

Contrary to these common readings of the plurals in Genesis 1:26–27, scholars have recognized the presence of the divine council in this text. According to David M. Carr, the plural in these verses “probably refers to the divine beings who compose God’s heavenly court.”13 Everett Fox mentions in passing that “some take [Genesis 1:26] to refer to the heavenly court.”14 Jon D. Levenson, providing commentary in an authoritative study Bible, writes, “The plural construction (Let us . . .) most likely reflects a setting in the divine council. . . . God the King announces the proposed course of action to His cabinet of subordinate deities.”15 Robert Hendel similarly notes, “The plural seems to refer to the lesser deities of the divine assembly described in other biblical texts.”16 Marc Zvi Brettler informs us, “[Genesis 1:26–27] is implicitly portraying God in terms of a human king: God is talking to his royal counselors or cabinet. . . . The creation of people is so significant that this creative act alone demands God consult his cabinet, [composed] of angels or other divine figures.”17 Finally, Gerald Cooke acknowledges “at least a strong possibility that [Genesis 1:26–27] represents[s] a conception of a plurality of divine beings.”18

Examples of God’s heavenly court in the Hebrew Bible could be multiplied (e.g., Genesis 3:22; Deuteronomy 32:8–9, 43;1 Kings 22:19–23; Isaiah 6:1–4; 40:1–5; Job 1:6–12, 21:1–6). The divine council is likewise present, with some conceptual differences, in the religious systems of Israel’s neighboring cultures, including Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is a thoroughly ancient Near Eastern concept that is usually only reluctantly or begrudgingly admitted by traditional Jewish and Christian exegetes as also being biblical.

On the other hand, the presence of the divine council in the Book of Abraham could not be more
explicit. Abraham, according to Abraham 3, was granted a vision that included viewing the assembled spirits that composed the premortal council.

Now the Lord had shown unto me, Abraham, the intelligences that were organized before the world was; and among all these there were many of the noble and great ones; And God saw these souls that they were good, and he stood in the midst of them, and he said: These I will make my rulers; for he stood among those that were spirits, and he saw that they were good. (Abraham 3:22–23)

As David E. Bokovoy has explained, the detail that God “stood” in the midst of the council may seem trivial at first glance, but in fact contains important ramifications for the depiction of God as the head of the council. What’s more, the Book of Abraham’s identification of these preexistent intelligences of the council with the stars of heaven appears to be using language that is part of the cultural and religious environment of the ancient Near East (compare Abraham 3:16–18).

Notwithstanding the somewhat unfortunately misplaced chapter division, the premortal council scene of Abraham 3 actually extends into Abraham 4–5. Instead of being a break in the narrative, the account of the creation in Abraham 4–5 should be read as an extension and continuation of the narrative in Abraham 3. That is to say, the divine council is introduced in Abraham 3 because it is the divine council that will carry out the creation in Abraham 4–5. The narrative informs us, “And then [i.e., immediately after the conflict in Abraham 3:27–28 is resolved and a course of action is selected] the Lord said: Let us go down. And they went down at the beginning, and they, that is the Gods, organized and formed the heavens and the earth” (Abraham 4:1).

The text proceeds to use the plural Gods as the subject carrying out the creation. There can be no doubt that these Gods include those from Abraham 3 whom the Lord in verse 1 instructed to accompany him and “go down” to carry forth the creation, in terminology perfectly suited for divine council imagery (compare Abraham 4:26–27; 5:4). But perhaps the most glaring detail in Abraham 4–5 that indicates the presence of the divine council is that the Gods are said to have taken “counsel among themselves” as they carried forth their creative acts (Abraham 4:26; compare 5:1–5), a detail not explicitly described in other scriptural creation accounts. This description of the Gods taking “counsel” among themselves during their creative deliberations is crucial in identifying the presence of the divine council in Abraham 4–5.

The explicit use of counsel to describe the actions of the Gods in Abraham 4 links it with the Hebrew noun sôd, which can be defined as both “council” as well as “counsel.” It conveys the sense of friends holding a private conversation in an intimate assembly or circle, as well as secrets that God imparts to his prophets (Amos 3:7), and is used in the Hebrew Bible to refer both to the divine council itself (cf. Psalm 89:6–7) as well as to the “counseling” that the gods do among themselves in the council.

I hasten to clarify what I am not claiming. I am not claiming that the Book of Abraham employs the word sôd in describing the premortal council. Because we presently possess only an English rendering of the text, there remains, of course, the question of whether the Book of Abraham was originally written in Hebrew, Egyptian, or another ancient Near Eastern language. What I am claiming, however,

One important aspect of a number of Egyptian creation myths is the motif of primordial water from which the earth, or, more properly, a primeval hill or landmass, springs out of.
The Hebrew of Genesis 1:2 uses highly technical vocabulary to describe this “formless void.” The earth at the time of creation, according to the Hebrew text, was "tōhū wā-bōhū." The New Revised Standard Version quoted above offers a perfectly acceptable translation, while E. A. Speiser translates the phrase as “a formless waste.”28 Douglas A. Knight and Amy-Jill Levine argue that "a formless void" is an appropriate translation of this idiom,29 and commentary provided by the New Interpreter’s Bible speaks of "tōhū wā-bōhū as “something desolate and unproductive.”30 Finally, Gordon J. Wenham suggests that “unproductive and uninhabited” is the underlying meaning of "tōhū wā-bōhū."31 Regardless of the precise translation, "tōhū wā-bōhū" thus seems to be a description of chaos.

But what are we to understand in Genesis 1:1–3 and Abraham 4:1–2 by “the deep” (tĕhôm) upon which “darkness” (ʾōšek) covered? Bendt Alster identifies tĕhôm as “the primeval sea” that “denotes the cosmic sea on which the world rests.”32 Allen P. Ross concurs, noting that tĕhôm “refers to the salty deep, the ocean, and thereby figuratively to the abyss . . . the primeval ocean.”33 Fox simply designates tĕhôm as “the primeval waters, a common (and usually divine) image in ancient Near Eastern mythology.”34 This identification of tĕhôm as primeval water is supported later in the verse, where we read that the spirit, or wind, of God (rûaʾ ʾĕlōhîm) swept over “the waters [ha-māim]” at the beginning of God’s creation.

To help us better understand the precise nature of tĕhôm, we diverge briefly from the Hebrew Bible to examine an important cognate of tĕhôm in the celebrated Babylonian creation myth and temple liturgy Enuma Elish. As Alster explains, tĕhôm is related to the Akkadian Tiamat,35 who in the Enuma Elish is an evil goddess conquered by the god Marduk and whose spoiled carcass becomes the primordial cosmic ocean at the creation of the world (4.125–46).36 Since its discovery and translation in the late nineteenth century, scholars have recognized the shared cosmological conceptions between Genesis 1 and the Enuma Elish. Although a direct dependence between the two creation mythologies cannot be maintained, and several significantly different cosmological conceptualizations exist between the two myths,37 it is apparent that the Israelites and Babylonians (as well as other surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures, for that matter) shared many commonalities in their
creation mythologies, including the depiction of deity overcoming chaos by bringing it into order through either a cosmic battle or divine fiat.\(^{38}\)

Also significant for Latter-day Saints is the *Enuma Elish*’s depiction of the primeval theomachy in the council of the gods, wherein Tiamat and her evil host of warrior gods battle against Marduk for reign over the divine council and, ultimately, the cosmos (3–4.129).\(^{39}\) The motif of a primeval theomachy in the divine council likewise appears in the Book of Abraham, in this instance between the premortal Jehovah and Satan over the agency of mankind (Abraham 3:22–28; compare Moses 4:1–4). Again, this is not to say that the Book of Abraham and the *Enuma Elish* are drawing directly on each other but rather to note the common presence of this motif in ancient Near Eastern creation mythology.\(^{40}\)

The Egyptians shared a similar cosmological outlook with their Semitic neighbors. For example, one important aspect of a number of Egyptian creation myths is the motif of primordial water from which the earth, or, more properly, a primeval hill or landmass, springs out of. Ian Shaw and Paul Nicholson, for example, write about the “creator-god and solar deity” Atum (later Atum-Rê), who, in the creation mythology of Heliopolis, came into being by “rising up from Nun, the waters of chaos,” and thus became the “primeval mound.”\(^{41}\) Günter Burkard identifies Nun as the “primeval ocean,” whom he describes as being “chaotic, unorganized” and “preexisting.”\(^{42}\) Similar creation myths that involve the earth being formed out of chaotic primeval water are also found at Memphis and Hermopolis, both associated with their respective deities.\(^{43}\)

But besides just conceptualizing creation from primordial matter, it is apparent that the Egyptians likewise conceived of creation as consisting of the establishment of order. James P. Allen writes about the importance of Maat in Egyptian cosmology as a “force of nature” that was “established at the creation.” Allen explains that Maat is “the natural order of the universe” that “on a cosmic level governed the proper functioning of the universe.” Maat should therefore be understood as “order,” ‘justice’; and ‘truth.” The opposite of Maat is *jzft*, which represents chaos, disorder, or disharmony and is generated by unruly humans. These two forces are constantly at war with each other in Egyptian cosmology. It is the duty, particularly of the pharaoh, to preserve Maat in Egyptian society and thus keep chaos at bay. By doing so the pharaoh is imitating “the creator who established a balanced universe.”\(^{44}\)

What we therefore have in these mythologies is a conception of creation in which a deity fashions chaotic, watery mass into order. The conquering of chaos depicts the deity as the rightful, mighty king over his newly fashioned cosmos. This is true also for the biblical depiction of creation (which shouldn’t come as a surprise, given, as explained earlier, that Genesis shares cosmological conceptions
similar to those of other Near Eastern cultures). Adele Berlin and Brettler, for example, have pointed out that Psalm 24:1–2, “a hymn celebrating God, creator and victor,” echoes the depiction in Genesis 1:1–3, wherein “God tamed the primeval waters and founded the earth upon them (Ps. 136:6); He is therefore to be acknowledged as the supreme sovereign of the world.”

Robert A. Oden Jr. indicates that the depiction of the “formless void” in Genesis 1 is that of “watery and dark undifferentiated matter” that “existed prior to the formation of a structured cosmos,” and J. H. Hertz helpfully explains that Genesis 1:1–3 describes “the reduction of chaos to ordered arrangement.” Along these lines, J. R. Porter comments that Genesis 1 follows the ancient Near Eastern depiction of a ‘deity’s victory over the forces of chaos, represented by threatening waters, as a result of which the god is established as a supreme king.”

The Book of Abraham’s portrait of creation from primordial water is consistent with the Near Eastern myths we have seen above. The text speaks of “the deep” upon which darkness “reign[ed]” as “the Spirit of the Gods was brooding upon the face of the waters” (Abraham 4:2). Eventually we’re informed that “the Gods ordered, saying: Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the earth come up dry” out of them (Abraham 4:9). These waters from which the earth arises out of are the primeval waters that the Gods commanded to be divided by placing “an expanse in the midst” of them (Abraham 4:6).

That the Gods in the Book of Abraham overcame a previously ruling chaos to establish their own dominion can be seen in the text’s usage of the word reign to describe the position of the chaotic darkness before the Gods fashioned the cosmos (Abraham 4:2). What is more, the Book of Abraham’s creation account portrays the Gods in much more regal terms than that of Genesis. Thus, we read of the Gods forcefully “ordering” this or that aspect of the cosmos, which obligingly “obey” when commanded (Abraham 4:7, 9–12, 18, 21, 25). The language in the Book of Abraham conjures the same imagery typical of the Near Eastern creation mythology we have reviewed—namely, that of kingly dominion establishing order over a previously chaotic cosmos.

“We Will Take of These Materials”: Creation ex materia

In close conjunction with the concept of God fashioning an ordered cosmos out of chaotic matter is the concept that God created the earth not ex nihilo, or out of nothing, but rather ex materia, or from preexisting matter. It is therefore not surprising that creation ex materia is present in the Genesis and Abraham accounts of creation. Unfailingly throughout Abraham 4 and 5 the verbs organize and form are used to describe the creative activity of the Gods. The presence of preexistent matter that the Gods form and organize is also apparent. “We will go down,” says God in the prologue to the Book of Abraham’s creation account, “for there is space there, and we will take of these materials, and we will make an earth whereon these [speaking of the preexistent intelligences] may dwell” (Abraham 3:24). Commenting on this verse, Richard D. Draper, S. Kent Brown, and Michael D. Rhodes explain, “The earth and its solar system were not created ex nihilo, out of nothing, as traditional Christianity teaches, but from existing matter. . . . The elements that are the building blocks of the Creation have always existed.” Indeed, Speiser argues that, despite “the theological and philosophical implications” of Genesis 1 speaking of “coexistent matter,” “the text should be allowed to speak for itself.”

Of crucial importance is the verb used by God in the first verse of Genesis. The verb in Hebrew is bārā; it is highly unique, occurring only about fifty times.
and being used only by God in the Hebrew Bible. Although it is often rendered as “create” in various translations, another meaning of the word could also be to “form” or “fashion.” John H. Walton writes that the verb בָּרָא (ba‘ar) in Genesis 1:1 most likely means giving the aforementioned (see above) primordial chaos “a function or a role within an ordered cosmos.” Walter Brueggemann similarly clarifies that the concept of creation in Genesis is that of “an ordering out of an already existing chaos.” As Walton elaborates, concerning the concept of creation in the Hebrew Bible and ancient Near Eastern thought, something is brought into existence functionally, not necessarily materially; rarely would the statement concern the issue of matter. Indeed, the text never uses bara‘ in a context in which materials are mentioned. Thus instead of suggesting manufacture of matter out of nothing (as many have inferred in the past), that materials are not mentioned suggests that manufacture is not the issue.

Latter-day Saint scholar Kevin L. Barney explains that “the verb [בָּרָא] seems to be used in the sense of shaping or fashioning.” To illustrate, Walton compares God’s act of creating in Genesis 1:1 as that of a human creating a painting. “One can create a piece of art, but that expression does not suggest manufacture of the canvas or paint.” In his monumental King Follett discourse, Joseph Smith insightfully compared the process of creation in Genesis 1:1 to that of building a ship.

Now, the word create came from the word baurau [בָּרָא] which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element, and in which dwells all the glory.

Joseph’s views on this point are not far removed from those of biblical scholars such as Brettler, who indicates that the creation account in Genesis “does not describe creation out of nothing. . . . Primeval stuff already exists in [Genesis 1], and the text shows no concern for how it originated. Rather, it is a myth about how God alone structured primordial matter into a highly organized world.” Fox straightforwardly comments, “Gen. 1 describes God’s bringing order out of chaos, not creation from nothingness.”

Barney similarly concludes that “the doctrine of creatio ex nihilo is . . . nowhere attested in the Hebrew Bible,” and “the historical evidence strongly favors Joseph Smith’s rejection of creation ex nihilo in his reading of Genesis 1:1.”

Thus, to read the concept of creation ex nihilo into the text of Genesis 1:1 is to wrest this account out of its primary ideological and historical context. Although Jewish and Christian theologians have gone to great pains to try to demonstrate the presence of creation ex nihilo in the biblical text, it simply does not exist. In this regard, as in the previous two, the Book of Abraham’s description of creation from primordial matter is right at home in the ancient Near East.

“To Possess Greater Knowledge”: Conclusion

The Book of Abraham invites its readers to drink deeply from its doctrinally rich pages. The narrative itself opens with Abraham expressing his heartfelt longing to become a greater possessor of truth and righteousness (Abraham 1:1–3; cf. 2:12–13). But besides having a doctrinal richness, the Book of Abraham also has strong ties with ancient Near Eastern, including particularly biblical, cosmology. Although questions still remain regarding the precise manner in which Joseph produced the Book of Abraham, including its relationship to the Egyptian papyri he received in 1835, and although questions remain as to how precisely Joseph’s study of Hebrew influenced his translation of the Book of Abraham,
there can be little doubt that the cosmological concepts in the Book of Abraham of the divine council, the conquering of chaos by the Gods, and creation from primordial matter fit nicely in the ancient world.

NOTES


11. It must be remembered that both ḫēḥîm or ḫâl could be used as either a noun or an abstraction. This can, at times, confound readers as to which sense (nominal or abstract) is being used in a given passage. When no grammatical clues are present, the key is usually to rely on the context of the passage to govern the translation. For reasons too complex to relate here, I concur with the NRSV that “divine council” is perhaps the most fitting translation of ḥādat ḫâl. Still, regardless of whether one translates ḥādat ḫâl as “divine council” or “council of God,” the meaning of the psalm is not substantially altered.

12. J. R. Dummelow’s popular, though outdated, biblical commentary offers the “plurality of majesty” or “royal we” explanation as one possibility for explaining the plurals of Genesis 1:16–27. See A Commentary on the Holy Bible, ed. J. R. Dummelow (New York: Macmillan, 1920), 5. Stated briefly, the idea is that monarchs have been known in some instances to speak in the plural when referring to themselves, as a sign of excellence or nobility, and that this can account for the plural in the text. This explanation has been popular for some time among Christians and Jews, as well as among Latter-day Saints. See James E. Talmage, Jesus the Christ (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1915), 38.


19. Although not present in the Masoretic Text, due undoubtedly to scribal mangling, the Qumran manuscripts 4QDeut and 4QDeut8 offer variant readings of these two passages in Deuteronomy 32 that unmistakably show the presence of the divine council. See Martin Abegg Jr., Peter Flint, and Eugene Ulrich, eds., The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1999), 191–93. For commentary, see Carmel McCarthy, Biblia Hebraica Quinta: Deuteronomy (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007), 140–41, 152–53.

20. The Book of Abraham’s “noble and great ones” call to mind the Anunnaki of Mesopotamian religion, whom Jean Bottéro identifies as “the most powerful, the most eminent, and, in some ways, the upper class or ‘chiefs’ of the other [gods].” Jean Bottéro, Religion in Ancient Mesopotamia, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 55.


23. The same language is used in Genesis 11:7, where, after seeing the unfavorable conditions of humans operating with one language, Yahweh instructs his host: “Come, let us go down, and confuse their language.” As Levenson, “Genesis,” 29, indicates, “As in [Genesis] 1:26, the plural (let us) probably reflects an address to the divine council.”


26. There is also the theory that Joseph is the inspired author of a pseudopigraphal Book of Abraham composed in English in the nineteenth century. See, for example, Karl C. Sanberg, “Knowing Brother Joseph Again: The Book of Abraham and Joseph Smith as Translator,” Dialogue 22/4 (1989): 17–37. Sanberg’s argument is essentially that the Book of Abraham’s contents are derived from Joseph’s inspired, prophetic interaction with contemporary environmental sources (e.g., his study of Hebrew with Joshua Seixas, and his exposure to the writings of Flavius Josephus). It is not within the scope of this paper to scrutinize this or other theories of the Book of Abraham’s translation.


James D. G. Dunn (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003), 38.
35. Alster, “Tiamat,” 1634, Victor P. Hamilton simply calls *tēhôm* the “Hebraized form” of Tiamat. See Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 110. Knight and Levine agree, observing that “the Hebrew word for ‘deep’ is *tē-hôm*, a linguistic cognate to Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess of the salt seas. She represents the great abyss, the endless seas around and under the earth.” See Knight and Levine, Meaning of the Bible, 201. See also the insightful comments by Michael D. Coogan, The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 5-9, where he discusses both the divine council in Genesis as well as the relationship between *tēhôm* and Tiamat.
37. For instance, *tēhôm* is nowhere personified as being evil in Genesis 1, whereas Tiamat is consistently portrayed as such throughout the Enuma Elish.
44. Allen, Middle Egyptian, 119-21. See also Jan Assmann, Of God and Gods: Egypt, Israel, and the Rise of Monotheism (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2008), 11-12. Assmann, Of God and Gods, cites an Egyptian text that speaks of “the sun god and creator, Re, [who] has placed the king on earth for ever and ever, in order that he may judge mankind and satisfy the gods, establish Ma’at and annihilate Isfet.”
45. “There is no doubt that the text [of Genesis] utilizes older materials. It reflects creation stories and cosmologies of Egypt and Mesopotamia. However, the text before us transforms these older materials to serve a quite new purpose, a purpose most intimately related to Israel’s covenantal experience.” Walter Brueggemann, Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 24, emphasis in original. J. J. M. Roberts similarly observes, “The closest parallels to the Israelite cosmogonic myth come from the Baal Epic at Ugarit though the preserved Ugaritic texts do not explicitly tie Baal’s defeat of the sea dragon to creation—but there are
also Egyptian and Hittite texts of a similar character.” J. M. Roberts, The Bible and the Ancient Near East (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 51.

46. Berlin and Brettlert, “Psalms,” in Jewish Study Bible, 1308, also 1434. See also Psalm 24:1–2.


50. Given what I’ve noted earlier (see n. 11), perhaps we could understand the “Spirit of the Gods” to mean “divine spirit.”

51. It should be remembered that the term *preexist* or *preexistence* (from the Latin *ex* “out” + *sister* “take a stand”) means “pre-placement,” not necessarily “pre-being.”

52. Draper, Brown, and Rhodes, Pearl of Great Price Commentary, 178–79, and also 280.


57. Brueggeman, Genesis, 29.

58. Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought, 183. Walton has elsewhere written: “Ancient traditions do not typically begin with nothing. Instead, they start with a condition devoid of order, function or purpose. Creation then takes place by giving things order, function, and purpose, which is synonymous with giving them existence… Instead of suggesting manufacture of matter out of nothing (as many have inferred in the past) … bārā concerns bringing heaven and earth into existence by focusing on operation through organization and assignment of roles and functions. . . Perhaps an English verb that captures this idea less ambiguously is ‘to design.’” John H. Walton, “Creation,” in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 156, 162.


60. Walton, Ancient Near Eastern Thought, 183.


62. Brettlert, How to Read the Jewish Bible, 41.


67. I am aware of the discussion of how Joseph’s study of Hebrew influenced the production of the Book of Abraham and am currently conducting my own research on the subject. That an influence exists is beyond question. For reasons too complex to discuss here, I am, however, hesitant to attribute too much of an influence to Joseph’s study of Hebrew beyond the transliteration and translation of some select phrases and words. I am highly doubtful that Joseph’s study of Hebrew alone would have vouchsafed the complex cosmological details discussed in this paper. Of course, one’s assumptions about the translation of the Book of Abraham (i.e., whether one believes Joseph translated an actual ancient text or composed the text by revelation) will in large part determine how one assesses the evidence.
MEMORY AND IDENTITY IN
THE BOOK OF MORMON

STEVEN L. OLSEN

FROM THE EDITOR:
Once again, Steven Olsen has produced a detailed analysis of the use of memory and identity in the Book of Mormon, particularly through the book’s use of the term remember and of the traditions of preserving the records. What makes his work significant is his ability to see how these themes help shape the narrative that Mormon created. Without saying as much, he again has demonstrated that a naive, mostly uneducated, nineteenth-century youth could not have produced this sacred record on his own.
The present study explores the concept of memory in the text of the Book of Mormon. The study is divided into three parts:

1. Vocabulary. It traces the use of the term remember and its variants—for example, remembering, remembered, remembrance, and so on—and considers the connotations of these terms within specific literary contexts and patterns.

2. Narrative contents. It examines how the word remember informs and integrates the historical narrative, thus helping to define and express Nephite historical consciousness.

3. Records preservation. It illustrates how traditions of managing the Nephite archive enlarge and refine this concept of memory.

The overall thesis of this study is that the Book of Mormon concept of memory is more than a cognitive awareness of the past. Rather, it represents a special kind of historical consciousness—one that is fundamental to the identity of a covenant people of God. Readers familiar with *Zakhor*, Yosef Yerushalmi’s classic study of Jewish concepts of memory, will see many similarities with the present study of the Book of Mormon, particularly during the period of biblical Judaism: the role of memory in historiography, covenant ideology, and the formation and preservation of cultural identity. These similarities derive primarily from the fact that the Book of Mormon has its roots in biblical Judaism. Hence its writers were steeped in and consciously preserved or rejected elements of this literary culture in their own record keeping (see 1 Nephi 1:1-2; 13:23-28; 14:23; 2 Nephi 25:1-6; 29:3-14).

**Vocabulary**

As the prophet Moroni closes the record of the Nephites, he declares how all mankind may receive a divine witness of its truthfulness. Contemporary Latter-day Saints call this passage Moroni’s challenge, which is usually cited as follows:

> And when ye shall receive these things, I would exhort you that ye would ask God, the Eternal Father, in the name of Christ, if these things are not true; and if ye shall ask with a sincere heart, with real intent, having faith in Christ, he will manifest the truth of it unto you, by the power of the Holy Ghost. And by the power of the Holy Ghost ye may know the truth of all things. (Moroni 10:4-5)

Many church members may not realize that Moroni’s challenge actually begins in the preceding verse: “Behold, I would exhort you that when ye shall read these things, if it be wisdom in God that ye should read them, that ye would remember how merciful the Lord hath been unto the children of men, from the creation of Adam even down until the time that ye shall read these things, and ponder it in your hearts” (Moroni 10:3). The more complete citation suggests that remembering is an essential component of spiritual conversion.

In the Book of Mormon, the importance of remembering relative to obtaining a divine witness is understood not only by the last Nephite prophet but also by disciples of Christ from earlier times as well. For example, in order to convince his unbelieving brothers that God can also lead their family to a promised land, Nephi declares how God had guided Moses and the children of Israel from Egypt to the Holy Land (1 Nephi 17:23-55). Although Nephi recognizes that only a small portion of his family’s experiences can be preserved on plates, he indicates that the sacred sealed portion of the Nephite record will “reveal all things from the foundation of the world unto the end thereof” (2 Nephi 27:10). Several centuries later, in order to revitalize the church of Christ among the Nephites, Alma the Younger reminds church members that a merciful God had...
delivered their fathers from captivity (Alma 5:1–13). When the four sons of King Mosiah introduce the gospel of Jesus Christ to the Lamanites, the missionaries begin their formal instruction by rehearsing the things of God from the creation to the present day (Alma 18:36–40; 22:12–14). The grandest example of Moroni’s model of conversion comes from Christ himself. During his postresurrection ministry to the Nephites, he “did expound all things unto them, both great and small . . . even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory . . . even unto the great and last day” (3 Nephi 26:1–4; see also 23:14). Nephite prophets from Nephi to Moroni recognize that gaining and retaining a proper understanding of the past are essential in coming to know the things of God.

The verb remember, along with its variants, appears some 220 times in the Book of Mormon, making it one of the most frequently used verbs in the entire text. Frequency, however, is just one indicator of significance. Another is the specific literary contexts in which this constellation of related words appears. The imperative form of the verb regularly appears in sermons, exhortations, prophecies, and spiritual counsel. For example, Nephi repeats the term eight times as he closes his sacred record with his testimony (2 Nephi 29). The term also appears eight times in Jacob’s brief but masterful discourse on the atonement of Christ (2 Nephi 9). Benjamin uses the term nine times in his grand valedictory address (Mosiah 2–5). Alma repeats the term multiple times while renewing the church among the Nephites and again while exhorting his sons to faithfulness at the end of his own life (Alma 5:7; 34:42). Alma’s son Helaman repeatedly emphasizes the concept in his final instructions to his own sons (Helaman 5:6–12). Christ also repeats the term numerous times to the Nephites during his ministry (3 Nephi 13–29). In short, religious leaders from the Book of Mormon exhort their followers to remember as much as to obey, repent, pray, and worship.

In these contexts, remember appears not only frequently but also at the spiritual apex of the exhortation: “O remember, remember that these things are true” (Mosiah 2:41); “And now, O man, remember, and perish not” (Mosiah 4:30); and “O remember, remember, my sons . . . yea, remember that there is no other way nor means whereby man can be saved, only through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, whom shall come; yea, remember that he cometh to redeem the world” (Helaman 5:9). These uses imply that the term remember connotes more than cognitive awareness of the past. Indeed, it is associated with spiritual maturity and is an essential component of righteousness.

The following uses of the term expand its connotations by characterizing how God remembers divine promises relative to his covenant people.

But behold, there shall be many—at that day when I shall proceed to do a marvelous work among them, that I may remember the covenants which I have made to their fathers. Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord . . . from the four quarters of the earth. (1 Nephi 19:15–16)

When that day cometh . . . that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers. Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord . . . from the four quarters of the earth. (1 Nephi 19:15–16)

When that day cometh . . . that they no more turn aside their hearts against the Holy One of Israel, then will he remember the covenants which he made to their fathers. Yea, then will he remember the isles of the sea; yea, and all the people who are of the house of Israel, will I gather in, saith the Lord. . . . from the four quarters of the earth. (1 Nephi 19:15–16)

But behold, there shall be many—at that day when I shall proceed to do a marvelous work among them, that I may remember my covenants which I have made unto the children of men, that I may set my hand again the second time to recover my people, which are of the house of Israel; And also, that I may remember the promises which I have made unto thee, Nephi, and also unto thy father, that I would remember your seed. (2 Nephi 29:1–2)

And I will show unto thee, O house of Israel, that the Gentiles shall not have power over you; but I will remember my covenant unto you, O house of Israel, and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. (3 Nephi 16:12)

And after they have been driven and scattered by the Gentiles, behold, then will the Lord remember the
covenant which he made unto Abraham and unto all the house of Israel. And also the Lord will remember the prayers of the righteous, which have been put up unto him for them. (Mormon 5:20–21)

And as the Lord liveth he will remember the covenant which he hath made with [the house of Israel]. (Mormon 8:23)

It is difficult to imagine an omniscient God forgetting (in the usual sense) something as vital as a covenant with or the prayers of his people. Rather, in these and related passages, remember carries the connotation of “restore,” “renew,” “revitalize,” or “refresh.” In each case, that which God remembers is an essential part of the identity of a people whom God distinguishes from the rest of humanity by means of a covenant and its periodic renewal.

The covenant connotation of remember is made explicit in the prayers offered during the sacrament of the Lord’s supper, the centerpiece of Nephite public worship. While Nephite worship services are not detailed to any great extent in the Book of Mormon, Moroni includes verbatim the prayers over the emblems of Christ’s atoning sacrifice in Moroni 4–5. Each prayer divides into three parts:

1. Invocation, in which the officiator addresses “God, the Eternal Father” and states the purpose of the prayer—that is, “to bless and sanctify” the bread or wine, respectively
2. Promise, in which members of the congregation commit to certain devotional acts that are central to their identity as members of Christ’s church
3. Blessing, in which the officiator declares how God will bless members of the congregation who keep their covenantal promise—that is, “that they may always have his Spirit [i.e., the Holy Ghost] to be with them”

While the specific wording of the promise portion of each prayer is not identical, the promises themselves are the same, as expressed in the two verbs remember and witness. In partaking of the sacrament, church members promise to remember and to witness to certain eternal truths in devotion to the Savior and as evidence of their membership in his church. The precise wording of the promise portion of each prayer is as follows:

That both prayers emphasize the same set of promises indicates that remembering and witnessing are key principles of personal devotion and covenant identity for members of the church of Christ.

Another literary construction of the term remember in the Book of Mormon is as a prelude to or component of action—for example, “remember to keep the commandments,” “remember to observe the statutes and judgments of the Lord,” and “remember to retain the name [of Christ] written always in your hearts” (1 Nephi 15:25; Alma 46:23; Helaman 5:6; 2 Nephi 1:16; Mosiah 5:12). This literary pattern is not relevant to all possible Nephite actions, only to those connected with devotion to God, and it carries the connotation not only of cognitive recall but more importantly of spiritual commitment. Thus remember lies at the foundation not only of an awareness of divine truth—the role it
plays in Moroni’s challenge—but also of a covenant commitment to a life of righteousness. From this perspective, repeated use of the term in the sacrament prayers implies that those who partake of the emblems of Christ’s atoning sacrifice acknowledge the truth of the atonement and the mission of Jesus Christ and commit to live the gospel of the Savior as they have received it.

Synonyms and antonyms of remember reveal related nuances of its meaning. The text contains few instances of the common English synonyms of remember—for example, remind, recall, recollect, and so on. When these words do appear in the text (e.g., Enos 1:23; Alma 11:43), they connote simply “cognitive recall” rather than the suite of spiritual meanings of remember mentioned above. Thus, while remember has certain common synonyms in English, the specific connotations of these words in the Book of Mormon diverge from those of remember, which focus instead on covenant relations and spiritual devotion found in keeping commandments.

The Book of Mormon word that is the closest antonym to remember is forget. While forget and its variants appear far fewer times than remember, all usages connote a spiritual imperative similar to remember, and most occur within a covenant context. The word forget in the Book of Mormon thus connotes “turning from,” “breaking,” “severing,” or “rejecting” rather than the more common English connotation of “putting out of mind.”

Given the covenant-based contexts for most uses of remember, it may be reasonable to consider the relevance of another possible antonym. While the term dismember itself does not appear in the Book of Mormon, a few related terms do. For example, cut is used over seventy times in the text, all but nine of which are combined with off, as in cut off. Nearly all uses of this phrase occur in an explicit covenant context that implies spiritual or physical death as the ultimate consequence of breaking a covenant by not remembering. Likewise, the term destroy and its variants usually connote the physical or spiritual death of those who forget their covenants.

This general pattern of word usage suggests that while the connotation of “cognitive recall” exists in the Book of Mormon, it plays only a secondary or supporting role relative to the book’s lofty spiritual objectives. More to the point is that use of the term remember—along with its variations, synonyms, and antonyms—exhibits patterns that are consistently associated with righteousness, obedience, covenants, and salvation and are regularly contrasted with evil, death, and destruction. None of the over 220 uses of remember occurs in a mundane, casual, completely empirical, or purely cognitive context. Rather, they connote such meanings as “hold fast,” “commit to,” “embrace,” “keep sacred,” “restore,” “renew,” “be true to,” “gather,” and “preserve.” That this pattern is abundantly manifest throughout the Book of Mormon suggests that its principal authors intend the constellation of related terms to communicate a set of precise meanings that are central to the book’s core spiritual purposes. These terms occupy a special place in the language of the Book of Mormon, one that acknowledges the empirical past and the role of cognition in human consciousness but that focuses these capabilities on God and his eternal purposes.

**Narrative Contents**

Record keeping is one of the principal duties given to the Nephites by God. On two separate occasions, the Lord commands Nephi to keep a record of his mortal ministry (1 Nephi 19:1–5; 2 Nephi 5:28–34). At the time that he distinguishes his followers as a separate people, Nephi identifies record keeping as one of the key measures by which they preserve their covenant-based identity (2 Nephi 5:12). In addition, Nephi appears to have used his divine vision (1 Nephi 11–14) as a microcosm for his own record, and Mormon seems to have used it as a pattern or framework to abridge the Nephite archives.

On a more comprehensive level, the Nephite concept of tradition contrasts dramatically with that of related peoples. While the Nephites maintain their traditions largely by written records compiled and preserved by supreme spiritual leaders and for covenant-based spiritual purposes, the people of Zarahemla bring no written records with them from Jerusalem and thus lose their covenant identity, even though they trace their descent from the royal lineage of the Jews and occupy the promised land for a period of time comparable to the Nephites (Omni 1:17; Helaman 8:21). Likewise, the Lamanites seem to have kept no written records; hence, their religious and social traditions are transmitted largely orally and are described in the Nephite record as “incorrect,” “wicked,” and “abominable” (Alma 3:8; 23:3; 37:9; Helaman 15:7; 16:20). By contrast, “silly” and
“foolish” are the epithets used by apostate Nephites to justify their rejection of the church and gospel of Christ among the Nephites (Alma 8:11; 21:8; 30:14–31; 31:17; compare Helaman 16:20). To reinforce the central role of record keeping in the preservation of Nephite covenant identity, Book of Mormon prophets specifically mention the desire of wicked Nephites and Lamanites to destroy the records of the Nephites, whom they also seek to destroy as a people (Enos 1:14–16; Alma 14:8).

The covenant-based concept of remember considerably influences the historical narrative of the Book of Mormon. Nephi’s initial use of the term occurs in the context of his making sacred covenants with God. In his first recorded spiritual experience, Nephi declares that the Spirit had softened his heart so that he can accept his father’s dire predictions of Jerusalem’s impending destruction and the resulting need for his family to flee into the wilderness. Having received this special witness, Nephi tries, but with limited success, to convince his siblings of these radical but revealed truths. Because of his faithfulness and humility in making the attempt, the Lord blesses Nephi. The divine blessings are expressed as covenants. In this paper, the first is called the covenant of the promised land and the second the covenant of the chosen people. The covenant of the chosen people identifies Nephi’s “seed” (who come to be known collectively as “Nephites” or the “people of Nephi”) as a “ruler and a teacher” over the “seed” of his rebellious brothers (eventually called “Lamanites”). According to this covenant, the Lamanites in their rebellious state will have “no power” over the Nephites unless they too rebel against God. In their own state of rebellion, the Nephites will be scourged by the Lamanites in order “to stir them up in the ways of remembrance” (1 Nephi 2:16–24).

Nephi’s brother Jacob reinforces this covenant-based distinction. While recognizing descent as one way to distinguish social subgroups, he contrasts their perpetual antagonists, the Lamanites, or be destroyed if they altogether reject, or forget, their covenant with God.

Covenant ideology in the Book of Mormon informs the historical consciousness of the Nephites and their identity as a chosen people of God. In fact, the two concepts—historical consciousness and covenant ideology—are sufficiently connected in the text to be virtually indistinguishable. In the Book of Mormon, the term people is the most frequently used noun, appearing some 1,800 times.

As remember is about more than the past, people is about more than a collection of individuals or even a society as a whole. In the Book of Mormon, the primary connotation of people is a group that is united, defined, and governed by sacred covenants. Nephi, for example, distinguishes Nephites from Lamanites largely in terms of a covenant with God. That is, the people of Nephi are those who follow God and are thereby blessed by their faithfulness, regardless of their lineal descent. By contrast, the Lamanites are those who fight against the Nephites and are thereby cursed, regardless of their literal ancestry. As a result, Nephi typically characterizes his followers as righteous, stable, civil, delightful, pure, prosperous, powerful, hardworking, unified, and happy and the Lamanites as indolent, nomadic, savage, repulsive, wicked, and ignorant of the things of God.

Nephi’s brother Jacob reinforces this covenant-based distinction. While recognizing descent as one way to distinguish social subgroups, he contrasts
Nephites from Lamanites primarily in terms reminiscent of God’s initial covenants with Nephi: “I shall call them Lamanites that seek to destroy the people of Nephi, and those who are friendly to Nephi I shall call Nephites, or the people of Nephi” (Jacob 1:14; see also 1 Nephi 2:21–24; Mormon 1:8). Because Nephites and Lamanites are both defined in terms of the covenant, they are each identified as a people. The house of Israel is also considered a people in this sense because of its association with God’s covenant with Abraham. The rest of humanity, however, is identified as Gentiles, a term connoting undifferentiated, residual human groups. While Gentiles are occasionally called nations, kingdoms, or multitudes in the Book of Mormon, they are never referred to as a people in this covenantal sense. 16 Nephite prophets anticipate a time when many Gentiles will accept the Abrahamic covenant and live the gospel of Jesus Christ. According to these prophecies, they will then be included with God’s covenant people and forego their Gentile identity (e.g., 1 Nephi 13; 2 Nephi 30; 3 Nephi 20–22).

Mormon adopts Nephi’s and Jacob’s covenant-based distinctions in his abridgment of the large plates (see Alma 3:11). Accounts of Nephite-Lamanite relations throughout the thousand-year history illustrate both aspects of this covenant pattern. As the Nephites remember their covenant, they enjoy spiritual blessings, prevail against external aggression, and succeed in converting many Lamanites to the gospel of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, whenever the Lamanites gain political, social, or military advantage, it is because the Nephites forget their covenant. However, as the Nephites are scourged in and restored to “the ways of remembrance,” they regain ascendency over their enemies and reclaim peace and protection for their society. In the end, however, the Nephites are destroyed as a people once they altogether reject the covenant, despite repeated scourging.

Mormon portrays the Nephites ideally as a peace-loving, God-fearing people who are nevertheless willing to defend themselves against aggression. In general, the Nephites are also well-governed by leaders—whether king, priest, judge, or prophet—whose essential leadership quality is righteousness. Righteous leaders seek the welfare of the governed. In turn, the governed serve one another and support their leaders. Thus, for the most part, the Nephites are unified, prosperous, delightsome, and pure, in contrast to the Lamanites, who are ferocious, savage, aggressive, godless, and prone to wickedness.

The covenant of the chosen people acknowledges that these cultural stereotypes can be reversed or contradicted altogether because they are not associated exclusively with particular descent groups. When Nephites, for example, turn from their covenants, they reject the church of Christ, undermine established governments, foment social discord, and seek alliances with Lamanites in order to pursue their unrighteous objectives (e.g., Alma 9–14, 30–35, 46–49, 51–52, 59–62; Helaman 1–2, 4, 8–9). By contrast, when Lamanites are converted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, they exemplify qualities of godliness often to a greater degree than Nephites themselves (e.g., Alma 25–27; Helaman 6). When righteousness prevails generally, social distinctions disappear and no “manner of -ites” exists among the descendants of Lehi; they come to be known collectively as the “children of Christ” (4 Nephi 1:17; see Mosiah 5:7–6:2). However, when the spiritual utopia disintegrates, the dissenters take upon themselves the name of “Lamanites,” regardless of their actual descent lines (4 Nephi 1:20). Finally, the group that Mormon credits with the overthrow and eventual destruction of the entire Nephite nation is never referred to in the text as a people. Rather, they are variously called the “band,” “robbers,” or “society” of Gadianton (Helaman 2:13–14).

Virtually all uses of remember in the Book of Mormon can be understood in a covenant context. Obedience, righteousness, spirituality, faithfulness, holiness, protection, deliverance, salvation, as well as their negative counterparts—in short, all of the things that the Nephites are enjoined to remember—are part of the covenant ideology by which they order and make enduring sense of their lives. Remembrance, then, is not just a mnemonic exercise for historians. It is, rather, an essential spiritual discipline that allows a covenant people to preserve their identity. Furthermore, it is not the past in general that must be remembered. It is, rather, those portions of the past that exemplify covenant identities and relationships, strengthen and expand faith in Christ, and assure salvation in the kingdom of God. For the Nephites, these values are not simply internal matters of the heart (emotions) and mind (intellect) but are also external truths manifest in the lives of a people. Thus
their “ways of remembrance” can be written down and preserved in historical records.

From this perspective, the Book of Mormon is more than simply an ancient historical narrative. Its contents and structure are thoroughly informed by covenant ideology. Thus remembering the past by compiling records; preserving, studying, and pondering their contents; and teaching and keeping their precepts constitutes a pattern that is implied by its authors to be a form of sacred covenant renewal.18

The large and small plates were carefully preserved and passed on. The chart assumes that the book of Mosiah was named after King Benjamin’s father rather than his son. Justin Kelly adapted this chart from chart 16 in John W. Welch and J. Gregory Welch, Charting the Book of Mormon (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1999).
Records Preservation

The foregoing discussion suggests that the Book of Mormon is not simply the history of an ancient community, society, family, or lineage. Rather, it is the official record of a covenant people. Nephite records not only provide an account of their sacred covenants but also are the most powerful witness to those covenants. For the Nephites, keeping records from generation to generation is a sacred duty, one that is entrusted only to Nephite spiritual leaders. So sacred is this archival responsibility that one Nephite holy man suggests that properly understanding the past is the special province of a “seer” (Mosiah 8:13-19).

As a result, the Nephites leave no aspect of records preservation to chance. Preserving records is so vital to Nephite identity that the names, positions, and spiritual roles of the successive stewards of the records, as well as the manner in which those records are preserved, constitute an important subtext of the Book of Mormon narrative. This degree of editorial transparency contrasts markedly with that of the Hebrew Bible. Furthermore, the high degree of consistency with which Nephites preserve records throughout their thousand-year history suggests that maintaining the traditions of records preservation is as important to the Nephites as preserving the records themselves.

As Lehi’s successor, Nephi is the first prophet-king of the “people of Nephi” (2 Nephi 5:9). Of all his responsibilities, none receives more attention than keeper of their sacred records. He maintains two sets of records, both of which are commanded of him by God but at different periods. He begins the first shortly after they have obtained the land of promise and the second after Nephi organizes his followers as a separate people a few decades later (1 Nephi 19:1-7; 2 Nephi 5:29-34). In short, the commencement of Nephi’s two records coincides with the initial fulfillment of the two covenants by which God defines his spiritual identity—possessor of a promised land and leader of a chosen people (see 1 Nephi 2:19-24). During his life, Nephi becomes aware that his people will be eventually annihilated as a people (1 Nephi 12:13-23; 2 Nephi 26:10). Thus his record will be the principal enduring memory and tangible evidence of

Jeremiah. Illustration by Joseph Brickey.
their existence. Nephi also learns that the record he and his successors create will be the primary means by which God fulfills his ancient covenant with Abraham in the latter days (1 Nephi 13:13–42). As a result, Nephi invests his best efforts to record “that which is pleasing unto God” and takes great pains to instruct those who will subsequently preserve and eventually translate the records so that they can fulfill this ambitious mission (1 Nephi 6; 2 Nephi 5:32; 25:22–26; 27).

The line of successive stewards becomes an important part of the record itself and, in some cases, its primary entry of a given generation (e.g., Omni 1:1–10). The first set of Nephite records (called the large plates of Nephi) is initially kept by the line of kings and the second (called the small plates of Nephi) by the descendants of Jacob, Nephi’s brother. After nearly five centuries, the small plates are full, and the current steward, Amaleki, entrusts this record to King Benjamin, who is also the steward of the large plates at the time (Omni 1:23–25). At the end of his eventful life, Benjamin transfers both sets of records to his son and successor, Mosiah (Mosiah 1:10–18).

At the dissolution of the kingship and the formation of an institutional church among the Nephites, Mosiah transfers the record-keeping function to Alma the Elder, who has been appointed “chief priest” over the church (Mosiah 28:20). For the next four centuries, both sets of records are kept by a succession of Alma’s righteous descendants until Ammaron identifies a ten-year-old boy who shows promise to be the next Nephite prophet (3 Nephi 5:20; 4 Nephi 1:48–49; Mormon 1:1–5; 8:13). In his turn, Mormon keeps a “full account” of his own period. In addition, he is eventually directed by God to abridge all the previous contributions to the large plates. Having done so, he instructs his son Moroni to complete the Nephite record, abridge the Jaredite record, and “seal up” the collection of plates in view of their “coming forth” in the last days (Mormon 2:18; Words of Mormon 1:1–2).

The Book of Mormon identifies not only those who possess and compile the official Nephite archive from generation to generation but also the manner of its preservation. Instructions that accompany the transfer of records justify their preservation in terms...
of covenant ideology, historical consciousness, the Nephites’ identity as a people, and their hope for salvation.

King Benjamin, for example, prepares his son Mosiah for the archival duty by having him “taught in all the language of his fathers,” as Lehi had previously done for Nephi, in order that he might become a man of “understanding”—that is, familiar with the prophecies that had been received and recorded by “their fathers.” Benjamin teaches his son about the plates of brass and declares that the additional records preserved by their predecessors are “true,” thus enabling the people (1) to know the “mysteries of God” and (2) to “keep the commandments of God.” Because of their care in keeping sacred records, the Nephites are able to maintain their covenant-based distinctiveness from the Lamanites (Mosiah 1:2–7).

Some seventy years later and toward the end of his own life, Alma the Younger charges his son Helaman to keep sacred not only all the received records, including those of the people of Ether, but also the sacred objects associated with the records. These include (1) the stone or interpreters that bring to light “works of darkness” and “wickedness and abominations” of mankind and (2) the Liahona or compass that directs people of faith to understand and follow the will of God. Acknowledging that preserving the records may seem to some a “small and simple” thing, Alma emphasizes that doing so is nevertheless crucial to ensure the righteousness of the people. To this end, he witnesses to his son that the Nephite records “[did enlarge] the memory of this people, yea, and convinced many of the error of their ways, and brought them to a knowledge of their God unto the salvation of their souls” (Alma 37:8). He further declares that these complementary benefits of remembrance, repentance, and knowledge unto salvation will eventually extend to other peoples and to “future generations” (Alma 37:18) as long as the records are properly preserved. Thus Alma enjoins Helaman to continued righteousness so that he can successfully carry out this sacred archival duty and lead the people of God (Alma 37:21–47; 45:2–17).

For most of the history of the Nephites in the promised land, sacred records are kept and preserved by the supreme leaders, whether king, prophet, priest, or general. As the society begins to disintegrate, the preservation of records by leaders, regardless how righteous, becomes more problematic. Near the end, stewards of the records begin hiding and even compiling them in caves or in other secure natural repositories. Hence the hill Shim and hill Ramah play an important role among the Nephites and their counterparts among the Jaredites (Mormon 1:3; 4:23; Ether 9:3; 13:13–14; 15:11). Not being able to secure sacred records in the traditional way is a sign that society has so completely forgotten their covenants that they are “ripe for destruction,” in accordance with the covenants’ curse.

Conclusion

Nephi repeatedly testifies that that he writes nothing on plates except that which is sacred. One thousand years later, Mormon testifies that he intends to model his abridgment on Nephi’s writings (Words of Mormon 1:4–5). By implication, everything about the Book of Mormon—language, contents, literary structures, manner of transmission and preservation, and latter-day mission—is to be considered sacred. The foregoing study has shown how concepts of memory and identity support this perspective. Not only do these concepts pervade the narrative, but they also complement each other in consistent, complex, and profound ways. Both themes derive meaning from and are grounded in divine revelation and sacred covenants, which helps to distinguish the Book of Mormon as a scriptural record.

According to the Book of Mormon, covenants are established by God with his children through revelation to a prophet. They serve as the basis of a unified community of committed believers and of an enduring relationship with God as well as a primary mechanism for realizing the blessings of salvation, partially in mortality and fully in eternity. Thus the Book of Mormon portrays history as the record of covenants that distinguish a chosen people and give eternal meaning to their lives, including their eventual destruction. While Mormon and Moroni include only a small portion of the available material in the final Nephite record, the narrative illustrates the extent to which an impressive array of information—military, domestic, spiritual, ecclesiastical, political, economic, social, and so on—can be accounted for within a covenant framework. Keeping such a record is crucial to Nephite identity, and thus this function is entrusted to supreme spiritual leaders. In addition to being a key to understanding the people of Nephi, this covenant pattern is shown in the Book.
of Mormon to be equally relevant to other peoples of the past and future. The Book of Mormon presents itself as both a record of God’s covenants among an ancient people and the agent of covenant renewal in the latter days. Thus the Book of Mormon defines a comprehensive covenant-based worldview whose principal purpose is the salvation of mankind in the kingdom of God.

3. The literary similarities between the past and future. The Book of Mormon presents itself as both a record of God’s covenants among an ancient people and the agent of covenant renewal in the latter days. Thus the Book of Mormon defines a comprehensive covenant-based worldview whose principal purpose is the salvation of mankind in the kingdom of God.

NOTES

1. Yosef Yerushalmi, Zakhor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982). The scholarly literature on memory is extensive, ranging from the cognitive and social sciences to the humanities and philosophy. One of the more valuable and broad-ranging examinations of the subject from a philosophical perspective is Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

2. R. Gary Shapiro, comp., An Exhaustive Concordance of the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price (Salt Lake City: Hawkes, 1977), s.vv. “memory,” “remember,” “remembered,” “rememberest,” “remembereth,” “remembering,” “remembrance.” Of the several hundred different verbs in the Book of Mormon, only about three dozen appear more frequently than remember, and many of these are basic verbs (e.g., to be, to have, to go).

3. The literary similarities between the sacrament prayers (Moroni 4:3; 5:2) and Moroni’s promise (Moroni 10:3–5) imply a degree of conscious intentionality on Moroni’s part and, hence, a strong relationship of meaning among covenant renewal, historical consciousness, social identity, and spiritual witness.

4. The following usage strengthens the association of remember with righteous action. In his final blessing to his posterity, Lehi urges his children, “Wherefore, my sons, I would that ye would remember; yea, I would that ye would hearken unto my words” (2 Nephi 1:12). In the Book of Mormon, the second clause in such a construction reinforces and amplifies the meaning of the first. Hence, remember in the first clause is defined and its importance is amplified by hearken in the second. Thus hearken connotes more than “listen” or “pay attention”; rather, it implies “mind,” “give heed to,” or “live according to” the counsel.

5. Shapiro, Exhaustive Concordance, s.vv. “recall,” “recollection,” “reminiscence,” “reminiscing.”


8. Shapiro, Exhaustive Concordance, s.vv. “cut,” “cutteth,” “cutting.”

9. Shapiro, Exhaustive Concordance, s.vv. “destroy,” “destroyed,” “destroyeth,” “destroyers,” “destroying,” “destruction(s).”


14. Shapiro, Exhaustive Concordance, s.v. “people.”

15. These stereotypical distinctions between Nephites and Lamanites are made explicit in 2 Nephi 5 and are developed throughout the rest of the Book of Mormon; see, for example, Enos 1:20–21; Jarom 1:5–11.

16. Shapiro, Exhaustive Concordance, s.vv. “Gentile(s),” “people.”

17. See also Shapiro, Exhaustive Concordance, s.vv. “band,” “Gadianton,” “robbers,” “society.”


JACOB’S TEXTUAL LEGACY

JOHN HILTON III

FROM THE EDITOR:
The Church today has a clear mechanism for determining what is accepted by the members as scripture. The Book of Mormon, however, never defines how earlier Nephite written records became normative for later generations. John Hilton, through careful analysis, has been able to trace the influence of an early Nephite writer, Jacob (Nephi’s brother), through a succession of later prophets and thus document the authoritative character of Jacob’s writings.

Today, members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints know what texts are considered authoritative—namely, the standard works. As members, we recognize a formal process for canonization; for example, at the Saturday afternoon session of general conference in April 1976, President N. Eldon Tanner announced that the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve had approved two revelations for inclusion in the Pearl of Great Price and called for a sustaining vote.1 This concept of canonization in the restored church has echoes from earlier Christian practices and councils.2

But what of earlier times? How did people in Old Testament and Book of Mormon times know which texts were authoritative? We may not know how they decided what was normative and what was not, but we can perhaps determine if a text was treated as authoritative. This paper will explore the likelihood that Jacob’s words, both in 2 Nephi 9 as well as in the book that bears his name, were employed by other prophets as an authoritative source. Specifically, I will identify phrases that are unique to Jacob (or nearly so)3 and discuss how Nephi, King Benjamin, and Moroni utilized these words in their own unique ways. The consistent use of Jacob’s teachings in the Book of Mormon demonstrates that he was a powerful literary figure. His words influenced not only future generations of modern readers, but also prophets4 and others5 of his own time.

Three Cases of Textual Echoes from Jacob

Jacob and Nephi

While we will see that prophets who lived centuries after Jacob often drew on his words, it appears that he also influenced Nephi’s teachings. It may seem strange to think of Nephi’s public sermons as having been influenced by his younger brother, yet the tight relationships between 2 Nephi 9 (Jacob’s sermon)6 and 2 Nephi 28 (part of a later sermon given by Nephi) lead one to believe that this is in fact the case (see table 1).

Jacob said, “Because they are rich they despise the poor, and they persecute the meek, and their hearts are upon their treasures.” In 2 Nephi 28:13, Nephi states that the proud “rob the poor because of their fine sanctuaries” and “fine clothing” and that “they persecute the meek” because of their pride. In this instance, we find both conceptual and textual echoes from Jacob’s earlier words. In both instances, the proud (wealthy) rob (or despise) the poor and persecute the meek because of their pride (wealth). Nephi further states that “the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up in the pride of their hearts, and all those who preach false doctrines, and all those who commit whoredoms, and pervert the right way of the Lord, wo, wo, wo be unto them, saith the Lord God Almighty, for they shall be thrust down to hell!” (2 Nephi 28:15).7 Each italicized

The prophet Jacob at the top is quoted in succession (counterclockwise) by Nephi, King Benjamin, and Moroni. “That They May Learn” (Jacob 4:3). © Annie Henrie 2013. Used by permission.
phrase or word in the preceding verse repeats Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9:36 or 42. Jacob taught, “Wo unto them who commit whoredoms, for they shall be thrust down to hell” (v. 36), and Nephi expands this fate to “the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up” (2 Nephi 28:15; compare 9:42). These words that appear first in Jacob’s sermon and later in Nephi’s occur nowhere else in scripture, even though the concept they describe is fairly universal.

Jacob stated that “the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them, that they are delivered from that awful monster, death and hell, and the devil, and the lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment” (2 Nephi 9:26; compare 9:19). In 2 Nephi 28:23, Nephi again utilizes this phraseology seemingly borrowed from Jacob to warn both those who are pacified and those who are angry with the truth that “they are grasped with . . . death, and hell; and the devil,” and all that have been seized therewith must stand before the throne of God, and be judged according to their works, from whence they must go into the place prepared for them, even a lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment.” While Jacob employs these phrases to illustrate the majesty of the Savior’s atonement, Nephi applies them differently—to warn those who are pacified and are “at ease in Zion . . . and are angry because of the truth of God” (vv. 24, 28).

In 2 Nephi 9:27–38, Jacob pronounces ten woes, or warnings, on the rich. John W. Welch sees this as significant, observing that Jacob’s “‘ten woes’ function as the equivalent of a contemporaneous Nephite set of ten commandments.” There are

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allusion</th>
<th>Jacob’s Words</th>
<th>Nephi’s Words</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Times Exact Phrase Is Used Elsewhere in Scripture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:30</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:13</td>
<td>they persecute the meek</td>
<td>0 (but JST Luke 16:21 is similar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:42</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:15</td>
<td>the wise, and the learned, and the rich, that are puffed up</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:36</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:15</td>
<td>who commit whoredoms</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:19, 26</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:23</td>
<td>death, and hell; and the devil</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:19, 26</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:23</td>
<td>lake of fire and brimstone, which is endless torment</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:38</td>
<td>2 Nephi 28:28</td>
<td>and in fine, wo unto all those who . . .</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Nephi’s allusions in 2 Nephi 28 to Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9

Nephi, in 2 Nephi 28, was apparently alluding to his brother Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9. © Annie Henrie 2013. Used by permission.
several similarities between Jacob’s woes and a series put forth by Nephi in 2 Nephi 28, including specific statements about “the rich” and those “who commit whoredoms” (compare 28:15; 9:30, 36).

Jacob capped his list of woes by stating, “And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in their sins” (2 Nephi 9:38). Nephi’s final allusion to Jacob in 2 Nephi 28 may refer back to this tenth wo. Nephi states, “And in fine, wo unto all those who tremble, and are angry because of the truth of God!” (2 Nephi 28:28). While the phrase in fine appears throughout the Book of Mormon, it is only combined with the word wo in 2 Nephi 9 and 28. Given the textual and conceptual similarities between Nephi’s woes and Jacob’s, it is possible that Nephi utilized the phrase and in fine, wo unto all those as a merism in order to more comprehensively refer back to the woes stated previously by Jacob.10

Jacob’s sermon in 2 Nephi 9 is a stern one; it contains more references to hell than any other chapter in all of scripture.11 Thus it seems natural that when Nephi needed to sternly rebuke prideful people he would turn to this text. Rebuking others is never easy; perhaps by utilizing words similar to those of Jacob, Nephi was in a sense communicating to the people that his message was not his alone, but that of other prophets.

A key reason people quote from others is to bolster their authority for a particular position. But why would Nephi, the senior leader of the Nephites, quote from his younger brother? Nephi is already in a strong position and does not need Jacob to reinforce his words. In this instance, I believe Nephi used Jacob’s words in order to prepare the people for the eventual transfer of ecclesiastical authority to Jacob. Just as an outgoing leader might quote from or praise an incoming leader in order to transfer some of that leader’s power to the new leader, so too could Nephi have quoted from Jacob. By referring to Jacob’s words, Nephi demonstrates the high regard he has for Jacob’s teachings.

**Jacob’s Words and King Benjamin’s Address**

The likelihood that King Benjamin would have been interested in Jacob’s words is easy to establish.12 Amaleki, the last writer on the small plates (which contained Jacob’s words) delivered the small plates to King Benjamin (see Omni 1:25). To receive new records is certainly not a regular occurrence, and it seems probable that King Benjamin would have carefully studied them. But even if King Benjamin did not peruse the small plates, Jacob’s words could have been recorded on the large plates. Textual evidence suggests that King Benjamin’s people could have been familiar with Jacob’s words. King Benjamin tells his people, “ye . . . have been taught concerning the records which contain the prophecies which have been spoken by the holy prophets, even down to the time our father, Lehi, left Jerusalem; And also, all that has been spoken by our fathers until now” (Mosiah 2:34–35). But whether King Benjamin’s people were familiar with Jacob or not, King Benjamin demonstrated that he was conversant with these words—at least ten times he echoes Jacob’s words from 2 Nephi 9. These allusions are outlined in table 2; it is significant to note that none of the phrases are biblical, and all of the additional references within the Book of Mormon are post-Jacob and also could be references to Jacob’s (or King Benjamin’s) words.13

Jacob had described a time when “this flesh must have laid down to rot and to crumble to its mother earth” (2 Nephi 9:7). While Jacob speaks of
mortality generally, King Benjamin uses Jacob’s language to describe his own particular impending death. He states, “I am also of the dust. And ye behold that I am old, and am about to yield up this mortal frame to its mother earth” (Mosiah 2:26). The phrase mother earth\textsuperscript{14} appears only three times in all of scripture (see also Mormon 6:15). But King Benjamin does not simply lift the idea of a universal death with Jacob’s unique phrase. Rather, he employs Jacob’s phrase to emphasize that he, although a king, faces the same issues of mortality as everyone else.

During Jacob’s important discourse on pride, he told them he had come to teach them “that I might rid my garments of your sins” (Jacob 2:2). This is not a biblical phrase, but appears for the first time in Jacob’s speech. King Benjamin employs Jacob’s words to explain that he has discharged his responsibility to teach his people and therefore cannot be held accountable for their sins. King Benjamin states, “I have caused that ye should assemble yourselves together that I might rid my garments of your blood” (Mosiah 2:28). While Jacob uses the word sins in Jacob 2:2, on another occasion he spoke of becoming rid of the blood of the people.\textsuperscript{15} It may be that Nephites saw blood and sin as related ideas; clearly these two words are connected in an Old Testament context (see, for example, Exodus 30:10 and Leviticus 4:25, 34). In any event, it is clear that both King Benjamin and Jacob wished to ensure they had clearly taught their people so they would not be held responsible for the people’s sins.

In his tenth wo, Jacob declared, “And, in fine, wo unto all those who die in their sins; for they shall return to God, and behold his face, and remain in

### Table 2. King Benjamin’s allusions to Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allusion</th>
<th>Jacob’s Words</th>
<th>King Benjamin’s Words</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Times Exact Phrase Is Used Elsewhere in Scripture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:7</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:26</td>
<td>its mother earth</td>
<td>0 (but Mormon 6:15 is very close)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jacob 2:2; cf. 2 Nephi 9:44</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:28</td>
<td>rid . . . garments</td>
<td>2 (Mormon 9:35; D&amp;C 61:34)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:38</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:33</td>
<td>wo . . . remaineth and dieth in . . . sins</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:16</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:38</td>
<td>whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever</td>
<td>1 (Alma 12:17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:16</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:27</td>
<td>and their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone</td>
<td>0 (but Almas 12:17 is very similar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:24</td>
<td>Mosiah 2:41</td>
<td>to the end . . . the Lord God hath spoken it</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:39</td>
<td>Mosiah 3:19</td>
<td>yeilds to theenticings</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:40</td>
<td>Mosiah 4:11</td>
<td>remember . . . the greatness of God</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:42</td>
<td>Mosiah 4:11</td>
<td>in the depths of humility</td>
<td>2 (Mosiah 21:14; Alma 62:41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:30</td>
<td>Mosiah 4:23</td>
<td>who are rich as . . . to the things of this world.</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
their sins” (2 Nephi 9:38). No other scriptural passages repeat these phrases exactly this way. But King Benjamin appears to refer to this wo, saying, “There is a wo pronounced upon him who listeth to obey that spirit; for if he listeth to obey him, and remaineth and dieth in his sins the same drinketh damnation to his own soul” (Mosiah 2:33). Note that King Benjamin refers to a wo that had been previously issued. Jacob speaks about people remaining and dying in their sins, while King Benjamin reverses the order of these two words. Why would King Benjamin reverse the order? One possibility is that it is a manifestation of Seidel’s law, in which later authors, when quoting from previous ones, reverse the order of some or all of the previous material to indicate their dependence on the previous author.16

Jacob taught, speaking of the wicked, that “their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever and has no end” (2 Nephi 9:16). He also wrote regarding unrepentant sinners, “according to the power of justice, for justice cannot be denied, ye must go away into that lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever, which lake of fire and brimstone is endless torment” (Jacob 6:10). King Benjamin likewise speaks of specific consequences for those who die in their sins. He states that they will receive pain “like an unquenchable fire, whose flame ascendeth up forever and ever” (Mosiah 2:38). In speaking of the wicked, King Benjamin, quoting the Lord, also says that they will have a state of “endless torment,” and that “their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone, whose flames are unquenchable, and whose smoke ascendeth up forever and ever” (Mosiah 3:25, 27). Jacob uses the concept of God’s justice to explain why the wicked will receive endless torment.18 Unlike other instances in which King Benjamin uses Jacob’s phrases in differing contexts, in this case he employs them exactly as Jacob does (see Mosiah 3:26). This demonstrates that King Benjamin was not simply trying to be creative in his use of Jacob’s material. Rather, he was willing to accept the content, wording, and intent of Jacob’s words. We, as readers, are thereby treated to an interesting textual and doctrinal cohesion, even though these discourses are separated by centuries.

In two instances King Benjamin utilizes Jacob’s own words to contrast points Jacob had made. Jacob said, “If they will not repent and . . . endure to the end, they must be damned; for the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, has spoken it” (2 Nephi 9:24). King Benjamin used similar words, although he represents the opposite end of the spectrum, saying, “Consider on the blessed and happy state of those that keep the commandments of God. . . . If they hold out faithful to the end they are received into heaven, that thereby they may dwell with God in a state of never-ending happiness. O remember, remember that these things are true; for the Lord God hath spoken it” (Mosiah 2:41). By using antonyms, King Benjamin may have been juxtaposing the happiness that awaits the righteous with the damnation Jacob spoke of that awaits those who do not repent. Where King Benjamin speaks of the righteous, Jacob speaks of those who will “not repent.” King Benjamin refers to those who “hold out faithful to the end,” while Jacob talks about those who will “not . . . endure to the end.” King Benjamin speaks of “a state of never-ending happiness” in contrast to Jacob’s reference to the “damned.”

A second example of what appears to be textual contrasting involves two key words: yield and entice. While yield and its variants occur ninety-nine times in the scriptures and entice twenty-three times, these two words only appear together in 2 Nephi 9:39 and Mosiah 3:19. Jacob teaches, “Remember . . . the awfulness of yielding to the enticings of that cunning one” (2 Nephi 9:39). In contrast, King Benjamin19 explains, “For the natural man is an enemy to God, and has been from the fall of Adam, and will be, forever and ever, unless he yields to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, and putteth off the natural man and becometh a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord” (Mosiah 3:19). By yielding to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, one can overcome the natural man.

Jacob taught that yielding to the devil’s enticings leads to death. Both Jacob and Benjamin speak of yielding to enticings. . . . Thus everyone is enticed; yielding to the enticings of the Spirit leads to becoming a saint.

Yielding to the devil’s enticings leads to death. Both Jacob and Benjamin speak of yielding to enticings. . . . Thus everyone is enticed; yielding to the enticings of the Spirit leads to becoming a saint.
Thus everyone is enticed; yielding to the enticings of the Spirit leads to becoming a saint. Yielding to the enticings of Satan leads to death. Jacob refers to the “awfulness” of yielding to the devil, while Benjamin employs words and phrases such as *patient* and *full of love* in connection with yielding to the Spirit.

Benjamin extends Jacob’s statement in one important sense. Jacob says that we receive death if we yield to the devil. Benjamin teaches that we will forever be enemies to God unless we yield to the enticings of the Spirit. So it is not enough to avoid the enticings of the devil; we must proactively yield to the enticings of the Spirit. Thus Benjamin turns Jacob’s statement about the awful consequences of yielding to the enticings of the devil into a positive statement about yielding to the enticings of the Spirit. The differences in audience may drive the different ways in which Jacob and King Benjamin teach these concepts. Jacob speaks to a people who appear to be seriously struggling with sin (see 2 Nephi 9:46–48). He is warning a group of people who are making bad choices. In contrast, King Benjamin is addressing individuals prepared to take upon them the name of Christ (see Mosiah 5:7). Thus King Benjamin focuses on being preventive, affirming that if his people continue to yield to the enticings of the Holy Spirit, they will become like Christ.

Benjamin echoes not only the sterner portions of Jacob’s message but also those pertaining to the atonement’s reach to those who know not the law.

Jacob told his people to “remember the greatness of the Holy One of Israel” and states that those who “come down in the depths of humility” will receive answers to their prayers (2 Nephi 9:40, 42). As King Benjamin explains to his people how they can avoid the lake of fire and retain a remission of their sins, he exhorts them to “remember, and always retain in remembrance, the greatness of God, and ... humble yourselves even in the depths of humility, calling on the name of the Lord daily” (Mosiah 4:11). In these cases, echoing Jacob could provide a familiar feel to the words King Benjamin is speaking.

King Benjamin later refers to another of Jacob’s woes. Jacob had stated, “Wo unto the rich, who are rich as to the things of the world” (2 Nephi 9:30). Many prophets have had to struggle against the effects of wealth among the people. Yet King Benjamin not only describes the same problem, but he also uses words that tightly link to Jacob’s: “Wo be unto that man, for his substance shall perish with him; and now, I say these things unto those who are rich as pertaining to the things of this world” (Mosiah 4:23). King Benjamin follows Jacob’s clarification about riches in terms of worldly as opposed to heavenly riches.

In addition to the textual allusions noted above, additional echoes, while lacking specific textual similarities, demonstrate important doctrinal parallels between 2 Nephi 9 and Mosiah 2–5. Jacob was the first Book of Mormon prophet to explicitly teach that “the atonement satisfieth the demands of his justice upon all those who have not the law given to them” (2 Nephi 9:26). This doctrine is not stated before or after in the Book of Mormon until King Benjamin states that Christ’s “blood atoneth for the sins of those . . . who have died not knowing the will of God concerning them” (Mosiah 3:11). Thus Benjamin echoes not only the sterner portions of Jacob’s message but also those pertaining to the atonement’s reach to those who know not the law.

The correlation between the discourses of Jacob and King Benjamin on this theologically important point—redemption for those who had not received the law—is strengthened when we see that in these two cases, after teaching this principle, both Jacob and Benjamin provide a warning for those who know better. Jacob asserts, “Wo unto him that has the law given, yea, that has all the commandments of God, like unto us, and that transgresseth them, and that wasteth the days of his probation, for awful is his state!” (2 Nephi 9:27). Similarly, King Benjamin says, “But wo, wo unto him who knoweth that he rebelleth against God! For salvation cometh to none such except it be through repentance and faith on the Lord Jesus Christ” (Mosiah 3:12).

From the foregoing, it is evident that King Benjamin employed Jacob’s teachings in crafting his speech. In a modern setting regarding academic studies, Nigel Gilbert argued that researchers utilize the words and findings of others in order to “persuade readers of the validity and significance of [their] arguments.” It seems probable that a similar function is at work with King Benjamin. The multiple similarities between King Benjamin’s words and Jacob’s
indicate that Jacob was viewed by King Benjamin and his people as an authoritative source.\textsuperscript{23}

Jacob and Moroni\textsuperscript{2}

Moroni, the final author of the Book of Mormon, frequently employs phrases similar, and in some cases identical, to ones stated by Jacob; at least nine phrases are exclusively used (or nearly so) by Jacob and Moroni. These allusions are summarized in table 3.

Jacob taught, “Ye will seek [riches] for the intent to do good—to clothe the naked, and to feed the hungry, and to liberate the captive, and administer relief to the sick and the afflicted” (Jacob 2:19). Moroni uses Jacob’s words to chastise future readers, asking, “Why do ye adorn yourselves with that which hath no life, and yet suffer the hungry, and the needy, and the naked, and the sick and the afflicted to pass by you, and notice them not?” (Mormon 8:39). Perhaps Moroni intentionally provides modern-day readers with an allusion to Jacob’s words to illustrate that latter-day readers are similar to former-day Nephites. Perhaps Moroni wanted us to see that Jacob’s counsel regarding riches still applies.

Jacob also discussed the dread that would come to those who had to stand before God in their sins. He said, “O my brethren, I fear that unless ye shall repent of your sins that their skins will be whiter than yours, when ye shall be brought with them before the throne of God” (Jacob 3:8).\textsuperscript{24} Moroni similarly stated, “When ye shall be brought to see your nakedness before God . . . it will kindle a flame of unquenchable fire upon you. O then . . . cry mightily unto the Father in the name of Jesus, that perhaps ye may be found spotless, pure, fair, and white” (Mormon 9:5–6). Moroni’s reversal of being brought and whiteness may be a manifestation of Seidel’s law, which, as described earlier, can signal a quotation. Moroni also expands on Jacob’s words to make clear that the issue is not skin color, but purity.

Moroni follows Jacob in outlining a series of events—death, resurrection, and final judgment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allusion</th>
<th>Jacob’s Words</th>
<th>Moroni’s Words</th>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Times Exact Phrase Is Used Elsewhere in Scripture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Jacob 2:19</td>
<td>Mormon 8:39; cf. 37</td>
<td>the naked, and the sick and the afflicted</td>
<td>0 (but Alma 34:28 is nearly identical)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jacob 3:8</td>
<td>Mormon 9:2, 5</td>
<td>when ye shall be brought . . . before . . . God</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:15</td>
<td>Mormon 9:14</td>
<td>and then cometh the judgment</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:16</td>
<td>Mormon 9:14</td>
<td>filthy shall be filthy still . . . righteous shall be righteous still</td>
<td>0 (but Revelation 22:11 is very similar)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Jacob 4:9</td>
<td>Mormon 9:17</td>
<td>by the power of his word man</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:9</td>
<td>Ether 8:25</td>
<td>who beguiled our first parents</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:38</td>
<td>Moroni 10:26</td>
<td>wo . . . die in their sins</td>
<td>1 (Mosiah 2:33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>2 Nephi 9:13</td>
<td>Moroni 10:34</td>
<td>the paradise of God . . . spirit . . . body</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Jacob 6:13</td>
<td>Moroni 10:34</td>
<td>meet you before the pleasing bar</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4 demonstrates how multiple relationships (both conceptual and textual) within two verses appear between Moroni’s words and Jacob’s.

Both prophets testify that because of Christ all men will be resurrected and “then cometh the judgment.” Just prior to this passage, Jacob says, “we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness” (2 Nephi 9:14). Similarly, Moroni states that we “shall be brought to see [our] nakedness before God” (Mormon 9:5). Both Jacob and Moroni teach that the judgment will be a restoration of what we already are.25 By employing Jacob’s vivid phraseology, Moroni adds a second witness to his own and shifts Jacob’s testimony forward in time, reiterating its relevance to modern readers. Jacob spoke to a hardened people; it may be that Moroni saw in his latter-day readers those who similarly struggled and thus employed Jacob’s words in reaching out to them.

As Moroni turns his attention toward the miraculous power of God, he again alludes to Jacob’s teachings. Moroni uses Jacob’s teachings and the power of God to illustrate that miracles can continue in the present time. Table 5 illustrates several connections between Moroni’s words and Jacob’s.

Table 5. Relationships between Jacob 4:9 and Mormon 9:17

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jacob 4:9</th>
<th>Mormon 9:17</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>For behold, by the power of his word man came upon the face of the earth, which earth was created by the power of his word. Wherefore, if God being able to speak and the world was, and to speak and man was created, O then, why not able to command the earth, or the workmanship of his hands upon the face of it, according to his will and pleasure?</td>
<td>Who shall say that it was not a miracle that by his word the heaven and the earth should be; and by the power of his word man was created of the dust of the earth; and by the power of his word have miracles been wrought?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In all of scripture, only Moroni and Jacob used the phrase the pleasing bar of God. © Annie Henrie 2013. Used by permission.
has argued that this phrase should be emended to read the *pleading bar*, while John S. Welch rejects this claim. However, for my present purposes, it perhaps matters less whether it is a *pleasing or pleading* bar of God; the point is that in either case Moroni and Jacob both use a phrase that appears nowhere else in scripture. In this case, Moroni does not change Jacob’s context—this is a situation in which two righteous men speak of judgment and how they will meet us at that day.

Note that Moroni echoes Jacob twice in his final words. As I have stated thus far, Moroni may be establishing the authority of Jacob’s words and commending them to future readers. In addition, I believe that Moroni felt a special relationship with Jacob. Just as Jacob seemed to stand in the shadow of his priesthood leader and older brother Nephi, perhaps Moroni felt inadequate compared to Mormon and looked to Jacob for guidance on how to play the role of the junior author. Moreover, Moroni likely identified with Jacob’s words in Jacob 7:26—“We being a lonesome and a solemn people, wanderers, cast out from Jerusalem, born in tribulation, in a wilderness, and hated of our brethren”—in ways that Jacob might not have fully foreseen.

Grant Hardy, who has noted Moroni’s propensity to quote from previous prophets (not just Jacob), makes an argument regarding Moroni’s reasons for alluding to other prophets that could be applied specifically to his echoes of Jacob. Hardy declares, “By employing the words of others, Moroni shifts the notion of authorship and makes himself the self-effacing inheritor, or spokesman, for an entire literary tradition. He is able to appeal to the authority of past prophets and record keepers (while at the same time reinforcing the respect due them).”

It would seem, then, that by frequently quoting from Jacob, Moroni more fully moves Jacob’s words into the consciousness of modern readers. Jacob originally spoke to the Nephites, and it isn’t clear that his words were specifically intended for the present day. But by using phrases such as *the naked and . . . the sick and the afflicted, the righteous shall be righteous still . . . [and the] filthy shall be filthy still*, Moroni applies images from the sermons in Jacob 2 and 2 Nephi 9 directly to latter-day readers. It may be that these consistent echoes are Moroni’s way of urging his readers to go back to the beginning and read Jacob’s words more carefully. Thus Moroni utilizes them not only to establish his authority but to demonstrate the authoritative nature of Jacob’s words to modern-day readers.

**Conclusion**

Throughout this article I have demonstrated multiple textual similarities between Jacob’s words and those of other Nephite prophets. These layers of intertextuality may add insight into the transmission and translation processes. Royal Skousen has argued that the “consistency of phraseology in the original text” provides “substantial evidence within the text itself for tight control over specific words, phrases, and sentences of English.” Precise textual matches between Jacob and Nephi, King Benjamin, and Moroni may indicate intentionality in the specific English words used in the translation of the Book of Mormon.

Moreover these textual connections establish Jacob as a key figure in the Book of Mormon and illustrate that his words had a lasting impact—not only in their original form, but also in how later Book of Mormon prophets echoed his words. Jacob’s stern address in 2 Nephi 9, including phrases such as *their torment is as a lake of fire and brimstone*, is later alluded to by Nephi, King Benjamin, and Alma. His ten woes, also appearing in that same chapter, are echoed by Nephi, King Benjamin, and Moroni, suggesting that they had become a well-known feature of Nephite theological discourse.

Jacob’s words are not simply used as filler. Those who echo his words appear to do so for their own purposes. Nephi used Jacob’s words to underscore the serious consequences of sin. He may also have emphasized Jacob’s words to pave the way for Jacob’s succession as the spiritual leader of his people and to provide a second witness for his teachings. King Benjamin appears to have employed Jacob’s words to provide both doctrinal and structural underpinnings for his address. It may be that he saw similarities between the needs of his audience and those originally addressed by Jacob. Moroni frequently quotes from Jacob, perhaps out of feelings of a shared but not identical circumstance, and also with a desire to shift Jacob’s words forward in time, urging us to carefully return to Jacob’s words.

In this article I have focused on Jacob’s textual legacy in terms of how Nephi, King Benjamin, and Moroni relied on his words, but they are not the only ones who employed Jacob’s phrases. Taken
together, these multiple allusions to Jacob suggest that his words were well-known and used among the Nephites for centuries after his death, likely demonstrating that he was viewed as an authoritative source. This study underscores the fact that, while often standing in Nephi’s shadow, Jacob was a powerful literary figure in his own right. His words influenced not only future generations of modern readers, but also the prophets and people of his own dispensation.

NOTES

1. See Robert L. Millet, “The Vision of the Redemption of the Dead (D&C 138),” in Sperry Symposium Classics: The Doctrine and Covenants, ed. Craig K. Manscill (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 314–31. Millet also points out that while these revelations were initially added to the Pearl of Great Price, they were, in 1979, moved to the Doctrine and Covenants.


3. Determining whether a phrase is uniquely Jacobean is not necessarily an easy task. Biblical scholars have put forth various ideas about how to tell whether any two texts are connected. In his classic work, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul, Richard B. Hays provides seven criteria that can be used to distinguish between real and illusory allusions: “(1) Availability. Was the proposed source of the echo available to the author and/or original readers? (2) Volume. The volume of an echo is determined primarily by the degree of explicit repetition of words or syntactical patterns. . . . (3) Recurrence. How often does [the author] elsewhere cite or allude to the same scriptural passage? (4) Thematic Coherence. How well does the alleged echo fit into the line of argument that [the author] is developing? (5) Historical Plausibility. Could [the author] have intended the alleged meaning? (6) History of Interpretation. Have other readers, both critical and pre-critical, heard the same echoes? (7) Satisfaction. With or without clear confirmation from the other criteria listed here, does the proposed reading make sense?” Hays, Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 29–31.

4. For additional information on Jacob’s literary legacy, see John S. Tanner, “Jacob and His Descendants as Authors,” in Rediscovering the Book of Mormon, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1991), 59; and John A. Tvedtnes, “The Influence of Lehi’s Admonitions on the Teachings of His Son Jacob,” Journal of Book of Mormon Studies 3/2 (1994): 35. The present article deals with allusions made by Nephi, King Benjamin, and Moroni. These are not the only prophets who share a connection with Jacob. For example, Joseph M. Spencer points out connections between Jacob and Abinadi, stating, “Abinadi is Jacob’s unquestionable doctrinal heir.” Spencer, An Other Testament: On Typology (Salem, OR: Salt Press, 2012), 134. Samuel the Lamanite and Amulek both draw on Jacob (and others) in their speeches, a topic I will explore on another occasion.

5. In making this assertion, I assume that the passages in the Book of Mormon can correctly be attributed to the person recorded as having given them. Admittedly, it is possible such passages were originally said by somebody else. For example, S. Kent Brown asserts that Jacob and Nephi used Lehi’s words in their teachings. Brown, “Lehi’s

John Hilton III is an assistant professor of ancient scripture at Brigham Young University. He has a master’s degree from Harvard and a PhD from BYU, both in education. He has written several nonfiction books, including The Little Book of Book of Mormon Evidences. Besides being with his family, his favorite hobbies are reading, writing, and learning Chinese.

17. While the words fire and brimstone occur in various pericopes, the connections between Jacob and King Benjamin are much stronger than those between King Benjamin and (for example) the book of Revelation. Note that both Jacob and King Benjamin speak of flame (smoke) ascending up forever and ever, a textual phrase not found in the Bible.

18. The phrase endless torment occurs seven times in the Book of Mormon and once in the Doctrine and Covenants. Jacob is the first to utilize this phrase; perhaps when the Lord says “it is written endless torment” (D&C 19:6), he refers to Jacob!

19. At this point in the text, King Benjamin may be quoting the angel who spoke to him.

20. The phrase retain in remembrance in this verse may be an allusion to Jacob 1:11.

21. Abinadi (who likely spoke before King Benjamin chronologically) also alludes to this principle in Mosiah 15:24–25.


23. King Benjamin alludes several times to Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9. Aside from utilizing Jacob as an authoritative source, why might Jacob’s words in 2 Nephi 9 be of particular interest to King Benjamin? Welch has written that “the key function achieved by Benjamin’s speech was to bring the entire population—both Nephites and Mulekites—under a single covenant of loyalty to God and to Mosiah, the new king.”

John W. Welch, “Benjamin, the Man: His Place in Nephite History,” in King Benjamin’s Speech: “That Ye May Learn Wisdom,” ed. John W. Welch and Stephen D. Ricks (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1998), 48–49. King Benjamin faced the difficult task of unifying two groups of people—the Nephites and Mulekites. It may be that he felt Jacob’s speech set a precedent for unifying disparate groups of people. While the exact circumstances of Jacob’s address in 2 Nephi 6–10 are unknown, Brant Gardner speculates that Jacob was teaching a combined group of people, some of whom were Nephites, others who were indigenous people with whom the Nephites had come in contact. See Gardner, Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon, vol. 2 (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007).

Gardner believes that the way Jacob structured his speech can be seen to include indigenous peoples as part of the Nephite covenant people. While this theory is speculative, if it were in fact the case, it would add relevance to King Benjamin’s finding meaning in Jacob’s word. It could be that King Benjamin saw himself faced with the task of devising a speech intended to unify two distinct groups and thus turned to Jacob, who had done the same thing.

24. In addition to this citation, Moroni’s words in Mormon 9:4–6 may also be related to 2 Nephi 9:14–16.

25. Alma also makes this point in Alma 41 (perhaps alluding in part to Jacob).

26. Moroni may also be referring to the words of other prophets, as mentioned in Acts 13:40–41.

27. The phrase father of all lies appears in 2 Nephi 2:18 and Moses 4:4. The statement father of lies is used only by Jacob, in 2 Nephi 9:9.


31. While the words torment, fire, and brimstone appear together in the book of Revelation 14:10, 20:10, their use by Nephi, King Benjamin, and Alma3 are more closely related to Jacob than to Revelation.
PRESERVING THE JOSEPH SMITH PAPYRI FRAGMENTS
What Can We Learn from the Paper on Which the Papyri Were Mounted?
FROM THE EDITOR:

It appears that some of the papyri that came into the possession of Joseph Smith and that are associated, in debatable degrees, with the Book of Abraham were cut and pasted onto repurposed nineteenth-century paper. Though not their main concern, Kerry Muhlestein, an Egyptologist, and Alex Baugh, an LDS historian, have used the nineteenth-century paper backing of the papyri to reconstruct the original relationship of the papyrus pieces, thus confirming previous suggestions.

KERRY M. MUHLESTEIN AND ALEXANDER L. BAUGH

Much research has been conducted regarding the papyri once owned by Joseph Smith, especially the fragments that still exist today. One aspect of this research that has not received very much attention is the paper on which the extant papyri were glued or mounted. Those papers are interesting in and of themselves since these materials also cast light on the attempt made by Joseph Smith and his associates to preserve the papyrus fragments. In this article we will examine the backing material of the papyrus fragments and discuss some historical connections that stem from analyzing the backing as well as when and why it was used.

In 1967, the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art transferred eleven papyrus fragments once owned by Joseph Smith to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. These fragments had originally been glued to paper, and some were framed under glass. The backing paper used for each of the papyrus fragments is thicker than normal writing paper and served as good mounting material. In 1856, Abel Combs purchased the Egyptian antiquities, including the framed fragments, from Emma Smith and her second husband, Lewis Bidamon. Sometime later, Combs gave the papyrus fragments to his housekeeper, Charlotte Weaver, whose descendants sold them to the Metropolitan Museum in 1947. About twenty years after the museum acquired the papyri, arrangements were made to transfer ownership to the LDS Church. The collection was named the Joseph Smith Papyri, and each fragment was numbered with Roman numerals. The abbreviations for these fragments are JSP I, JSP II, . . . JSP XI. While we will use this established numbering system to designate which papyrus fragment we are analyzing, for the purposes of this article we will discuss them in the order of how they seem to have been grouped together on the backing papers.

JSP I

The backing paper used on JSP I is largely blank. The edges were cut quite cleanly, although one side wanders a little and the others have straight portions interrupted only by an occasional small snag. These snags suggest that after the papyrus was mounted, the papyrus and its backing paper were cut together with scissors. The person doing the cutting does not appear to have been attempting a careful, straight cut. A note regarding the method used for cutting the papyrus and backing paper is in order. Although it is often difficult to tell what method was used for cutting, we will note the method that seems most likely for each fragment, whether with scissors or with a straight edge and a blade. However, it is quite possible that they were always cut using the same method, in which case it appears that cutting with scissors was the method.

When JSP I is viewed from the papyrus side, the top is 19 cm at its widest point, while the bottom is 18.3 cm. The left side is 12.1 cm, and the right side is 11.6 cm. The backing paper of JSP I, XI, and III contains schematic drawings of the interior of a temple, including pews and pulpits. The backing of JSP I displays what appears to be two partial squares, one inside the other. The paper was cut in the middle of these squares. Inside the small square, some writing was also cut in half. The remains of the abbreviation “No” and the numeral “i” are visible. An examination of the drawing on the backing of JSP I and of the configuration on the backing of JSP XI (discussed later in the article) suggests that an attempt was made to use the paper as a partial template for the design printed on the paper or vice versa.
below) indicates that the two fragments were once part of the same original backing document that contained a schematic floor plan of a temple. This inspection also leads to the conclusion that JSP I and JSP XI were originally mounted together, an inference supported by the fact that the papyrus text on these two fragments is contiguous. Furthermore, on the papyrus side of JSP I, the left sides of the paper and papyrus match perfectly with the right side of JSP XI. The angle of the cut, the papyrus text, and the drawings on both the front and back of the backing paper all correspond perfectly. Though largely covered by JSP I, the front side of the backing paper features another rendition of the plan that is also on the back side of the backing paper of JSP I and XI, with parts of several pews visible. This drawing continues for seven more full rows plus another partial row on the front side of the backing paper of JSP XI. On the back side of the backing paper of JSP I and XI, the squares align and face rows of pews. The “No 1” is completed in the smaller square. The continuity of both the papyrus and the drawings on the paper indicates that the papyrus was originally glued to the paper in one piece and later cut.

**JSP XI**

The left side and bottom of JSP XI have fairly clean cuts, while the top and right side are cut at angles and wander. It is difficult to tell what cutting method was used, although it seems most likely it was cut with a straight edge (such as a ruler); however, the person doing the cutting was not able to prevent the straight edge from moving as the cut was made. As previously noted, both the papyrus and the backing paper of JSP XI are contiguous with JSP I, which means that the temple plan depicted on the backing of JSP I continues on the backing of JSP XI. Several aisles and pews are depicted on this part of the plan, one section of which is labeled with a “No 4” written in an aisle space. This labeling is similar to JSP III, which is discussed below. To one side of the aisle space, two full pews are depicted. When the paper was cut, it went through a third pew, now only partially portrayed. On the other side of the aisle, four full corner pews are situated perpendicular to the other pews.

On the lower side of these pews, the paper is cut at an angle, but the partial remains of “No 1” are still visible. As was mentioned previously, the other half of this number is present on the backing of JSP I, indicating that JSP I and JSP XI were originally mounted together as part of the same document. That said, the similarities of the temple drawings (including the dimensions of the pews), the texture of the paper, and the blotching on JSP I and JSP XI also correspond with that of JSP III, confirming that all three were part of the same document before it was cut. A careful reconstruction makes it possible to view the full original temple drawing that served as the backing paper for JSP I, XI, and III. Erasures of pew lines that span across the backing of JSP XI and III further confirm that they were once the same sheet. The papyrus fragments were apparently glued to this large sheet and then cut.

Significantly, drawings of pews also appear on the upper portion of the papyrus side of JSP XI’s backing paper. The beginnings of eight rows of pews and perhaps part of a ninth are visible. This side also exhibits more signs of damage after the papyrus was mounted. Moreover, both short edges of the paper show that the papyrus was cut after mounting because the cut wanders at an angle that includes the paper and the papyrus together. JSP I was on one side of this fragment. We do not know what happened to the portion of papyrus that was cut from the other side. As noted, JSP I and JSP XI were originally on one piece of paper and then were separated. The reason for creating the smaller pieces may have been to fit them into framed glass for additional protection. The plan drawn on the front, or papyrus side of the backing paper, is so close to the top that it seems unlikely the draftsman would have drawn it that close to the original edge. This suggests that the paper was cut after the drawing was made, an idea strengthened by the fact that the cut along this edge wanders. The backing paper is 17.1 cm at the top, 16.3 cm at the bottom, and 12.2 cm on both sides.

**JSP III**

The drawings on the backing of this paper are part of the same temple plan that is on the back of JSP I and XI. This papyrus fragment was cut on all sides, indicating that a larger piece of papyrus was glued to the paper and then later cut. The backing paper was originally two pieces of paper spliced together by abutting the two papers and then gluing a strip of paper across them. The top of the backing paper with the temple plan is 25.9 cm by 14.4 cm.
Figure 1a. Original placement of Joseph Smith Papyri I, XI, and III on the single paper used for the backing which appears on the next page. Joseph Smith Papyri © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Redrawn by Michael Lyon.
RECONSTRUCTED KEY

No. 1 left-hand vestry in entry foyer  
2 right-hand vestry in entry foyer  
3 main top-to-bottom aisles  
4 unknown symbol (used on all four plans)  
5 semicircular center pulpits, top and bottom  
6 elevated side pews, top and bottom  
7 stairwells between pulpits and pews  
8 lower side-to-side aisle  
9 upper side-to-side aisle  
10 swing table for sacrament (as in the two later plans)

Figure 1b. Backing paper repurposed from the reconstruction of a temple floor plan by Frederick G. Williams. Joseph Smith Papyri Ia, Xla, and Ila © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Missing portions of plan reconstructed by Michael Lyon.
The paper on the bottom is 24.5 cm by 17.5 cm, making it 1.4 cm narrower than the paper above it. The strip of paper that glues the two sheets together is 24.4 cm long, 1.4 cm wide at the top, and 1.6 cm at the bottom. The cut wanders slightly along both of the long edges, exhibiting both straight and jagged cuts that suggest scissors were used, although with more care than with JSP I. The back of these sheets contains a preliminary temple floor plan. In the process of splicing the two pieces of paper, the lines of the temple plan were slightly misaligned at the joint. It seems the papers were originally spliced together to make sheets large enough for the plan and then were later cut into smaller pieces after the papyrus was attached. The papyrus has a crack at the natural bend of the joint, indicating that it was handled substantially after being attached. One possible explanation for this crack is that this fragment was rolled in modern times and smashed flat, resulting in breaks about every 3.8 cm. The mounting paper was split, rejoined, and recut along one of the papyrus breaks. Then the top of the right-hand piece was trimmed.

A portion of the backing paper has been torn off in one corner; thus we are missing part of the temple schemata. Moreover, the tear of the paper also creates a missing portion of the papyrus glued to it, suggesting that the papyrus had been whole when it was first mounted. The paper has been cut so that it ends in the middle of the plan. The edges of the paper are cleanly cut for the most part, although two of them wander a little, and one ends at an angle, indicating that these portions had been cut freehand. A few holes have been worn in the paper.

The temple plan depicted on the JSP III backing paper is divided into sections, each with its own number. For example, the most detailed portion of the drawings shows facing pulpits for the quorum presidencies (both Aaronic and Melchizedek, based on parallels) that are labeled “No 5.” A “swing” (drop-leaf) sacrament table attached to the top end of the lowest pulpit is labeled “No 10.” The stairwells for the pulpits are marked with a “7,” with slightly smaller adjoining pews (obviously elevated) labeled “No 6.” An aisle running the entire length of the room is labeled “No 3,” while the perpendicular aisles located in front of the tiered pulpits are marked respectively “No 8” and “No 9.”

Identifying the Drawing on the Back Side of JSP I, III, and XI

The temple floor plan on the backing material comprising JSP I, III, and XI corresponds closely with a detailed set of interior drawings by Frederick G. Williams of the temple planned for Independence, Missouri, that was sent to church leaders in Missouri on 25 June 1833. A close examination suggests that the drawing on the backing material may possibly have been a preliminary plan or perhaps a copy from which the June plan was made. A second set of Independence Temple plans drawn up and signed by Williams was sent to Missouri in early August.
Frederick G. Williams. “Plan of the House of the Lord” for the Independence temple, 25 June 1833; note the text on the far left in Oliver Cowdery’s hand. These images are rotated 180° to match the orientation of the earlier plan on p. 70, as noted by the location of the swing table for the sacrament below the pulpits at the top. MS 2568 FD 1. Courtesy Church History Library.
1833. They called for an expansion of the building, although the interior design remained much the same. Since no drawings or plans of the Kirtland Temple are known to exist, we conclude that the temple plan that appears on the backing material of JSP I, III, and XI consists of a preliminary or additional drawing of the Independence Temple made by Frederick G. Williams. However, the plans may have served an additional purpose in connection with the Kirtland Temple. Elwin C. Robison, an architectural historian, surmised: “It is entirely possible the Kirtland Temple was built using only some written notes and perhaps a sketch taken from the Independence drawings, supplemented by verbal instructions.” If this were the case, the temple plan on the backing of JSP I, III, and XI may have served as a blueprint in the construction of the Kirtland Temple. Once the building neared completion or was finished, the temple plan was no longer needed and the paper was “repurposed” as mounting paper for the Egyptian papyrus.

It should also be remembered that the front side of the backing of JSP I and JSP XI also contained a plan for the temple. Because JSP III also came from this same sheet of paper, it follows that the front of JSP III also contained a drawing of a temple plan that is no longer visible because the papyrus fragment covers the entirety of that side of the paper. We must further remember that JSP III originally consisted of two sheets of paper joined together by a small strip of paper with glue. This method must have been what created the large sheet of paper that contained the drawings on both sides of JSP I, III, and XI. The entire township grid includes all of present-day Ashtabula, Lake, and Geauga Counties, and portions of Trumbull, Cuyahoga, and Lorain Counties. The writing identifying the townships (as they then existed) is clearly legible and is in slanting manuscript (noncursive) form. The townships are represented in a total of fifteen complete vertical columns, a partial sixteenth column, and nine horizontal rows.

JSP II

The top, left-hand corner (when viewed from the papyrus side) of JSP II has been torn off, which likely happened some time after the papyrus was mounted. Measuring the papyrus and backing paper as if this tear had not taken place, JSP II measures 26.4 cm on the top and bottom and 12.9 cm on both sides. Similar to JSP III, JSP II was cut on all its sides, indicating that it was glued to the paper before it was cut. A township grid of eighty-two northeastern Ohio townships (including two partial townships) has been drawn on the back side of the mounting paper. Above the township grid is a wide, gray-colored swath, probably made using a thin, translucent wash, representing the Lake Erie shoreline. The grid system is a typical style for drawing townships at that time. In the region of Ohio known as Connecticut's Western Reserve, townships measured five-by-five square miles, although the townships bordering the Lake Erie shoreline are irregular and slightly larger or smaller depending on the geographic curvature of the lake. As indicated, a total of eighty-two townships are represented on the grid, with two townships (Troy and Ridgeville) only partially depicted because of cutting (see JSP IV backing). Names of seventy-five of the eighty-two townships as they were known or identified in the 1820s and 1830s are inscribed in ink in each respective township. The entire township grid includes all of present-day Ashtabula, Lake, and Geauga Counties, and portions of Trumbull, Cuyahoga, and Lorain Counties. The writing identifying the townships (as they then existed) is clearly legible and is in slanting manuscript (noncursive) form. The townships are represented in a total of fifteen complete vertical columns, a partial sixteenth column, and nine horizontal rows.

A small part of this backing paper is missing at the center of the top, but it appears that nothing was drawn or written on that portion of the paper since no drawings appear on either side of the small tear. The edges of this paper were cleanly cut for the most part, although one of the clean cuts has since deteriorated. On two edges the cut wanders just a little, suggesting that it was possibly cut freehand with scissors and that it is not the original size of the paper. This is confirmed by the facts that only partial names of two townships (Troy and Ridgeville) are preserved on the left side of the grid system and that the wandering portion of the cut goes through the middle of the grid system.

Below the ninth row of the grid are additional vertical column lines indicating that the grid continued. An examination of the backing material of JSP II and JSP IV indicates that they were joined together.
Figure 2a. Original placement of Joseph Smith Papyri II and IV on the repurposed paper backing. Circled areas on JSP IV indicate fragments from other papyri that were pasted over missing areas. Joseph Smith Papyri © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Redrawn by Michael Lyon.
Figure 2b. Repurposed paper backing showing Ohio townships, including Kirtland, on the southern shore of Lake Erie. Township names written by Wilford Woodruff. Joseph Smith Papyri IIa and IVa © By Intellectual Reserve, Inc.
before being cut. The backing of JSP IV clearly indicates that the grid originally included five additional township rows.

The grid drawing also includes three meandering lines, two of which represent sections of the Cuyahoga River and several of its tributaries. The river actually originates in Leroy Township (current-day Geauga County), where it flows south (illustrated on the grid map in Hampden, Clarydon [sic], Burton, and Welshfield Townships) through Portage County (not shown on the map), turns north, and then reemerges in Cuyahoga County (depicted in Independence, Newburgh, and Brooklyn Townships) before emptying into Lake Erie. Another, smaller river, Rocky Creek and its tributaries, is shown in Kingsville, Middlebury, and Rockport Townships.19

**JSP IV**

When JSP IV came into the possession of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1967, it was still inside a frame.20 It is possible that all these fragments had been framed at one point, although we can no longer be sure.21 The cuts wander a bit, again giving the impression that a straight edge was used but did not stay in place during the cutting, although carelessly used scissors could also account for this look. The wandering gives the paper a slightly irregular shape, and the fact that it was cut on all sides suggests it was originally the center of a much larger piece of paper.22 The top and bottom edges measure 20.2 cm, but the left side is 29.2 cm and the right 28.7 cm.

The paper backing was at some point torn or cut on the top corners and had other papers spliced into place to make it whole by gluing paper strips to hold them in place. The top right-hand addition is squarely cut and contains a piece of papyrus that does not belong in that position.23 The backing of that small piece contains drawings from a temple plan. Only three partial pews are visible. This piece was clearly cut from a larger drawing of the temple plan and was originally part of the same backing material as that of JSP I, III, and XI since it is in the same scale. The top left-hand addition seems to have been irregularly torn and then reattached and is blank on the back. The bottom left-hand portion of the papyrus and backing paper began to crack or tear and was then reinforced by gluing a large strip of paper to the back. The paper backing of JSP IV is badly damaged and contains two different drawings: a temple plan and the township grid. A sizable portion of the paper is blank.

A major section of the backing paper includes a township grid of all of Lorain and formerly Huron Counties (now also Erie County), and a portion of Medina and Wayne (now Ashland) Counties.24 As noted in our discussion of JSP II, the grid pattern, the handwriting, and the gray, water-colored area depicting Lake Erie of the JSP II backing material correspond with the backing material on JSP IV, indicating that the two pieces were originally one document.

It is reasonable to conclude that the township grid was drafted during this time since Woodruff is likely the person who inscribed the township names.

The township grid contains eight complete vertical columns, a partial column (due to the cut), and seven horizontal rows. A total of sixty-one townships are represented on the grid. However, only fourteen of the sixty-one township names as they were known or identified in the 1820s and 1830s are inscribed in slanted manuscript (noncursive) form in the respective townships, three of which, Troy (now Avon), Ridgeville, and Holbrook (now Eaton), are only partially depicted because of cutting (see JSP II).25 Three major rivers and four creeks (and their tributaries) are also represented, each of which flows into Lake Erie. Viewed from left to right they include the following: Pipe Creek, the Huron River, Old Woman Creek, an unidentified creek, the Vermilion River, Beaver Creek, and the Black River (including both west and east branches).26

**Identifying the Drawing on the Back Side of JSP II and IV**

As noted previously, the Ohio township grids that appear on the backing material of JSP II and JSP IV correspond with each other and at one time were one document. The names written in the townships appear to be in the handwriting of Wilford Woodruff. It cannot be determined whether or not Woodruff drew the township grid, rivers, and the Lake Erie shoreline as shown on the separated maps,
but the written text is most likely his. The identification of Woodruff’s handwriting is significant since it provides a possible timetable for when the township grid map(s) were drawn. Woodruff came to Kirtland, Ohio, for the first time in April 1834. He remained in Kirtland only a few days before leaving with the main company of Zion’s Camp to march to Missouri. At the conclusion of Zion’s Camp, Woodruff remained in Clay County, where he worked for Michael Arthur, a non-Mormon, for nearly seven months. Then, beginning in January 1835, he served a twenty-two-month mission in Arkansas, Tennessee, and Kentucky before returning to Kirtland in late November 1836. Woodruff spent the next six months in Kirtland (25 November 1836 to 31 May 1837), the only period during which he spent considerable time in the area. Given this chronology, it is reasonable to conclude that the township grid was drafted during this time since Woodruff is likely the person who inscribed the township names. It is difficult to determine why the township map was made and why it later was no longer needed. For unknown reasons, Joseph Smith and his associates clearly considered the document more useful as backing material for the papyrus fragments. Regardless, we conclude that the final version of township map was drafted sometime between late November 1836 and late May 1837; therefore, the JSP II and JSP IV papyrus fragments could not have been mounted to Woodruff’s township grid before that time.

**JSP V and VI**

JSP V and VI seem to have been glued to the same piece of paper, which was cut at some point and later taped together again. They were joined by what appears to be scotch tape, which did not exist in Joseph Smith’s day. Thus we can conclude that it was one of the later owners who rejoined these fragments. Part of the backing paper for JSP VI was also cut at the seam, leaving a rectangular gap that is between 1.7 cm to 1.9 cm wide and 10.3 cm in length. The papyrus also shows this gap. The lower corner of JSP V and its backing have been torn. Since the backing is torn in the same way as the papyrus, the papyrus apparently had not been torn at that place when it was mounted. Both of these fragments are fairly complete, and no drawings can be seen on the side of the paper to which they were glued. The left-hand side of the paper and the JSP VI papyrus glued to it has a series of notches cut into it. The backing paper for JSP VI is 29 cm long and 14.1 cm wide at its widest point, although with notches cut in various points on both sides, its width constantly varies. The paper on the right to which JSP V is attached is 28.6 cm long and 14.7 cm wide at its widest point.

**JSP VII–X**

The backing of JSP VII, not pictured here, is also completely blank, although it has a small hole in the center. The cut of three of the edges wanders, and the fourth is worn with a small tear in the corner. The cutting looks like poorly executed scissor-work, although it is so irregular it is hard to explain with any cutting method. Thus the shape of the paper is irregular. At the center, it is 15.9 cm in length and 15.4 cm in width. The fragments glued to this paper have been damaged. Under one of the missing portions of the papyrus, glue marks and small flecks of papyrus show on the backing, indicating that this portion of

---

Wilford Woodruff (1807–98) in the 1830s, around age 21. International Society, Daughters of Utah Pioneers, Salt Lake City, Utah.
the papyrus fragment was lost after it was glued to the paper backing.

The paper attached to JSP VIII is also blank; the papyrus has a few holes that are larger than those in JSP VII. The top edge of this paper curves, demonstrating that it was cut through the papyri at some point. The bottom edge is cleanly cut for most of its length but suddenly extends out farther on the left in an irregular shape; these rough edges suggest that it was torn rather than cut for that section. The cutting looks like it was done with scissors. The front of the mounting paper, which exhibits no signs of drawings and has broken pieces of papyrus remaining in the middle of glue marks, again indicates that more of the papyrus was present when it was first glued to the backing paper. Moreover, the cleanly cut bottom line that extends out into the torn section cuts through the papyrus, and the papyrus is on the extended torn section as well. This suggests that the papyrus was mounted to the backing paper before it was cut and that the incision went through both paper and papyrus when it was made. At its greatest dimensions, the paper is 20.5 cm long and 12 cm wide.

The backing of JSP IX appears to be two papers attached together. A visual examination makes it appear that it was folded, but a careful tactile examination of the line demonstrates that there is indeed a splice. The backing is blank and has two cleanly cut edges and another that shows signs either of wear or of being ripped. The top edge is cut with jagged notches in it. The cutting was most likely done with scissors. The front side has a few papyrus fragments attached with enough flakes left to indicate that much more was originally present on the paper. The notched cuts go through the papyrus, again indicating that the papyrus was glued to the paper before it was cut to its present shape. It is not apparent how the two sheets of paper were joined together. It is possible that glue served as the
splicing agent, although the papyrus does not extend across the two papers now, so glue would no longer serve this function. The backing paper’s back and front sides, which are largely visible, are blank. There are some figures on the front side that appear to be attempted reproductions of ancient Egyptian characters and drawings.

The paper attached to JSP X seems to be one blank piece of unaltered, narrow paper. It has a tear in one edge, and one of the edges wanders in its cut. A hole has also been worn through the paper. The papyrus again shows signs of damage that probably occurred after it was glued on, and both sides of the papyrus were cut after it was mounted. No signs of drawings are visible on either side of the backing paper. The paper is generally 16.2 cm by 30.5 cm, although the cuts wander enough that these dimensions vary depending on where the measurement is taken. Either a poorly held straight edge or poorly executed scissor-cutting was employed to cut the paper.

JSP X has an interesting story that we cannot fully recover. The papyrus text is part of the same text present on JSP I and XI. However, part of the column of text that would go between JSP XI and X is missing. Additionally, JSP X seems to be mounted on a different piece of paper than the large set of drawings on which JSP I and XI were mounted. Furthermore, some of the fragments that are missing from the papyrus text show up as patches pasted onto some of the other papyrus fragments. In other words, it appears that when JSP X was mounted, some of it was cut off, divided into smaller pieces, and then used to make other papyrus fragments look less broken. This may also have happened with some of the papyrus cut from the edge of JSP XI. Perhaps this portion of the papyrus was so broken that it was deemed unfit for framing and display and was therefore used to make other pieces more aesthetically pleasing for display purposes. Whatever the reason, the differences between the backing papers of JSP X and XI show that while the Egyptian text is almost contiguous, the fragments were not glued to the same paper and some of the missing text was cannibalized.

When Were the Papyri Mounted?

While mounting the papyri could have taken place anytime after Joseph Smith acquired them in July 1835, it seems most likely that the Prophet and his colleagues would have mounted them either while they were consistently engaged in working with them or soon thereafter. According to the Prophet’s journals, the period in which they were most consistently working with the papyri was from 19 to 26 November 1835.\(^{35}\) We have no other reference to working with the papyri again until the 1840s. However, considering the fact that the township grid that was used as backing material for JSP II and IV was produced no earlier than November 1836, and surmising that all the papyrus fragments were mounted at the same time, we suggest the mounting did not take place until after late 1836.

Having concluded that the mounting of the eleven fragments likely took place all together but no earlier than November 1836, we now turn to the latest time it could have happened. One historical account may cast further light on the timing. William S. West visited Kirtland sometime before the end of 1837. While there, he saw the papyri and recorded that “these records were torn by being taken from the roll of embalming salve which contained them.”\(^{36}\) West’s statement suggests the possibility that by the end of 1837 the papyrus fragments had been deliberately cut from the long scroll, were at least in the process of being mounted, were perhaps already glued to their backing material, and were even possibly under glass by that time. These assumptions are somewhat corroborated by another account given...
in December 1837 in which the writer speaks of the size of some fragments, describing them as about 8 by 12 inches.37 If this made reference to the framed fragments, the mounting must have occurred at least by then. If so, we have a smaller window during which the mounting could have occurred, a period somewhere between the creation of the township maps made by Woodruff between late November 1836 and late May 1837, and the account of the fragment sizes in December 1837. Because it is unlikely that Woodruff’s township maps were repurposed as backing paper as early as July 1835, the mounting most likely would have happened in late 1837.

Increasing hostilities and threats of lawsuits compelled Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon to leave Kirtland on 12 January 1838 and take up permanent residence in Far West, Missouri. Because of their hasty departure, many of the Prophet’s important records, including the Egyptian artifacts, were left in the care of family members and close friends. Lucy Mack Smith reported it was at this time that the enemies of the church vowed to destroy the papyri, necessitating that they be moved from place to place in an effort to keep them hidden.38 For a short time, the mummies and papyri were temporarily sequestered in William D. Huntington’s home at New Portage, Ohio, and hidden under the bed of his seventeen-year-old daughter, Zina Diantha Huntington (later Young), with the hope that the antagonists would not likely look for them under the bed of a teenage girl.39 Still later, the artifacts were moved to Edwin Woolley’s home in Rochester, Ohio. Then in the spring of 1838, Edwin, his brother Samuel Woolley, and Joseph Smith Sr. made arrangements for the Egyptian artifacts to be transported to Missouri; they arrived at Far West in June or July.40 We know that the Saints had a difficult time keeping important papers and documents safe when transporting them from Ohio to Missouri and eventually to Illinois.41 Therefore it seems unlikely that they would bring paper that was not seen as absolutely necessary. Most likely the mounting had been done (and also the papyri possibly placed under glass) by December 1837, or at the latest, in the early spring of 1838 before being packed and transported to Missouri.42 This is somewhat corroborated by the eyewitness accounts cited earlier that speak of fragments of papyri separately from the scrolls.

Conclusion

In summary, the backing material on JSP I, III, and XI contains a schematic temple floor plan by Frederick G. Williams. The plan is associated with similar and more detailed drawings he made in conjunction with the Independence Temple plans sent by church leaders in Kirtland to church leaders in Missouri in June and August 1833. The backing material on JSP II and IV includes a township grid of northeastern Ohio townships transcribed by Wilford Woodruff sometime between late November 1836 and late May 1837. Although in theory the papyrus fragments could have been mounted with the backing paper as early as July 1835, the backing paper itself demonstrates that it far more likely took place sometime after November 1836 but before the Egyptian artifacts were transported to Missouri in the early spring of 1838. The most likely time period seems to be late 1837 or early 1838.

Presumably, Joseph Smith and his associates felt that mounting the fragile papyrus fragments on sturdier paper and putting at least some of them under glass would help preserve them from additional wear and deterioration. The fact that the eleven mounted fragments are the only papyri known to exist from the Prophet’s original collection is at least a partial attestation to that effort.

Kerry M. Muhlestein received his PhD in Egyptology from UCLA. He is an associate professor of ancient scripture, a teacher of ancient Near Eastern studies, and the associate chair of the Department of Ancient Scripture at Brigham Young University. He directs the BYU Egypt Excavation Project and has held office in the American Research Center in Egypt and the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities.

Alexander L. Baugh is a professor of church history and doctrine at Brigham Young University. He received his BS from Utah State University and his MA and PhD degrees from Brigham Young University. He specializes in the Missouri period (1831–39) of early LDS Church history. He serves as editor of Mormon Historical Studies, codirector of research for the Religious Studies Center at BYU, and volume editor for the Joseph Smith Papers.
NOTES


3. According to Doyle L. Green, “New Light on Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papyri,” Improvement Era, May 1968, 40, “The 12 pieces of papy-rus have now been numbered and labeled by Dr. Hugh Nibley.”

4. Most of the backing papers of the papyri have a number lightly penciled on them. This number does not seem to be part of the original context of the backing papers but was likely added later, probably even after they left Joseph Smith’s possession. Because we know little about these numbers and because they do not add to the discussion, we will not refer to them in the body of the text. In order to be complete, however, we will include this detail in a note for each papyrus backing paper since some may find it useful. The backing of JSP I has an “i” penciled on it.

5. A “9” is penciled on the backing paper of JSP XI.

6. The authors express appreciation to Michael P. Lyon for this observation.

7. A “2” is penciled on the backing paper of JSP III.

8. This idea is supplied by Dr. John Gee. We are grateful for his help.

9. “Plan of the House of the Lord,” circa August 1833, text and drawing by Frederick G. Williams, MS 2568, fd. 2, Church History Library.

10. “Plan of the House of the Lord,” circa August 1833, text and drawing by Frederick G. Williams, MS 2568, fd. 1, Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Although the drawings and the accompanying description are unsigned, an analysis of the handwriting shows it to be that of Frederick G. Williams. In a letter accompanying the temple drawings under the date of 25 June 1833, church leaders in Kirtland wrote: “We send by this mail, a draft of the city of Zion, with explanations, and a draft of the house to be built immediate in Zion, for the Presidency, as well as for all purposes of religion and instruction.” See Joseph Smith Jr., History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed., rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 1:363. See also Elwin C. Robison, The First Mormon Temple: Design, Construction, and Historic Context of the Kirtland Temple (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1997), 9.

11. According to Doyle L. Green, “New Light on Joseph Smith’s Egyptian Papyri,” Improvement Era, February 1968, 40, “The 12 pieces of papy-rus have now been numbered and labeled by Dr. Hugh Nibley.”

12. “Plan of the House of the Lord,” circa August 1833, text and drawing by Frederick G. Williams, MS 2568, fd. 2, Church History Library.

13. The authors express appreciation to Michael P. Lyon for this observation.

14. A “to” is penciled on the backing paper of JSP II.

15. US townships generally measured six by six miles square (thirty-six square miles or 23,040 acres). However, in 1796, when the Connecticut Land Company subdivided its Ohio lands (known as the Connecticut Western Reserve), it surveyed the land in five-mile-square townships (twenty-five square miles, or 16,000 acres). See Thomas Aquinas Burke, Ohio Lands: A Short History (Ohio: Ohio Auditor of State, 1994), 6–7.

16. Beginning in the extreme upper right portion of the grid (column 1, row 1) and reading from top to bottom and right to left, the following townships are identified. Column 1: blank (now Conneaut), Salem (now part of Monroe), Monroe, Peir-point [sic], Leon (now Richmond), Andover, Williamsfield, Kinsman, and Vernon. Column 2: Kingsville, Sheffield, Denmark, Millsford (now Dorset), blank (now Cherry Valley), Wayne, Gustavus, and Johnston.

17. Blank (now Plymouth), Jefferson, Lenox, Lebanon [sic] (now New Lyme), Phelps (now Colebrook), Green, and Mecca.

18. Column 4: Wrightsburgh (written vertically, now Saybrook), blank, Auburn, Morgan, Rome, Leffingwell (now Orwell), Bloomfield, and Bristol.

30. JSP V has a “4” penciled on its back-
ing paper. Additionally, JSP VII has a “4” penciled on the back of the backing paper of JSP II and IV. The letter “y” from “Troy” is just slightly visible, as is “geville” from “Ridgeville” (because of spatial constraints the latter three letters, “lle,” were written above the main word). “Holb” appears on JSP IV, but because of the location of the bottom cut on JSP II, the remainder of the township name, “rook,” does not appear.


32. A “5” is penciled on the backing paper of JSP X. Additionally, “geville” from “Ridgeville” (because of spatial constraints the latter three letters, “lle,” were written above the main word). “Holb” appears on JSP IV, but because of the location of the bottom cut on JSP II, the remainder of the township name, “rook,” does not appear.

33. No penciled numbers are visible on the backing paper of JSP IV.

34. An “8” is penciled on the back of the backing paper of JSP X. Additionally, “front end” and a “0” and “2” are penciled on the front of the backing paper in a different handwriting than the numbers penciled on the back side of the backing papers.


38. Lucy Mack Smith, Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations (London: published for Orson Pratt by S. W. Richards, 1853), 215; also in Lucy Mack Smith, Lucy’s Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith’s Family Memoir, ed. Lavina Fielding Anderson (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2001), 613–14. John and Nicholas Markell stated they seized the papyri and mummies and then returned them. See John Markell and Nicholas Markell, affidavits, MS D155, bx. 5, Perry Special Collections.


40. See Ray L. Huntington and Keith J. Wilson, “From Kirtland, Ohio, to Far West, Missouri: Following the Trail of the Mormon Mummies,” Religious Educator 2/1 (2001): 98–100. William Swartzell, who was also en route from Ohio to Missouri at this same time, reported on 24 May 1838 seeing Joseph Smith’s “box of mummies” at the landing in Richmond, Missouri. See William Swartzell, Mormonism Exposed, Being a Journal of a Residence in Missouri from the 28th of May to the 20th of August, 1838 (Pittsburgh: Ingram Jr. Printer, 1840), 9.

41. For an example of this, see F. M. Cooper, “Spiritual Reminiscences—No. 2: In the Life of Sister Ann Davis, of Lyons, Wisconsin,” Autumn Leaves 4 (January 1891): 18.

42. The eleven papyrus fragments were undoubtedly mounted and put under glass before April 1840 since an eyewitness specifically speaks of seeing the framed fragments in Quincy, Illinois. See Bartlett, “Glance at the Mormons,” 1.
JOSEPH SMITH, THE TIMES AND SEASONS, AND CENTRAL AMERICAN RUINS

MATTHEW ROPER, PAUL J. FIELDS, AND ATUL NEPAL

In 1841, explorers John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick G. Catherwood published an account of their travels and discoveries in Southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras entitled Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan. Stephens's well-written narrative, with accurate and detailed sketches of the ruins and monuments by Catherwood, was well received by American readers. Latter-day Saints also greeted these discoveries with enthusiasm in large part because of their potential relevance to the ancient historical setting of the Book of Mormon. During the Prophet Joseph Smith's tenure as editor of the Nauvoo Times and Seasons, five articles were published endorsing Stephens and Catherwood's work. Historians have wondered if Joseph Smith authored these articles or if they were actually written by someone else. Some have gone so far as to suggest that the articles were written without his supervision or authorization and that the unknown writer’s or writers’ efforts to associate the Central American discoveries with the Book of Mormon contradicted revelations of the Prophet.

In order to address these questions we will review the historical evidence of Joseph Smith's knowledge of the work of Stephens and Catherwood, the content of these articles, and the Prophet's activities as editor of the Times and Seasons. After establishing this historical foundation, we will then apply the statistical tool of stylometry (wordprint analysis) to the question of Joseph Smith's authorship of these articles and examine the implications of these findings.

Historical Background

Latter-day Saints in Nauvoo became aware of Stephens and Catherwood's discoveries through an article published in the 15 June 1841 issue of the Times and Seasons. At this time the periodical was under the editorship of the Prophet's brother Don Carlos Smith.
and Robert B. Thompson, who noted the significance of the explorers’ discoveries for Latter-day Saints in an article entitled “American Antiquities—More Proofs of the Book of Mormon.” Several months later, John Bernhisel, a recent convert then serving as a bishop over the Saints in New York City, purchased a copy of the two-volume work, and on 8 September he wrote to Joseph Smith to inform him that he was sending a copy of the set “as a token of my regard for you as a Prophet of the Lord.” Bernhisel asked Wilford Woodruff, who was returning home from his apostolic mission in Great Britain, to carry the set back to the Prophet in Nauvoo, which he did.

On the way home, Woodruff spent part of his time reading the work and was enthusiastic about its contents. On 13 September he recorded the following in his journal:

I spent the day in reading the 1st vol of INCIDENTS OF TRAVELS IN Central America Chiapas AND Yucatan BY JOHN L STEPHEN’S . . . . I felt truly interested in this work for it brought to light a flood of testimony in proof of the book of mormon in the discovery & survey of the city Copan in Central America A correct drawing of the monuments, pyramids, portraits, & Hieroglyphics as executed by Mr Catherwood is now presented before the publick & is truly a wonder to the world. Their whole travels were truly interesting.

On 16 September he recorded that he had perused the 2d Vol of Stephens travels In Central America Chiapas of Yucatan & the ruins of Palenque & Copan. It is truly one of the most interesting histories I have read.

Woodruff arrived in Nauvoo on 6 October. Then, on 16 November 1841 Joseph Smith dictated a letter to John Bernhisel thanking him for the gift:

I received your kind present by the hand of Er [Elder] Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & develops many things that are of great importance to this generation & corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprihensive.

This letter shows that Joseph Smith had read Stephens and Catherwood’s work and shared the excitement these discoveries generated among his associates. It also, in effect, signaled his approval of such interests in connection with the Book of Mormon, an interest that can be seen in subsequent Latter-day Saint literature. Of particular interest are five articles that appeared in the Times and Seasons in 1842 when Joseph Smith served as editor. These articles, two signed “Ed.” (presumably indicating editor) and three left unsigned, promoted the work of Stephens and Catherwood among Latter-day Saints. The five editorials highlight Latter-day Saint interest in the discoveries and also encouraged the view that they were consistent with and supportive of the claims of the Book of Mormon.

Times and Seasons Editorials on Central America and the Book of Mormon

It was common for Latter-day Saint writers and missionaries to welcome any reported evidence of pre-Columbian civilization as evidence in support of the Book of Mormon. The 2 May 1842 issue of the Times and Seasons printed an article reporting
the discovery of what appeared to be mummified bodies found in some caves in Kentucky. The editor then suggested that that find could be considered evidence for the Book of Mormon since a knowledge of Egyptian embalming was in accordance with the Bible and was known to the ancient Israelites; however, no geographical correlation between the Kentucky site and the Book of Mormon was made.10

The Times and Seasons printed another editorial signed “Ed.” on 15 June 1842 that referenced reported Mexican traditions of a flood and the confounding of languages. The editor then quoted Book of Mormon passages showing that the Jaredites and the Nephites also knew of these things and argued that the Mexican accounts “support the testimony of the Book of Mormon, as well as that of the Mosaic history.” The editor thought that “the coincidence is so striking that further comment is unnecessary.”11

The 15 July 1842 issue contained another editorial signed “Ed.” that cited an extract from Joseph Priest’s American Antiquities, which discussed reported discoveries found in Tennessee and along the Mississippi River, including evidence for silver, gold, copper, iron, and brass as well as evidence of swords and cities. The author of the editorial, after observing that these North American evidences of pre-Columbian civilization were consistent with the Book of Mormon, further observed:

Stephens and Catherwood’s researches into Central America abundantly testify of this thing. The stupendous ruins, the elegant sculpture, and the magnificence of the ruins of Guatemala, and other cities, corroborate this statement, and show that a great and mighty people—men of great minds, clear intellect, bright genius, and comprehensive designs inhabited this continent. Their ruins speak of their greatness; the Book of Mormon unfolds their history.12

Two additional editorials (unsigned) on the Central American ruins appeared on 15 September 1842. The first of these reprinted a lengthy extract from Incidents of Travel in Central America that described the ruins of Palenque in southern Mexico and concluded that “the foregoing extract has been made to assist the Latter-day Saints, in establishing the Book of Mormon as a revelation from God. It affords great joy to have the world assist us to so much proof, that even the credulous cannot doubt.” Regretting that they could not reprint a longer extract from Stephens and Catherwood, the writer suggested that “these wonderful ruins of Palenque are among the mighty works of the Nephites” and compared them with Nephi’s description of the temple in the land of Nephi. The Nephites in the Book of Mormon “lived about the narrow neck of land, which now embraces Central America, with all the cities that can be found.” The editorial is significant in that the writer went beyond the earlier general arguments for pre-Columbian civilization to making specific correlations between Central American ruins and cities mentioned in the Book of Mormon.13

The second unsigned editorial quoted from a Guatemalan tradition reported by Stephens and Catherwood that claimed that the Toltecs who ruled the region in pre-Columbian times were originally of the house of Israel who fled from Moses before they migrated to that land. This “goodly traditionary account” seemed to provide additional “circumstantial evidence” for the Book of Mormon.14

The 1 October 1842 issue contained yet another unsigned editorial on the Central American ruins. This one reprinted another extract from Incidents of Travel that described the ruins of Quirigua near the Gulf of Honduras and a large stone monument with hieroglyphic writing that reminded the writer of the “large stone” found by the people of Zarahemla and deciphered by King Mosiah (Omni 1:20–21):

Since our “Extract” was published from Mr. Stephens’ “Incidents of Travel,” &c., we have found another important fact relating to the truth of the Book of Mormon. Central America, or Guatamala, is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south.—The city of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior, and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land. . . . It is certainly a good thing for the excellency and veracity, of the divine authenticity of the Book of Mormon, that the ruins of Zarahemla have been found where the Nephites left them: and that a large stone with engravings upon it, as Mosiah said; and a “large round stone, with the sides sculptured in hieroglyphics,” as Mr. Stephens has published, is also among the left remembrances of the, (to him,) lost and unknown.

Then with a little more caution, the writer continued:

We are not a-going [sic] to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua are those of Zarahemla, but when the land and the stones, and the books tell the story...
The Acquisition of the *Times and Seasons*

Between 1839 and 1841, the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles fulfilled an important mission to Great Britain, resulting in the conversion of several thousand British Saints. This mission proved to be a blessing to the church as well as to the quorum itself, but it was sometimes difficult for the Prophet to be separated from some of his closest and most diligent associates. This is reflected in some of the challenges associated with publishing the *Times and Seasons*.

In the spring of 1839, Elias Smith, Hiram Clark, and others traveled to Far West, Missouri, where they had retrieved the printing press and the type that had been used to print the short-lived *Elder's Journal* in the summer of 1838. These were brought back to Nauvoo, and the first issue of the *Times and Seasons* was printed in November 1839 under the editorship of Ebenezer Robinson and one of the Prophet’s younger brothers, Don Carlos Smith. On 1 December 1840, this partnership was dissolved and Don Carlos became the sole editor of the paper. Sometime afterward, the Prophet’s scribe and friend Robert B. Thompson joined Don Carlos as editor. When Don Carlos died in August 1841, Ebenezer Robinson joined Thompson. Thompson died just twenty days later, and Robinson again became the editor and was joined by Gustavus Hill. Both served as editors until early 1842.

In the fall of 1841, the Prophet began expressing concerns about Robinson and Hill’s ownership and operation of the paper. By this time, most of the Twelve had returned from Great Britain, and Joseph was increasingly anxious to place someone else in charge of the church newspaper. On 20 November, Brigham Young recorded:

I met with six others of the Twelve in council, at my house, on the subject of the *Times and Seasons*, the Quorum not being satisfied with the manner Gustavus Hill had conducted the editorial department.

On 28 January the Prophet received a revelation in which the Lord told him,
On 3 February Wilford Woodruff recorded that Joseph Smith had become the *Times and Seasons* editor:

> Woodruff did not specify precisely what Taylor's writing assistance to the Prophet entailed. Then, in the 1 March 1842 issue of *Times and Seasons*, the Prophet announced that he was undertaking editorship of the paper:

> This paper commences my editorial career. I alone stand for it, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward. I am not responsible for the publication, or arrangement of the former paper; the matter did not come under my supervision.26

It seems clear that this statement disavows Joseph's sanction for previous editions of the *Times and Seasons*, the “former paper,” for as we noted above, Joseph and the Twelve disapproved of how Hill and Robinson had been handling things. In this statement Joseph also declares his willingness to endorse “all papers having my signature henceforward,” which is more than an endorsement of individual articles, but rather of all content in all issues of the newspaper for which he is listed as editor. The term *papers* does not mean “documents” in this context; it means issues of the newspaper published with Joseph as editor.

The 1 March 1842 issue of the paper bore the note “The *Times and Seasons* is edited by Joseph Smith.”27 However, the Prophet’s tenure as editor was short-lived as he subsequently transferred editorial responsibilities for the paper to John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff around 12 November 1842.28

### Joseph Smith as Editor

What are we to make of Joseph’s role during his time as editor? The historical evidence suggests that this title was not an empty one. In addition to Joseph’s known contributions, sources indicate that he read page proofs and sometimes collected and supplied content material to be used for the paper.29 For most of his tenure, he was in or near Nauvoo and frequently visited and worked at the printing office and counseled with fellow apostles, including John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff.

Regardless of who wrote the *Times and Seasons* editorials linking the Book of Mormon to Central America, it is difficult to argue that Joseph Smith was unaware of or would have disapproved of the content of the editorials.

Although the Prophet was in hiding from his enemies during August and September 1842, he stayed close enough that he could continue to work quietly and address church business as opportunity allowed.30 Sometimes he was able to stay at home, where he even managed to pose for a portrait for several days.31

Significantly, both Woodruff and Taylor were seriously ill during this time. For example, Woodruff recorded on 19 September, “I commenced work this day for the first time for 40 days.”32 This means that...
Woodruff had been absent from the printing office for more than five weeks because of illness from 10 August to 19 September. Prior to that Joseph had sent him to St. Louis on 23 July to purchase supplies for the printing office, a journey that took almost three weeks, up to 10 August. Thus Wilford was absent for nearly two months.

On 21 September the Prophet recorded that he met with John Taylor—“who is just recovering from a severe attack of sickness” and had therefore also been absent from the printing office—and that he counseled him “concerning the printing office.” 33 The two men met again two days later. We do not know how long Taylor had been sick, but the fact that both he and Woodruff had been seriously ill suggests that the Prophet must have had to bear alone the full editorial burdens during an extensive period of time, during which two of the unsigned editorials were published. The accompanying timeline graphically displays the chronological events related to the Times and Seasons during 1842.

In any case, the fact that he met with Taylor several times suggests that Joseph was actively involved in editorial matters even when in hiding. Regardless of who wrote the Times and Seasons editorials linking the Book of Mormon to Central America, it is difficult to argue that Joseph Smith was unaware of or would have disapproved of the content of the editorials.

The events surrounding Joseph Smith’s editorship of the Times and Seasons in 1842 as they intersect with the editorials about Central America. Designed by Justin Kelly.
During Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor, the *Times and Seasons* published numerous articles of doctrinal and historical significance to the church. This content included the Prophet’s translation of the Book of Abraham, the Wentworth letter containing the Articles of Faith, early installments of the *History of Joseph Smith*, and two important letters from him on instructions relating to baptism for the dead. When we examine the content of the *Times and Seasons* during this period, we find that he signed his name “Joseph Smith” only when he was reproducing a letter or document written for a publication other than his own paper.

Excluding items attributed to other contributors to the paper, two kinds of editorial articles and commentary remained—those signed “Ed.” and those left unsigned. Material attributed to the editor(s) included articles on doctrinal subjects such as baptism, baptism for the dead, the Holy Ghost, detecting false spirits and evil influences, revealed knowledge, and the government of God. In addition, several articles dealt with the Book of Mormon. Unsigned editorial material touched on persecution, the city of Nauvoo, the temple, apostasy, local events, and the Central American ruins.

The time came when Joseph Smith needed to turn his attention elsewhere. In early November Wilford Woodruff wrote that the Prophet “wished us to take the responsibility of the printing Office upon ourselves & liberate him from it.” John Taylor formally took over as editor with the 15 November 1842 issue, in which the Prophet wrote:

I beg leave to inform the subscribers of the *Times and Seasons* that it is impossible for me to fulfil the arduous duties of the editorial department any longer. The multiplicity of other business that daily devolves upon me, renders it impossible for me to do justice to a paper so widely circulated as the *Times and Seasons*. I have appointed Elder John Taylor, who is less encumbered and fully competent to assume the responsibilities of that office, and I doubt not but that he will give satisfaction to the patrons of the paper. As this number commences a new volume, it also commences his editorial career.

John Taylor wrote immediately thereafter:

The patrons of the *Times and Seasons* will unquestionably be painfully disappointed on reading the above announcement. We know of no one so competent as President Joseph Smith to fill the editorial chair, of which the papers that have been issued since he has been editor are sufficient evidence.

We do not profess to be able to tread in the steps, nor to meet the expectation of the subscribers of this paper so fully as our able, learned and talented prophet, who is now retiring from the field; but as he has promised to us the privilege of referring to his writings, books, &c., together with his valuable counsel, when needed, and also to contribute to its columns with his pen when at leisure, we are in hopes that with his assistance, and other resources that we have at our command, that the *Times and Seasons* will continue to be a valuable periodical, and interesting to its numerous readers.

To summarize the historical data:

1. Joseph Smith, having read the work of Stephens and Catherwood, was well aware of the discoveries in Central America they reported.
2. Joseph Smith was, as were his close associates, very interested in the Central American discoveries and felt that they were important and that Latter-day Saints should know about them; in his view they corresponded with and supported the claims of the Book of Mormon.
3. Joseph Smith was the editor of the *Times and Seasons* from about 19 February to 15 November 1842, at which point he announced in the *Times and Seasons* that John Taylor was taking over as editor.
4. Between February and November 1842, the only men said to be working in the printing office were Joseph Smith, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff.
5. Five articles discussing Central America and endorsing the work of Stephens and Catherwood were published while Joseph Smith was editor.
6. While acting as editor, Joseph Smith took full responsibility for the content of the material published in the *Times and Seasons*.
7. Although he may have received “assistance in writing” from John Taylor, Joseph Smith authored articles “with his pen.”

The Question of Authorship

Authorship attribution attempts to identify the author of a text based on the writing style displayed in the text. Using quantitative measures to describe an author’s writing style is formally called stylometry or stylometric analysis, but it is commonly referred to as wordprint analysis. The premise behind wordprint studies is that an author has a unique style of writing
and that his or her written work can be identified by
a stylistic fingerprint discernible in a document as
evidenced by his or her choice of words.

Our area of interest is the authorship of the five
Times and Seasons editorials on the Book of Mormon
that appeared in 1842. Because of the many pres-
sures that Joseph Smith was under during 1842, the
teditorials signed “Ed.” on 15 June and 15 July and
the unsigned editorials of 15 September and 1 Octo-
ber 1842 could have been written by John Taylor.36
Or because of Wilford Woodruff’s enthusiasm for
the subject of the Central American discoveries,
perhaps he wrote those articles. Then again, the ed-
teditorials were possibly produced collaboratively and
therefore were published without a claim of sole
authorship.

One mathematical tool used in a stylometric in-
vestigation is discriminant analysis. This technique
finds combinations of features (discriminant func-
tions) that can categorize (discriminate) items into
known classes, just as plants or animals can be cate-
gorized into species based on distinguishing features.

While the contextual [lexical] words are
the content words that convey the authors’
message, the noncontextual [grammatical] words are the function words an author
uses to construct his or her message.

The discriminant functions can be used to classify a
new item of unknown group membership into its ap-
propriate group based on its features.

Two types of words appear in the structure of
language: (1) grammatical words, which are non-
contextual words, and (2) lexical words, which are
contextual words. While the contextual words are
the content words that convey the authors’ message,
the noncontextual words are the function words
an author uses to construct his or her message. Ex-
amples of noncontextual words include and, but,
however, in, on, the, above, upon, and so forth. In a
text such words do not impart the author’s message,
but they do tell us how the author forms his or her
message. Interestingly, the frequency with which an
author uses noncontextual words distinctively char-
acterizes his or her writing style and can reveal an
author’s identity in comparison to other authors for
a text of unknown authorship. Consequently, we
can use noncontextual words to distinguish among
authors’ writing styles and thereby form a basis to
attribute authorship of a text.

To investigate the probable authorship of the
five small editorials (two signed “Ed.” and three un-
signed) in the Times and Seasons that referred to Cen-
tral America, we put them into one composite block
of text so there would be sufficient data to measure
word frequencies. Next we took writing samples
from Joseph Smith’s signed editorials, editorials
signed “Ed.,” and unsigned editorials appearing in
the Times and Seasons from March through Octo-
ber 1842. These were segmented into thirty-five
1,000-word blocks to correspond in size with the
composite “Central America” text.

So that we could characterize Joseph Smith’s
writing style, we compiled twenty-nine 1,000-word
blocks of text known to have been written by Joseph
Smith in his own hand (other than the few Times
and Seasons editorials he had signed with his name).
We also took writing samples from John Taylor and
Wilford Woodruff, who were reasonably the only
other possible contributors to the editorials. We se-
lected texts that were as close to the editorial genre as
were available and encompassed the 1842 time frame.
Thus we did not utilize texts from Woodruff’s dia-
rries since his personal writing style differs from his
more public exposition; we did likewise for Taylor.
We compiled thirty 1,000-word blocks for Taylor and
twenty-four 1,000-word blocks for Woodruff, giving
a total of one hundred and eighteen blocks of text
for use in building the discriminant functions to test
the probable authorship of the composite Central
America text.

Next we identified seventy noncontextual words
in the writing samples that best distinguished the
writing styles of Smith, Taylor, and Woodruff. Using
these words as the distinctive literary features for the
candidate authors, we developed a set of discriminant
functions that could classify each writing sample as
belonging to the correct author over 98 percent of the
time.

Although this is a seventy-dimensional prob-
lem (one dimension for each noncontextual word),
we can project the relative relationships between
the three authors and the three types of editori-
als into a three-dimensional plot in the shape of a
cube in which each edge of the cube is one of the orthogonal discriminant functions. Figure 1 shows the line of sight from which we can view the positions of each author’s texts within the three-dimensional space when looking from the front, top, and side of the cube.

Shown in the figures below are plots of the texts within the framework of the three discriminant functions when looking from the front. In the first plot (fig. 2) we see that the three authors—Smith (yellow dots), Taylor (maroon dots) and Woodruff (green dots)—can clearly be distinguished from each other as their respective texts group together separately from the texts of the other authors. We notice that the discriminant function along the base of the cube (the horizontal axis) separates Smith from the other two authors, and the discriminant function along the vertical axis separates Woodruff from Smith and Taylor.

In the next plot (fig. 3) we add the editorials signed “Joseph Smith” (brown dots). We see that these obviously group with the other Smith texts, indicating that Joseph’s editorial style was not much different from his noneditorial style. Interestingly, in the editorials signed “Joseph Smith” the word I was used far more frequently than it was used in any of the other editorials.

In the next plot (fig. 4) we add the additional unsigned editorials during Joseph’s editorship (gray dots). These editorials group closely with the Smith texts and the “Joseph Smith” editorials, indicating that these texts have similar stylistic features. In figure 5, when we add the texts signed “Ed.” (or editor texts; blue dots), we see that here again these editorials are closer to the Smith texts and the other editorials than they are to either of the other two possible authors.

The relative positions of the texts are evidence that the editorials signed “Ed.” and the unsigned editorials were likely written by Joseph Smith. However, there does appear to be some influence from Taylor in the style of the editor texts since they are pulled somewhat away from the grouping of the Smith texts in the general direction of the Taylor texts.

In figure 6 we add the Central America editorials composite text (black dot). This text is clearly closer to the Smith texts than it is to the texts of the other authors, providing evidence that Joseph Smith is the most likely author, if there was in fact only one author of the Central America editorials.

In the final two plots we look at the cube from the top and the side. In the top view (fig. 7) we see that the discriminant function along the vertical axis separates the Smith text from the editorials and it separates the editor texts the farthest. As in the front
view, in the top view the Central America composite text groups with Joseph Smith’s texts and within his grouping it is closest to the editor texts.

In the side view (fig. 8) the Woodruff texts (green dots) are pulled toward the bottom of the plot, separating his texts from the editorial texts, including the Central America composite text. Consequently, the evidence does not indicate that he contributed strongly, if at all, to the editorials. As in the front and top views, the Central American composite text is closest to the editor texts, and we can also see the possible influence of Taylor on the editor texts since his texts (maroon dots) are toward the top of the plot as are the editor texts.

As Wilford pointed out, John assisted Joseph in the editor role, so perhaps he was Joseph’s scribe and in that capacity contributed to the wording of the editorials as they were dictated by Joseph. Or perhaps Joseph and John collaborated in writing the editor texts and unsigned editorials. Perhaps their collaboration included interactive discussion of the topics and exchange of draft copies of the editorial texts. If the editorials were the product of their combined collaborative work, then it would make sense for the editorials to be signed “Ed.” or left unsigned.

Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that the editorials on the Central America ruins and the Book of Mormon, published during Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor of the Times and Seasons show a strong alignment with his personal writing style and the editorials to which he signed his name. Consequently, the evidence points to Joseph Smith as the author of the Central America editorials.

However, we need not presume that the five Central America editorials were the work of only one author. The evidence is more supportive of a collaborative effort within the Times and Seasons office between Joseph Smith and John Taylor. Wilford Woodruff’s observation appears to be correct that Joseph Smith as editor wrote for the paper and was assisted in his writing by John Taylor. We conclude that Joseph was not editor in name only but was an active and conscientious participant in the work of writing as well as of editing the Times and Seasons,
Figure 4. A front view of the three authors’ texts with the texts for the additional unsigned editorials during Joseph Smith’s editorship added (gray dots), showing that the unsigned editorials also group closely with Joseph Smith’s texts.

Figure 5. A front view of the three authors’ texts with the texts signed “Editor” added (blue dots) showing that these editorials also group closest to Joseph Smith’s texts, but they seem to be pulled toward John Taylor’s texts, which could indicate his influence on those editorials.

Figure 6. A front view of the three authors’ texts with the composite Central America text added (black dot), showing that it is clearly closest to the Joseph Smith texts and the editorials signed by Joseph Smith, signed “Editor,” or left unsigned. Further, among those texts, the Central America text is closest to the “Editor” texts, indicating that Joseph Smith is the most likely author of the composite text with the possible influence of John Taylor.
although he was influenced by his two apostolic brethren.

Even if the Central America editorials were a collaborative work, that still does not reduce the authoritative nature of the statements in the articles since Joseph clearly stated that he took full responsibility for what was published in the paper under his editorship. So, whether he penned the words in their entirety or only partially or even not at all, he authorized the publication of the words and thereby made them his own, since he stated about the content of the paper, “I alone stand for it.”

Claims that Joseph Smith was unaware of what was written in the Central America editorials, or that he considered their geographical opinions and interpretations to be inconsistent with his revelations, is not sustained by the historical and stylometric evidence.

Matthew Roper holds a BA degree in history and an MA degree in sociology from Brigham Young University. He is a research scholar at the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship. His current research focuses on questions of Book of Mormon authorship and on the intellectual history of Latter-day Saint scripture.

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.

Atul Nepal is a doctoral student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where he is studying applied economics. He received his undergraduate degree in actuarial science from Brigham Young University. He has extensive experience in textual analysis and statistical methods.
NOTES


5. “I received $40 dollars of Dr John M Bernhisel for President Joseph Smith also Stephens travels in central America in 2 volumes also one letter.” Wilford Woodruff Journal, 9 September 1841, in Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff’s Journal* (Midvale, UT Signature Books, 1983), 2:124. All further citations from the Wilford Woodruff Journal can be located in the Kenney source by date.


8. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 6 October 1841.

9. Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, 16 November 1841, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 533. The letter to Bernhisel, written in the hand of John Taylor, belongs to a class of historical documents that are extant only in the hand of scribes but are included in the Joseph Smith corpus (see, for example, Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 527–28, 551–52). The letter could suggest that Joseph Smith either dictated the letter or directed the apostle to write to Bernhisel on his behalf. In either case, it would be unlikely for Taylor to knowingly attribute views to the Prophet that were not his own.


23. Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 28 January 1842.

24. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 3 February 1842. The price was $6,600. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 4 February 1842.


32. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 19 September 1842.


34. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 7–12 November 1842.


37. In fact, LDS church history bears record of other incidences of collaboration in writing documents to be distributed to church members for their instruction and edification. The *Lectures on Faith* are one example of such a possible collaborative work product.
EVALUATING THE SOURCES OF 2 NEPHI 1:13–15
Shakespeare and the Book of Mormon

ROBERT F. SMITH

FROM THE EDITOR:
Robert F. Smith wrote this piece years ago as an occasional paper for the FARMS growing shelf of Book of Mormon papers. The version printed here is an update offered to long-standing readers and new readers alike to remind them, or perhaps inform them for the first time, that Joseph Smith did not crib from Shakespeare. In fact, Shakespeare probably cribbed from the same ancient sources that form the background out of which the Book of Mormon was produced.
ne oft-repeated claim made against the Book of Mormon is that Joseph Smith quoted Shakespeare at 2 Nephi 1:14. The claim began with Alexander Campbell, and many detractors have continued to repeat it.1 An undeniable similarity of expression does exist between them (the similar words in boldface):

- “But that the dread of something after death, / The undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveller returns” (Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.1.78–80; cf. Richard III, 1.1.128).
- “the cold and silent grave, from whence no traveller can return” (2 Nephi 1:14; cf. Mosiah 3:25, “a state of misery and endless torment from whence they can no more return”).

In response to this parallel, Mormon defenders have been quick to note that similar phraseology was available to both Joseph and Shakespeare in the form of KJV renditions of Job.

- “So he that goeth down to the grave shall come up no more. / He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him any more” (Job 7:9–10).
- “Before I go whence I shall not return” (Job 10:21).
- “When a few years are come, then I shall go the way whence I shall not return” (Job 16:22).

Such examples can be multiplied either bibli-cally (Psalms 39:13 [in Hebrew, v. 14]; 88:10–12 [Heb. 11–13]) or extrabiblically—as we shall see—and it should be clear that (1) such phrasing was available to Joseph in several forms, (2) translation normally requires the use of equivalent phrases in one’s own language, (3) such an expression is as modern as it is ancient, and (4) such a phrase cannot be critically considered in isolation from its broader context simply due to its ubiquity. In other words, the phrase alone proves nothing about the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. The facts can be made to fit any one of several scenarios of the most widely divergent sort, unless we broaden our purview somewhat.

Hugh Nibley showed us long ago what the contextual approach means and how it is to be applied, although he did no more than give us a few arresting glimpses into how well Lehi’s imagery fits into the ancient Near Eastern context.2 Indeed, a few more rational anti-Mormons have softened their single-minded devotion to the Shakespeare theory and have taken a broader, contextual approach, albeit of an anti-Mormon variety. This new sophistication is to be praised and adopts a policy long accepted by true scholars: isolated instances of similarity can easily be no more than coincidences. To say anything one way or the other requires a chain of circumstantial evidence—a pattern—and this has been the burden of Hugh Nibley’s efforts throughout his career as a patternist historian. Thus, a dispassionate observer finds patterns from the ancient world being placed over and against patterns from the nineteenth century in order to show the “true” origin of the Book of Mormon.

Unfortunately, neither side seems to pay a great deal of attention to what the other side is doing and saying. This is probably due to a sense of mutual disrespect or contempt, though Stephen Smoot suggests the double-edged sword of cognitive dissonance in the face of information that does not fit in with one’s preconceived worldview or religious tenets.3 I merely suggest that a calm view of both positions (in tandem), accompanied by familiarity with consensus in modern scholarship, might lead to resolution for many who stick to only one side of the issue.

However, where does the current negative approach leave us? It leaves us with a picture of an extraordinarily well-read raconteur in Joseph Smith Jr.—a young man with a well-integrated mind/personality and a lack of formal education who managed to assimilate a tremendous amount of data from the broadest possible range of sources available in his immediate area. Whether we see Joseph as engaged in a noble but misguided defense of God or (with most of his detractors) see him as a fraud, we are then left with the question of coherence: within reason, are the sources available in the early nineteenth century sufficient to explain the origins of the Book of Mormon in naturalistic terms? Does the naturalistic theory cohere with the facts? It might be nice to

In the end, one is faced with self-contradictory evidence, with but one scholarly way out of the dilemma: Occam’s Razor: Parsimony.
say yes and be done with it. It is at least a convenient solution to the nagging problem of having to engage in never-ending and unpredictable research projects.

In the end, one is faced with self-contradictory evidence, with but one scholarly way out of the dilemma: Occam’s Razor. Parsimony. The explanation that does the least violence to the facts is the best. No matter that we are left with plenty of imponderable details. There is an abundance of conflicting “evidence,” and it is fashionable in some circles to laugh at the Bible for most of the same reasons that it is fashionable to guffaw at the Book of Mormon.

The Broader Context

The present state of research permits us to take the entire section of 2 Nephi 1:13–15 and to demonstrate that the constellation of ideas and expressions found there (and in parallel texts) were available throughout the ancient Near East in Lehi’s own time. I have appended a chart with some of the possibilities (see the appendix), but the chart should not be taken to mean that Joseph Smith could have put such a section together from the literature of his day (including biblical literature).

Even the book of Job does a lot of borrowing of ideas and imagery. It was dated by the late William F. Albright to the seventh or early sixth century BC, and the Bible is replete with such parallels. In any case, our horizons go beyond the Bible.

In a work unintentionally dedicated to the concepts contained in 2 Nephi 1:13–15, Jan Zandee gives us some important clues as to just what those horizons may be. Lehi’s declaration that death is an enemy that can be defeated, for example, is in accord with ancient Egyptian belief. Death “was the source of eternal life for mankind. According to the Egyptians man becomes in death the peer of the gods.” Zandee and Sigmund Mowinckel seem to share the view that Semites held a dualistic conception of death, the latter saying that “neither Israel nor early Judaism knew of a faith in any resurrection nor is such a faith represented in the psalms.”

However, Mitchell Dahood, in criticizing and refuting this notion, has provided us with several examples of a biblical paradisiacal “Elysian Fields” concept, for example, in Psalms 5:8 (Heb. 9); 23:2–3; 36:9–10; 56:13 (Heb. 14); 61:4 (Heb. 5); 97:11; 116:9; and Isaiah 26:19.

Moreover, the fact that ‘ere (“earth; netherworld”) and ‘āpar (“dust, mud; netherworld”) appear in parallel in Hebrew, Ugaritic, and Book of Mormon sources is an important indication that Lehi needn’t have been a pro-Egyptian revisionist of Hebrew religion. Yet it is a fact that the Old Testament lacks any clear and unambiguous statements on this issue—hence the need for our concern for the clearly monistic Egyptian belief in a life after death. True, there were parallels with the negative Semitic idea of She’ol (= Sumerian KUR), and Lehi’s statement, out of context, might seem comparable. The concept is an old one:

- “May you not go on the roads of the western ones [the dead]; They who go on them [travelers] do not return” (Pyramid Text 697 §2175ab).
- “There is nobody who returns from there” (P. Harris 500, VI/8).
- “Behold, there is nobody who has gone, who has returned” (P. Harris 500, VII/2–3).
- “None that have gone have come back” (Song of Vizier Paser, line 12).

Zandee speaks of this also as the Babylonian concept of the Netherworld: iršūt là tāri, “land without return”—“where dust is their nourishment and mud their food.” Here we may compare the Sumerian KUR.NU.GI₄, “land of no return.” On her he felt that the composition was made in northern Israel, or near Phoenicia. As evidence of this, Albright noted the contemporary Phoenician usage of the name of the Egyptian Moon-god, Thoth, in the same vocalization as is found in Job 38:36. Job also contains material very similar to the earlier hymn of Pharaoh Akhenaton to the Sun-disk Aton. Phoenicia is thus a likely intermediary in the transmission of certain Egyptian features to classical Israel. I limit my comments here to Job only because of the claims that Lehi or Joseph must have been cribbing from a Shakespeare who sounds suspiciously like Job.

Lehi’s use of the broad-ranging store of ancient Near Eastern images and styles of expression did not prevent his adherence to a truly Hebraic religious view, eschatological and apocalyptical as it may have been.
descent into the Netherworld, the gatekeeper of the Netherworld asks the goddess Inanna:

> Why, pray, have you come to the "Land of No Return,"
> On the road whose traveler returns never,
> How has your heart led you? (Sumerian Descent of Inanna)17

The Semitic version of the same story has lines similarly applicable to Lehi’s imagery:

> To the house from which he who enters never goes forth; To the road whose path does not lead back (Descent of Ishtar, obv., lines 5–6).

However, as Zandee demonstrates, most Egyptian sources exhibit a strongly positive view of resurrection and eternal life, and the Coffin Texts (CT) and Pyramid Texts (PT) closely parallel the very words of the full context of 2 Nephi 1:14:

- Rise, shake off your dust! (CT 71ab I 297)
- Raise yourself, throw off your dust, . . . loosen your bonds, . . . ! (PT 553 §1363ac, following Faulkner; CT 248ae III 341)
- Raise yourself, shake off the dust of the earth which is on your flesh! (PT 373 §654ad, following Faulkner and Zandee)
- Throw off your dust, loosen your bonds! (PT 676 §§2008ab; 2009a, following Faulkner)18
- Your ties are loosened! (PT 358 §593b)

Zandee hints that these ties (šš.t) or bands of death are not necessarily mummy bandages.19 Egyptian šš also means “knot; vertebra,” which shows a semantic range sufficient to include the idea of “chains” (2 Nephi 1:13) as well. Zandee lists a host of other words that have similar meanings and usage, noting in particular PT 703 §2202:20

- Horus comes to you, that he may loosen your ties, that he may burst your chains!

Sleep too is a major aspect of death, as we see in PT 670 §1975ab:21

- You go away and return, you sleep and wake up.

Other examples follow:

- Truly, I live (again), after having fallen asleep [qdr]. (Book of the Dead 41, 111, Theban rec.)
- You who hates sleep [qdr], who is made tired, rise! (PT 247 §260b)

So also for Lehi’s concept of the “silent grave”: Egyptian ḳgrt is the name of the realm of the dead—also ḳ ḳgrt, “Land of Silence” (from gr, “be silent”), while the god of the dead (Osiris) is called the “Lord of Silence.”22

- Landing at the land that loves silence. (Song of Neferhotep I, line 9)
- There is no coming back. (Song of Neferhotep I, line 24)23

Other observations from Zandee may also be found pertinent to Mormons—for example, on the second death,24 sin,25 and so forth. Lehi’s statement in 2 Nephi 1:15 (intended as a kind of “prophetic perfect”), “But behold, the Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell!” is paralleled in the final chapter of the same chiastic book (2 Nephi 33:6) as well as biblically. Lehi’s use of the broad-ranging store of ancient Near Eastern images and styles of expression did not prevent his adherence to a truly Hebraic religious view, eschatological and apocalyptic as it may have been.

This should give some hint of what lies in store for those who systematically apply knowledge of Egyptian language, religion, and culture to an understanding of the Book of Mormon—a book written in Egyptian script, if not in that very language. This also demonstrates that the purported Shakespearean quotation can hardly be given credence as something

a-na KUR NU.GI4.A qaq-qa-ri [la ta-ri] “to the land of no returning, the territory [of not coming back].” KUR is a Sumerogram that means “land,” and NU.GI4.A is a Sumerogram meaning “not returning” in this Akkadian Iron Age text. Transcription and translation by Paul Hoskisson.
from a late period. Shakespeare is a relative latecomer to the phrase, and his context does not fit the complete ancient Near Eastern image of death and the Netherworld—though I have provided a mere sampling of the context here—as well as Lehi’s does. If later phrasing just happens (perhaps not so coincidentally) to fit certain portions of our context, then so much the better for Joseph Smith—whose burden was to provide a contemporary mode of expressing such terms insofar as his own limited education allowed. The parallels with the KJV and with other books available to Joseph cannot be taken as anything more than an effort at making a good, modern translation simply because the ancient Near Eastern parallels are so much closer and better integrated in the Book of Mormon than examples more contemporary with Joseph.

Robert F. Smith has studied languages and archaeology at BYU, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, UCLA, and California State University, Long Beach. He was the editor of the FARMS Book of Mormon Critical Text from 1979 through 1987.

---

**Appendix**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2 Nephi 1</th>
<th>Book of Mormon and Biblical Parallels</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13. O that ye would awake;</td>
<td>2 Nephi 8:24–5; Judges 5:12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awake from a deep sleep,</td>
<td>Isaiah 26:19; 51:17; 52:1 ūri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yea, even from the sleep of hell,</td>
<td>Isaiah 14:15 šĕ’ōl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And shake off the awful chains by which ye are bound,</td>
<td>Alma 5:9–11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which are the chains which bind the children of men,</td>
<td>Proverbs 15:11; Luke 16:26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That they are carried away captive</td>
<td>Isaiah 26:19; 51:17; 52:2–3; Psalm 90:3 ḥāpar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down to the eternal gulf of misery and woe.</td>
<td>Psalm 88:4 (Heb. 5) ṣyd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Awake! and arise from the dust,</td>
<td>Psalm 30:3, 9 (Heb. 4, 10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And hear the words of a trembling parent,</td>
<td>Joshua 23:14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose limbs ye must soon lay down</td>
<td>2 Nephi 33:6; Psalms 56:13; 86:13; 116:8, 16 šĕ’ōl</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the cold and silent grave,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From whence no traveler can return;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A few more days</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I go the way of all the earth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. But behold,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Lord hath redeemed my soul from hell,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have beheld his glory,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>And I am encircled about eternally</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the arms of his love.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The overall theme of the appendix is elaborated on in 2 Nephi 1:21–23, but in general see the relevant Old Testament and New Testament perspectives studied by Howard Bream.
NOTES


8. Zandee, Death as an Enemy, 1, 7.


18. All these Egyptian examples are cited in Zandee, Death as an Enemy, 104–5.


21. Zandee, Death as an Enemy, 81–85; this and following two examples.


25. Zandee, Death as an Enemy, 41–44.


27. CT 71ab I 297; PT 373 §654a; 553 §1363a; 676 §§2008ab, 2009a.

28. CT 248ac III 341; PT 358 §593b; 553 §1363ac; 703 §2202; Psalm 18:5–6 (Heb.).

29. CT 71ab I 297; PT 222 §260b; 373 §654ad; 553 §1363ac; 676 §§2008a, 2009a; Eg. õmœ, “dust”; Albright, Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan, 66149, in Amarna letters; cf. Genesis 3:19; 18:27.

30. PT 373 §654; 676 §2008.


32. PT 697 §2175ab; ’Intef VI/6; VI/1–3; Paser, 12; Neferhotep I, 24; Job 7:9–10, 10:20–1, 14:12, 16:22.

33. PT 373 §654ad; sm3 t3, “burial, union with the earth”; going into the Netherworld; Umberto Cassuto, “Biblical and Canaanite Literature (conclusion),” Tarbiz 14 (1942) 1–10, for parallel of “earth” Il “dust,” #1 (Heb.).


HAS OLISHEM BEEN DISCOVERED?

JOHN GEE

FROM THE EDITOR:
Over the years, some LDS scholars, including yours truly, and a few non-LDS scholars have proposed that the “Ur of the Chaldees,” of Abraham is to be located in the northern Levant, not southern Mesopotamia. There is as of today no decisive evidence, though, that would force this conclusion. But then, neither is there for the southern candidate. Therefore, whenever new assertions are made, no matter how weak, I have thought our readers may find these claims of interest. John Gee presents here one of the latest assertions, tenuous and no doubt premature though it may be, and explains how it fits into the northern Levant model for Ur of the Chaldees.
On 16 August 2013, a report appeared in the Turkish news service Anadolu Agency in which Turkish archaeologists claim to have discovered the city of Abraham near Kilis in Turkey. The news report claims that “new archaeological excavations have revealed traces of Prophet Abraham’s stay in the vicinity, as well as a treasure from Alexander the Great.” The report cites as its authority Atilla Engin, an associate professor in the Archaeology Department of Cumhuriyet University. The report does not note that Professor Engin and his dig are associated with the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut and the University of Liverpool in England nor that excavations have been proceeding for over twenty years. Professor Engin is reported to have said that “according to a papyrus document from the Iron Age, a lost city which we have found in the region is where the Prophet Abraham lived. It will make great contributions to the region and the country’s tourism.”

The press release continues: “In terms of its size, the Oylum tumulus is one of the largest in Turkey, but more importantly, we are here because it was a significant kingdom in the Bronze Age. Cuneiform documents and seal stamps of Hittite kings obtained during three excavation seasons prove to us that this area was the center of a kingdom. We think that this place is the ancient city of Ullis. Documents from 3,000 B.C. show that this city was very important. But of course we need more documents and findings to prove it. We are still working on it.” “The name of Ullis is mentioned in ancient Akat documents. It matches with the name mentioned in Hittite documents. In the papyrus documents, this city is said to be the city where the Prophet Abraham had lived. In the Ullis plain, there is a center, which is related to a name, Abraam, but this center was sought in the eastern Mediterranean. We have reached important information about it, too.” All this tantalizing information surfaces from a press report. We examine the report’s conclusions in light of other available information.

A 2012 report on the Early Bronze (3300-2000 BC) and Middle Bronze (2000-1600 BC) Age levels and a surface survey of the site are perhaps more modest and detailed than the news reports. The site is the largest archaeological site of the Kilis plain during the Early Bronze and Middle Bronze periods. Indeed it is “one of the largest settlement mounts in Southern Turkey and dominates the plain of Kilis.” So, “according to its strategic location and imposing size, Oylum Höyük must be regarded as the centre of the Kilis Plain and the adjacent lands in modern Syria during the Bronze Age.” It was the major city or town of the area and almost twice the size of the next largest site in the Kilis Plain. Thirty-eight Middle Bronze Age sites are known in the Kilis Plain north of the Qoueiq River. For those proposing that it is the site of Ulišum mentioned in the Naram-Sin inscription, being a major city in the general region of Ebla is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for this to be the site of Ulišum.

Another necessary condition for identification with Naram-Sin’s Ulišum is a destruction layer in the Early Bronze IV period. “The building layer ended in a conflagration that destroyed most of the walls, and left hardly any intact inventory in the rooms except for ground stone implements such as querns.” The city had burned to the ground and was abandoned until the Middle Bronze II period.

The site was surrounded by a fortification wall, attributable to the Bronze Age, built of “huge irregular basalt blocks” that are comparable to “other Bronze Age sites in Northern Syria west of the Euphrates.” The wall is about 50 meters from the mound and enclosed part of the valley.
Middle Bronze Age fortification wall was higher up the slope. Contemporary sites in the Habur region, such as Tell Chuera and Tell Beydar, also have upper and lower citadels that are “typical of many of the northern Syrian centers.” Despite the fortification walls, the city seems to have been destroyed twice during Middle Bronze II times.

Oylum Höyük is the largest site in the Kilis plain and clearly dominated the whole plain in the Middle Bronze Age.

One of the features of the Middle Bronze Age city is a form of plumbing in which “ceramic pipes laid perpendicular to the walls served as water drains.” This is a step up from most sites in northern Syria, which used stone channels. Despite these technological improvements, the area seems to have been a bit poorer, which might account for the use of less-expensive ceramic rather than stone. One of the striking features of the Middle Bronze Age city is that people were buried “hidden under the floors, or integrated in the walls.” This feature, however, is typical for Middle Bronze Age sites in northern Syria where “burials under house floors were common.”

Excavations are ongoing, and “the excavated part represents only a miniscule aperture, when compared to the mound at large.” The evidence from the Bronze Age “remains partly patchy and includes gaps.”

The recent excavation report says that “no radiocarbon dates are available, neither exist textual data to determine the historical importance of Oylum.” This seems to contradict the news report. Although the publication date for the report is 2012, the information may not reflect finds from even a couple of years before that. Tablets in Old Babylonian script were found in the 2011 excavation season in the Middle Bronze I level. Typically, there can be a ten-year lag between the discovery of an inscription and the publication of the inscription.

Oylum Höyük is the largest site in the Kilis plain and clearly dominated the whole plain in the Middle Bronze Age. The site would explain the wording in the Book of Abraham that “Potiphar’s Hill [was] at the head of the plain of Olishem” (Abraham 1:10).

Olishem (phonetically similar to Ulišum) is mentioned in this scripture only because the whole plains took their name from the city; apparently Ur was located in the plains, but the text never says that Abraham was at Olishem. Nothing precludes this site from being Abraham’s Olishem, but nothing requires it to be either. Ur should be in the same plain and about five to twenty miles from Olishem.

We have two pieces of inscriptive evidence for Ulišum. The earliest comes from a record of conquests of Naram-Sin, who was a ruler in Babylon during the Akkadian period (2254–2218 BC), where Ulišum is listed as being in the general area of Ebla and near the Mediterranean Sea. The second is in execution texts from Egypt during the reigns of Sesostris I and Sesostris III. While the execution texts from the reign of Sesostris I seem random, the texts from the reign of Sesostris III follow the coast from north to south with incursions inland following routes of travel. Ulišum comes in the following sequence: Ebla (yḫšy), Ridu (rytš), and Ulišum (šwššmm). This sequence would place Olishem northward of Ebla (Tell-Mardikh) by two major Middle Bronze II cities. Oylum Höyük is in the correct vicinity for Ulišum.

Scholars dated the papyrus mentioned in the news article to the Iron Age, which puts it much later than Abraham. Without archaeological context or content of the papyrus to judge, it is difficult to know what to make of the claim.

If indeed tablets in Hittite from the site identify it as Ullis, then it is probably the Ulišum that Naram-Sin attacked and is a likely candidate for Olishem. If Oylum Höyük is Olishem, then Ur of the Chaldees should be one of the dozens of Middle Bronze II sites in the Kilis plain. We await further discoveries and publications. At present, given the many uncertainties, we can regard this identification as promising but not proven.
2. See note 1.
3. http://www.dainst.org/de/project/t%C3%BCrkei-oylum-h%C3%B6y%C3%BCk?ft=all, accessed 4 September 2013.
4. See note 1.
5. See note 1.
20. Many have sought to read this toponym as Jerusalem. This has phonetic problems and does not match the trajectory of the routes in the execution lists. For the phonetic problems, see Gee and Ricks, “Historical Plausibility” 75–76, 92–93. It also might have archaeological problems; see Ammon Ben-Tor, “Do the Execration Texts Reflect an Accurate Picture of the Contemporary Settlement Map of Palestine?” in Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context, ed. Yairah Amit, Ehud Ben Zvi, Israel Finkelstein, and Oded Lipschitz (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 68–70.
BOOK OF MORMON STUDENTS MEET
Interesting Convention Held in Provo Saturday and Sunday

The following includes excerpts from a newspaper article, “Book of Mormon Students Meet,” Deseret Evening News, 25 May 1903.

PRESIDENT [JOSEPH F.] SMITH PRESIDES

Afternoon Session
The afternoon session commenced by the congregation singing: “Come, let us anew,” etc. Prayer was offered by Elder Charles W. Penrose.

The meeting was devoted to a consideration of the geography of the Book of Mormon—the location of the countries and cities inhabited by the Nephites after they landed on this continent.

FROM THE EDITOR:
Book of Mormon geography has no doubt been a topic of discussion since before the book was published. Through the years, it seems, the discussion has heated up and then cooled down. A little more than a hundred years ago, a two-day “convention” was held at what would become Brigham Young University, and the topic was the Book of Mormon, including Book of Mormon geography. The President of the Church, various General Authorities, the president of Brigham Young Academy, and other interested individuals attended. Neither then nor now has there been any unanimity about the topic. For those interested in Book of Mormon geography and those who enjoy reading historical documents, we offer here a transcription of parts of the Deseret Evening News report on the conference. The closing remarks by the President of the Church, Joseph F. Smith, are as current today as they ever were.
Book of Mormon Geography

Prof. B. Cl[u]ff, Jr., was the first speaker. He referred to the indefinite manner in which the Book of Mormon writers described the land of Zarahemla, and the consequent uncertainty in the minds of Book of Mormon students on the matter of its location. He accounted for the lack of definiteness by the Book of Mormon writers on this point, by calling attention to the fact that, unless a person is writing a geography, he is not, as a rule, exact in the geographical description of the place where he lives. This was so with the Book of Mormon writers; but they wrote of other countries and places, locating them with reference to Zarahemla. Prof. Cluff read a great number of passages from the Book of Mormon, thus describing other cities and lands, which indicated that Zarahemla was located south of a narrow neck of land, that it was north of a plateau or higher country than Zarahemla, and that it was on one of the banks of a river having a north and south direction. This with other historical and descriptive Book of Mormon data, to which reference was made by the speaker, caused him to believe that Zarahemla was situated on the Magdalena river—the river Sidon of the Book of Mormon—in the United States of Columbia and Venezuela. The speaker referred to the fact that some students could not reconcile the statements as to time consumed in traveling from one place to another with Zarahemla being at the point claimed by him. This the speaker did not think was incompatible with his claim, and in support of this cited the rapidity with which the Indians, now in that country, the descendants of the Nephites and Lamanites, travel. From this initial point Prof. Cluff located a large number of cities and countries mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

Location of Zarahemla

Elder Robert Holmes, of Spanish Fork, had a different opinion as to the location of the land and city of Zarahemla and believed it was situated at some point in Honduras, and gave his reasons from Book of Mormon writings. Elder Holmes was quite earnest in his opinion and had evidently studied the question very closely.

President Smith’s Advice

At the close of Elder Holmes’ address, President Smith spoke briefly and expressed the idea that the question of the situation of the city was one of interest certainly, but if it could not be located the matter was not of vital importance, and if there were differences of opinion on the question it would not affect the salvation of the people; and he advised against students considering it of such vital importance as the principals of the Gospel. . . .

Location of Nephite Lands

Elder B. H. Roberts expressed pleasure to be privileged to address the convention, and spoke of the apparent necessity for such a gathering. He desired to speak upon the question of locating the Nephite lands, and somewhat upon the bringing forth of the Book of Mormon. Where the peoples of Nephi, Mulok and the Jaredites were was a matter of secondary consideration. The Book of Mormon was not a physical geography but a history of the hand dealings of God with this people on this continent, to be brought forth in this day for the purpose of
Internal Evidences

Dr. James E. Talmage spoke of the internal evidence of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon, which had been admitted, not only by our people, but by others who had examined it. These evidences were the diversity of style among the writers, which proved it to have been written, as is claimed, by different writers at different times; the consistency of its claims with the external evidences; its agreement with the Bible, etc.

Dr. Talmage related several instances showing that educators and scientists were interested in the book and becoming acquainted with it; and he believed the time would come when it would be accepted as having an important bearing on the history of this continent and its people.

President Smith endorsed the remarks of Dr. Talmage and Elder Roberts, and again cautioned the students against making the union question—the location of cities and lands—of equal importance with the doctrines contained in the book. ■
FROM THE EDITOR:
In congratulating a young woman on her success in a Book of Mormon oratorical contest, President Heber J. Grant presents her a copy of the book and shares in the accompanying letter his love for the Book of Mormon and his testimony of its divinity, a testimony that he gained as a youth.
Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship

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.