

Chapter 15

The Book of Mormon

A scanty six pages (pp. 169-174) are dedicated to the Book of Mormon, with the authors giving a weak and facile analysis of the text and what they perceive to be problems with the volume. Their ignorance of the Book of Mormon is highlighted on the first page (p. 169) by claiming that it was the year 421 CE (or, as they prefer, A.D.) when the Lamanites destroyed the Nephites. However, as a cursory reading of the Book of Mormon would reveal, it was 385 CE, not 421 CE, when the Nephites were destroyed in the battle at Cumorah. The authors confuse the date of the final battle and when Moroni buried the plates of the Book of Mormon.

Furthermore, they claim that “the record, on gold plates, was buried by [Mormon’s] son Moroni, the last living Nephite, in the hill Cumorah.”

Firstly, the Book of Mormon text makes it clear that Moroni was not the only Nephite who survived the battle at Cumorah (Mormon 8:2).

Moreover, the hill in New York is NOT the Hill Cumorah of the Book of Mormon. While some have accepted such to be the case, the internal geography of the Book of Mormon refutes such. The Book of Mormon makes clear that the demise of both the Jaredites and the Nephites took place near the narrow neck of land. Yet New York is thousands of miles away from any plausible configuration that could be described as this narrow neck of land. Thus, the scripture itself rules out the idea that the Nephites perished near Palmyra, and that the hill in New York was not known as Cumorah until the mid-1830s,¹ becoming a namesake.²

Furthermore, Mormon 6:6 claims that the records Mormon had, *except* the plates he gave his son, Moroni, which would be the source of the Book of Mormon, were buried in Cumorah, revealing that the final resting place of the Book of Mormon plates is not the same hill as the Cumorah of the Book of Mormon.

The Book of Mormon’s internal geography, material culture, and so forth, gives 15 main characteristics of either the Hill Cumorah or the surrounding area:³

- Cities in the vicinity of the hill
- Towers or steeped pyramids for religious purposes
- Efficient agriculture
- Metallurgy

¹ Oliver Cowdery, *Messenger and Advocate*, July 1835, 158-59

² This seems to be how D&C 128:20, a *letter*, not a divine revelation, uses the name.

³ David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Utah: Horizon Publishers, 1981), 106-122.

- Formal political states
- Organised religion
- Idolatry at certain times
- Craft specialisation
- Trade
- Writing
- Weaponry in the immediate vicinity of the Hill
- Astronomy
- Calendar
- Cement
- Wheels

With the exception of crafts and trade, of which there were but little, the vicinity of Palmyra vicinity does not match up to the criteria above.⁴ Indeed, most serious Book of Mormon scholars have shown that *all* Book of Mormon events fit the milieu of Mesoamerica, namely southern Mexico, Northern Guatemala, and some models, Belize. Contra some popular belief, however, most models have little, if any, overlap with Maya areas. The hill that best matches the Book of Mormon's Hill Cumorah is Cerro Vigia in Southern Mexico, fitting *all* the criteria above. Indeed, even weaponry has been found around the general vicinity of the hill.⁵

Other geographic and topographic criteria necessitated for any plausible candidate for Cumorah (all of which Cerro Vigia ["Lookout Hill"] fulfils, that the hill in New York, for the most part, is found lacking) are:⁶

- Near Eastern seacoast
- On a coastal plain and possibly near other mountains and valleys
- One day's journey south of a large body of water
- In an area of many rivers and waters
- Presence of fountains
- The abundance of water must provide a military advantage
- Escape route to the land southward
- Hill must be large enough to provide a view of hundreds of thousands of bodies
- Hill must be a significant landmark
- The hill should be free-standing so people can camp around it
- In temperate climate with no cold or snow
- In a volcanic zone subject to earthquakes

As to the question of how the plates could have ended up in New York, parallel journeys in history lend themselves to the plausibility of Moroni surviving a trip of several thousand miles, after several decades, through strange peoples and lands. We have a

⁴ Ibid., 86-87

⁵ ibid., 119

⁶ ibid., 93-105

striking case of a trip much like the one Moroni may have made. In the mid-sixteenth century, David Ingram, a shipwrecked English sailor, walked in 11 months through completely strange Indian Territory from Tampico, Mexico, to the St. John's River at the present border between Maine and Canada.⁷ His remarkable journey would have been about the same distance as Moroni's, in a fraction of the time taken by Moroni, and over essentially the same route. So Moroni's getting the plates to New York even under his own power seems feasible.

The Fullness of the Gospel

The authors ask "in view of the [fact that Book of Mormon is said to contain the fullness of the gospel], why does the Book of Mormon contain nothing about many key Mormon doctrines?" (p. 171). However, such reasoning results from the misconception that the term "gospel" refers to all truth from God, and it is unfortunate that Latter-day Saints have come to use it in that sense.

Both the Book of Mormon and other scriptures define the gospel more narrowly, as the good news of Christ's atonement, with its first principles being faith, repentance, baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost (1 Nephi 10:14; 15:13-14; 3 Nephi 27:13-21; Ether 4:18; D&C 3:20; 13:1; 20:9; 27:5; 33:11-12; 39:5-6; 42:12; 76:40-42; 84:26-27; 107:20; 135:3; 138:2-4, 57; JS-H 1:34; Articles of Faith 3-4). D&C 93:51 uses the term "the gospel of salvation," while Abraham 2:11 speaks of "the blessings of the Gospel which are the blessings of salvation, even of life eternal." In Jacob 7:6, the gospel is defined as "the doctrine of Christ," referring to the doctrine concerning Christ, rather than the totality of Christ's teachings, since he had not yet been born when these words were uttered. Elsewhere, the Book of Mormon equates the fullness of the gospel with coming "to the knowledge of the true Messiah" (1 Nephi 10:14; 15:13-14).

The Book of Mormon contains the most lucid explanation of the atonement of Christ found in any of the scriptures (see, especially, 2 Nephi 2, 9; Mosiah 15; Alma 34, 42), and therefore clearly qualifies as containing "the fullness of the gospel."⁸

Furthermore, contra the authors (pp. 171-72), many of the doctrines that separate Latter-day Saints from Protestants and Catholics are contained in the Book of Mormon, such as Melchizedek Priesthood and pre-existence in Alma 13, deification (AKA theosis, apotheosis, divinisation) in 3 Nephi 28, and many scholars, both Mormon⁹ and non-

⁷ "Man Alone," *Christian Science Monitor* (June 1, 1967), p. 16, as cited by John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985), 45

⁸ John A. Tvedtnes, *The most correct book: insights from a Book of Mormon scholar* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Cornerstone, 1999), 292-93

⁹ E.g., Daniel C. Peterson, "Nephi and his Asherah: A note on 1 Nephi 11:8-23," in *Mormons, scripture, and the ancient world: studies in honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 191-244

Mormon,¹⁰ have interpreted 1 Nephi 11:8-23 as containing an authentic Asherah motif, something that could have resonations towards the muted Mormon belief in a mother in heaven.¹¹

Changes in the Book of Mormon

It is true that there has been changes made to the Book of Mormon since its initial publication in 1830. Notwithstanding, such has not been kept hidden from the members of the Church. In the section of the 1981 edition of the text, “A brief explanation about the Book of Mormon,” we read: “*About this edition:* Some minor errors in the text have been perpetuated in past editions of the Book of Mormon. This edition contains corrections that seem appropriate to bring the material into conformity with prepublication manuscripts and early editions edited by the Prophet Joseph Smith”

All scriptures - whether the Old or New Testament,¹² or the Book of Mormon - have undergone changes. Hundreds of the changes made were merely to correct typesetting errors so they would coincide with the original manuscript. A prime example of a justified change can be seen in a comparison of Helaman 3:23 between the 1830 and 1837 editions:

...the secret combinations which Gadianon the *nobler* had established, in the more settled parts of the land (1830 edition)

...the secret combinations which Gadianon the *robber* had established, in the more settled parts of the land (1837 edition)

Oliver Cowdery transcribed this section and the printer mistook Cowdery's “r” for an “n” and his “b” for an “l.” The mistake was an innocent one but it needed to be set aright, as were similar mistakes made in many other verses.¹³

¹⁰ Margaret Barker, “Joseph Smith and the pre-exilic religion,” in *The worlds of Joseph Smith: A bicentennial conference at the library of congress* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 69-82

¹¹ For more on the concept of a consort of God and/or a heavenly mother figure in heaven, see William G. Dever, *Did God have a wife? Archaeology and folk religion in ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William D. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005); Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess* 3rd enlarged edition (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990); Peter Schafer, *Mirror of his beauty: Feminine images of God from the Bible to the early Kabbalah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002); Margaret Barker, “Wisdom, Queen of Heaven,” in *The Great High Priest: The temple roots of Christian liturgy* (London: T&T Clarke, 2003), 229-61 and Kevin L. Barney, “Do we have a mother in heaven?” available at www.fairlds.org

¹² For scholarly documentation on changes made in the New Testament of significant theological importance, see Bart D. Ehrman, *The Orthodox corruption of scripture: the effect of early Christological controversies on the text of the New Testament* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993)

¹³ Diane E. Wirth, *A challenge to the critics: scholarly evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers and Distributors, 1986), 91-2

Some critics often cite D&C 17:6 where the Lord declares the translation to be “true.” What they fail to understand is that the Book of Mormon never was labelled as perfect or infallible.

Book of Mormon authors themselves admitted their susceptibility to error (1 Nephi 19:6; 2 Nephi 33:11; 3 Nephi 23:12-13; Mormon 8:12, 16-17; 9:31; Ether 12:23-25). Even the Book of Mormon title page admits, “if there are faults they are the mistakes of men; wherefore, condemn not the things of God.”

As recently as 1978 [the LDS Church] changed “white and delightsome” [2 Nephi 30:6] to “pure and delightsome” where the Book of Mormon promises Lamanites that their curse of dark skin will be lifted if they repent. (P. 172)

There are a number of problems with this charge. Firstly, Joseph Smith himself was the one responsible for the change of “white” to “pure” in the 1840 edition of the Book of Mormon. However, because the British edition of the text contemporary with the 1840 Nauvoo edition of the text, the “white” rendition remained in subsequent editions of the text (e.g., the 1879 and 1920) until 1981. Furthermore, “white” need not refer to phenotypic characteristics. In the biblical texts, “white” is often used in reference to purity (e.g., Daniel 11:35; 12:10). Finally, contra Mike and Ann Thomas, the people being addressed by Nephi are not the Lamanites, but the Jews and Gentiles (2 Nephi 30:3). Clearly, the concept of purity is being discussed, as Joseph Smith would have undoubtedly known that most Jews are white, not black, in skin colour.

Another change the authors view as significant pertain to the Benjamin/Mosiah variant in Mosiah 21:28 and Ether 4:1.

The first thing that one must realise is that Mosiah 21:2 is one of two passages that chronicles the same historical data. The parallel passage is found in Mosiah 8:13-14. The presence of parallel passages of the same event is consistently lost on critics, yet it is crucial in making sense of the scope of this problem.

The Book of Mosiah does not follow a seamless and sequential chronology. It is a composite record containing records within the record, full of “flashback” accounts and records.

In Mosiah 8:13-14, there are two important items to note: First, no name is given to identify the King of Zarahemla. We are not told in this pericope whether Ammon was talking about Mosiah or Benjamin. The second item to note is that this passage is a first-hand account, the words out of the mouth of Ammon. In contrast, while Mosiah 8 is a direct quote, the Mosiah 21 account is a narrative history and part of a Zeniffite record, one a direct quote and one a narrative, the latter either by a Zeniffite scribe or by an interpolation by Mormon.

It is always possible that Ammon departed on his expedition prior to the death of King Benjamin.¹⁴ And, if this is the case, it is very possible that Ammon would have mentioned King Benjamin by name, and, therefore, Ammon would have used the name Benjamin rather than Mosiah.¹⁵

Mosiah 8:3 is conducive to this hypothesis:

And he also rehearsed unto them the last words which King Benjamin had taught them, and explained them to the people of king Limhi, so that they might understand all the words which he spake.

So, them verses later when Ammon tells Limhi of Zarahemla's king who has the gift to translated, yet doesn't mention a name, it is not surprising that the Zeniffite scribe or Mormon inserted the name Benjamin. It is Benjamin who Ammon was referring to a few verses earlier in Mosiah 8:3 and it would also be reasonable to understand Moroni's like interpolation of the Ether 4:1 passage that contained the name "Benjamin" in the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon.

While we are unable to be sure as to the reason for the change in Mosiah 21:28, a change which is perhaps the most "problematic" change in the Book of Mormon, it is possible that Joseph Smith translated this correctly and should the verse should not have been changed. It is also very possible that Joseph Smith translated this correctly, yet needed to be changed to correct a scribal error. It is important, too, to note that the Book of Mormon authors, including Moroni himself, cautioned us not to expect an inerrant or infallible book (e.g., the Title Page of the Book of Mormon; Mormon 9:33; 1 Nephi 19:6).

Interesting thing is that we have a parallel with the biblical texts. We read in 1 Kings 15:1-5 that Abijam (also called Abijah [2 Chronicles 12:16]) became king of Judah after the death of his father Rehoboam and that, despite his sins, the Lord preserved his kingship for the sake of his ancestor, David. Then, in 1 Kings 15:6-7, we read:

And now there was war between *Rehoboam* and Jeroboam all the days of his life. Now the rest of the acts of Abijam, and all that he died, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam.

¹⁴ It would strain credulity to claim that Benjamin was not a seer, as his father was, and his son was, too.

¹⁵ King Benjamin lived three years after his son Mosiah was made king. It was at the end of these three years that the expedition was sent to the Land of Nephi, where the plates of Ether were found. After relinquishing his kingship, Benjamin may have continued to act as a seer for the three-year interval. The chronology in this part of the Book of Mormon is not at all that clear and we do not know how long Ammon and his brethren were in the Land of Nephi. It could have been only a matter of weeks or months. It is not inconceivable then, that Benjamin passed away shortly after their return, which still would have been "after three years" (Mosiah 6:5).

The name Rehoboam is anachronistic, since he was dead and the passage was intended to describe events in the days of his son Abijah. The error is actually corrected in a few Hebrew manuscripts and in the Peshitta (Christian Aramaic) version to read, “And there was war between *Abijah the son of Rehoboam*.” The parallel passage in 2 Chronicles 13:2 reads, “And there was war between Abijah and Jereoboam.”

On page 173, we read the following:

In the 1830 edition of the Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 11:18 says, “Behold, the virgin which thou seest, is the mother of God, after the manner of flesh.” 1 Nephi 11:21 says, “And the angel said to me, behold the Lamb of God, yea, even the Eternal Father!” And in 1 Nephi 13:40 says, “And shall make known to all kindreds, tongues, and people, that the Lamb of God is the Eternal Father, and the Saviour of the world.” However, in the 1981 edition, these verses read: “is the mother of the *Son of God*”; “even the *Son of the Eternal Father!*” and “that the Lamb of God is the *Son of the Eternal Father!*” respectively. Didn’t God really know who Jesus was?

Are these changes really doctrinally significant? Latter-day Saints believe that Jesus Christ is God, and in fact, they affirm that He was the Jehovah of the Old Testament. And they assert that, in very real and important ways, Christ is and will be the Father of those who accept His atoning sacrifice (e.g., Mosiah 15). Viewed in this light, the 1830 renderings of the verses just mentioned were not at all incorrect, although subsequent modifications (made by the very prophet through whom the Book of Mormon was revealed in the first place) do obviously clarify the passages and make them more precise.¹⁶

Important Book of Mormon verses that serve to refute the popular notion among critics that these changes were the result of Joseph Smith changing his theology can be seen in the following concepts and supporting passages in both the 1830 and 1981 editions of the Book of Mormon:¹⁷

1. *Jesus is the Son of God* - 1 Nephi 10:17; 11:6-7, 24; 2 Nephi 25:15, 19; 31:11-21; Jacob 4:5-11; Helaman 3:28; 3 Nephi 9:15.
2. *Jesus is the Son of the Father* - Alma 5:48; 3 Nephi 11:7; 12:19; 14:21; 18:27; 28:8, 10; Moroni 4:3; 5:2.
3. *Jesus is God* - Title page; 2 Nephi 10:3-7; 11:7; Mosiah 27:31; Mormon 3:21; Ether 3:18.
4. *Jesus is the Father* - The Eternal Father: Mosiah 15:4; 16:15; Alma 11:38, 39. Father

¹⁶ Daniel C. Peterson, “Is the Book of Mormon true? Notes on the debate,” in *Book of Mormon authorship revisited: the evidence for ancient origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), 141-78, here, p. 144

¹⁷ Michael W. Hickentbotham, *Answering challenging Mormon Questions* (Bountiful, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 210

of all things, Father of heaven and earth: 2 Nephi 25:12; Mosiah 3:8; 7:27; 15:4; Alma 11:39; Ether 4:7; Helaman 14:12; 16:18. Father of the redeemed: Mosiah 5:7; Ether 3:14.

5. *Jesus is both the Father and the Son* - Mosiah 15:2-3; 3 Nephi 1:14; Mormon 9:12; Ether 3:14; 4:12.
6. *Jesus has a Father and God who is a separate and distinct person* - Jacob 4:5; 3 Nephi 11:7, 32; 17:16; 19:18-31; 20:46; 26:2, 15; 27:28-30; Moroni 7:27; 9:26.

Interesting thing is that some of the changes to the Book of Mormon actually attest its authenticity.

In the 1837 and subsequent editions of the text, Alma 46:19 read, “When Moroni had said these words, he went forth among the people, waving the rent part of his garment in the air.” The 1830 edition, however, reads, “...rent in the air.” In English, the *rent* is the hole in the garment, not the piece torn out of the garment. However, Hebrew does not have to add the word *part* to a verbal substantive like *rent* in English requires. Thus, *broken* in Hebrew can refer to a *broken thing* or a *broken part*, while *new* can refer to a *new thing*. In the aforementioned verse, the original rendition reflects a Hebraism and is actually evidence for the authenticity of the Book of Mormon.¹⁸ Many more examples could be cited.¹⁹

The language of the Book of Mormon

1 Nephi 1:2 and Mosiah 1:4 state that the native language of the Hebrews between 600 and 130 BC was Egyptian. Archaeological discoveries show that they spoke Hebrew prior to the Babylonian captivity of 586-538 BC and then the common language between Aramaic (P. 173)

We do not know exactly what language was used on the original plates of the Book of Mormon. Nephi described the writing system as a combination of “the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians” (1 Nephi 1:2). Moroni, writing a thousand years later, called it “reformed Egyptian” (Mormon 9:32-34). This might mean that they used Egyptian symbols to represent Egyptian words, or that they used Egyptian symbols as a shorthand to represent Hebrew words, or even that they used both Egyptian and Hebrew symbols to represent Hebrew words. Whatever reformed Egyptian was, it must have been influenced by the language that the Nephites used in daily speech - Hebrew.

¹⁸ John A. Tvedtnes, “The Hebrew background of the Book of Mormon,” in *Rediscovering the Book of Mormon: Insights you may have missed before*, ed. John L. Sorenson and Melvin J. Thorne (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1991), 77-91, here, p. 78

¹⁹ E.g., Royal Skousen, “Hebraic conditionals in the Book of Mormon,” in *Pressing forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS updates of the 1990s*, ed. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 201-03

It was not until the twentieth century that ancient Hebrew texts written in Egyptian script became known to scholars. We now have a number of Northwest Semitic texts (Hebrew or related to Hebrew) in Egyptian magical papyri. These are mostly incantations that, instead of being translated, were merely transcribed in hieratic, a cursive or reformed version of the hieroglyphic characters most people think of as Egyptian writing. The underlying language, however, is an early form of Hebrew/Canaanite. The texts are found on the London Magical Papyrus (fourteenth century BCE), the Harris Magical Papyrus (thirteenth century BCE), Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century BCE), and Ostrakon 25759 recto (eleventh century BCE). The latter is interesting because the text on one side is purely Egyptian hieratic, while the text on the other is an early form of Hebrew written in hieratic characters. All of these documents were discovered and translated long after the Book of Mormon was published.

Of particular interest is Amherst Papyrus 63, a document of the fourth century BCE written in a cursive (reformed) Egyptian script called demotic but whose underlying language is Aramaic, a sister language to Hebrew. Among the writings included in the religious text is a version of Psalm 20:2-6.

An ostrakon uncovered at the ancient Judean site of Arad in 1967 and dating to the time of Lehi has a text that, although written in a combination of ten Egyptian hieratic and seven Hebrew characters, can be read entirely as Egyptian. Other texts of the same time period that commingle Hebrew and Egyptian scripts were discovered during archaeological excavations at Tel Ein-Qudeirah (biblical Kadesh-Barnea), in the Sinai Peninsula near the border of ancient Judah, during the latter half of the 1970s.

To most of Joseph Smith's contemporaries, the term *reformed Egyptian* seemed to be so much nonsense. Many critics²⁰ still suggest, despite long-standing evidence to the contrary, that there is no such thing as "reformed Egyptian" and insist that no ancient Israelite would have written sacred scripture using Egyptian. We now know the opposite to be true.²¹

Anachronistic Coins in the Book of Mormon?

Alma 11:4-19 mentions eight different coins, not one example of which has ever been discovered. (P. 173)

It is quite true that there is no evidence whatsoever for the existence of Book of Mormon coins – not even in the Book of Mormon itself. The text of the Book of Mormon never mentions the word *coin*, nor any variant of it. The reference to "Nephite coinage" in the

²⁰ Mike and Ann Thomas are among these critics (p. 41). They claim, however, it is a language. Notwithstanding, Mormon 9:32-34 clearly reveal it not to be a language, but a *script*.

²¹ John A. Tvedtnes, "Ancient texts in support of the Book of Mormon," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), 231-60, here, pp. 233-35

chapter heading to Alma 11 is not part of the original text and is almost certainly mistaken (it represents the same unexamined modern assumption – that *money* equals coins or currency or both – that misleads the critics). Alma 11 probably refers to standardised weights of metal – a historical step toward coinage, but not yet the real thing. So Latter-day Saint scholars would be surprised as anybody if “Book of Mormon coins” were to have been discovered.

It should be noted that coins were not used in the Old World until after the exile, predating the Book of Mormon’s genesis. Indeed, this on its own shows that the monetary system as recorded in Alma 11 were not coins, but weights, as the text states it was based on an Old World system, albeit, with modifications (Alma 11:4). Even in the Bible, using the same ethnocentric standards of critics such as the Tanners, Mike and Ann Thomas, and James R. White, we would find anachronistic coinage. Contemporary with Moses up until the post-exilic era, words such as “shekel” and “garah” were used for weights of metal or other precious material, and in Hebrew, the value of each unit²² (the roots of the Hebrew for these words all derive from verbs meaning “to weigh”). In the Torah, the Israelites were required to be honest in their use of weights and measures (e.g., Leviticus 19:35-36; Deuteronomy 25:12-15). Furthermore, after ~597 BCE, when Lehi fled Jerusalem,²³ we find that the Israelites, as a monetary system, were using, not coins, but weights (e.g., Ezekiel 45:10-14).²⁴

Interesting thing is that Alma 11 has many parallels from the ancient world. Alma 11:22 refers to “onti,” which is an Egyptian word meaning “small amount” or “short of an amount.” If we take the word *senum*, referred to in Alma 11:3, we come up with an Egyptian word with a Nephite ending. Nephite ending to words were no doubt a grammatical device to change Egyptian words to their language. *Sen* in Egyptian means “one-half” or “doubling.”²⁵

John Welch, professor at Brigham Young University’s J. Reuben Clark Law School and founder of the Foundation of Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, also made an interesting observation. In Alma 11:16 we come across a unit of measurement called

²² Michael D. Coogan, *The Old Testament: A historical and literary introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 177

²³ The Book of Mormon uses a Lunar Calendar for, at the very least, its first 600 calendar years (Omni 1:21). Therefore, the date at the end of the 1981 editions of the Book of Mormon states “600 B.C.”

²⁴ For correlations between Alma 11 and ancient Mesoamerican civilisations and their monetary system, see Sorenson, *An Ancient American setting*, 233. Anti-Mormon activist Bill McKeever in a Web Page on “coins” in the Book of Mormon claims that coins are implied by Alma 11, due to the use of the words “piece” and “pieces” that he claims in 1828 denoted “coins.” However, this reveals Mr. McKeever’s illiteracy. “Piece” in Webster’s 1828 dictionary denoted, as a primary meaning, a piece of something (see “piece” at <http://www.christiantech.com/>’s searchable 1828 dictionary). Further, the KJV, the English that Webster based his dictionary on for semantics, and the verbiage that the prophet Joseph Smith used to translate the Book of Mormon, uses the word “piece” when a standardised weight of metal is implied (e.g., 1 Samuel 2:36 and Job 42:11), blowing McKeever’s claims out of the water.

²⁵ *Worterbunch der Aegyptischen Sprache*, IV, pp. 164-165, as cited by Wirth, *A Challenge to the critics*, 47

shiblum. Checking an original fragment and printer's manuscript of the Book of Mormon, it was found that the word was actually *shilum*, a Hebrew word meaning "payment" or "retribution."²⁶

Other discoveries include John Welch's analysis of the Book of Mormon and the Laws of Eshnunna, promulgated in Babylonia probably during the early eighteenth century BCE, but not discovered until the mid-twentieth century CE. In this law, there was an instituted and elaborated system of weights and measures. The following initial provisions stand at the head of this ancient law code:²⁷

1 kor of barley [*she`um*] is (priced) at [*ana*] 1 shekel of silver;

3 *qa* of "best oil" are (priced) at 1 shekel of silver;

1 seah (and) 2 *qa* of sesame oil are (priced) at 1 shekel of silver [and so on]...

The hire of a wagon together with its driver is 1 *messiktum* (and) 4 seah of barley. If it is (paid in) silver, the hire is one third of a shekel. He shall drive it the whole day.

There are several impressive parallels between these laws and the economic system decreed by King Mosiah and found in Alma 11:3-19, especially since any evidence of this ancient pattern of establishing a commercial economy was unknown in Joseph Smith's day. Consider these parallels:

First, the basic legal form of these two texts is consistent. The standard phrasing "1 kor of barley is (priced) at 1 shekel of silver" resembles that in the Book of Mormon, "A senum of silver was equal to a senine of gold" (Alma 11:7).

Second, the primary conversion in Babylonia was between barley and silver. Nine other Babylonian provisions converted various additional commodities into silver values, followed by three more provisions that converted others into measures of barley. Thus, precious metal and grain measures were convertible into each other. The law of Mosiah featured precisely the same conversion capability: the basic measure for either gold or silver was equated with "a measure of barley" (Alma 11:7).

Third, in Babylonia the basic commodity valuation system allowed traders to deal in a variety of items, all convertible into silver or barley. Similarly, Mosiah's system covered transactions from silver into "a measure of every kind of grain" (Alma 11:7).

²⁶ "Volunteers team up to study the Book of Mormon" by Sue Bergin, *BYU Today*, Feb. 1985, pp.15, and 16, as cited by Wirth, *ibid.* 48.

²⁷ The following is based on John W. Welch, "A steady stream of significant recognitions," in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, 331-88, here, pp. 348-50

Fourth, both economic systems were announced by kings to have been instituted for similar reasons. The laws of Eshnunna began with a royal superscription that proclaimed this standardisation as instrumental in establishing justice, eliminating enmity, and protecting the weak. Likewise, King Mosiah enacted his laws expressly to establish peace and equality in the land (see Mosiah 29:38, 40).

Fifth, the ideal, practical motivation behind the laws of Eshnunna seems to have been to under-gird the rental market and to standardise values on daily wages and the computation of various damages and penalties. Similarly, a motivation for the economic part of King Mosiah's reforms was to provide a standard system under the new reign of judges for the payment of judges on a daily basis: "a senine of gold for a day, or a senum of silver" (Alma 11:3).

Plants and animals in the Book of Mormon

*Wheat and Barley*²⁸

In 1 Nephi 18:24, we read that Nephi planted seeds he had carried from Jerusalem to the New World, and that they grew well. What were these seeds? Were they necessarily wheat and/or barley? Even if they were Old World Wheat and Barley, the experience of pioneers suggests that first success for an imported crop does not necessarily mean continuator vigour for it, Flourishing plants don't always yield good seed in turn. Bishop Diego de Landa in sixteenth century Yucatan used language very similar to Nephi's: "We have set them [the Indians] to raising [European] millet and it grows marvellously well and is a good kind of sustenance" (A. M. Tozzer, ed., *Landa's Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan*, HUPM 18 [1941], p. 196). Yet nearly four centuries later, when Carnegie Institution botanists researched the plant inventory in that area, they failed to find a trace of the millet about which Landa had been so enthusiastic (ibid.) One possibility is that edible seeds not familiar to most of us, including the early Nephites, were labelled with the names "wheat" or "barley." That names do shift, for seeds and animals, is well documented. "Corn" in England means wheat; in Scotland, oats; in North America, maize. Indeed, there are a wide variety of Mesoamerican crops that could be labelled as either "wheat" or "barley," such as:

- Amaranth
- Huauzontle
- Chia (used heavily by the Aztecs)
- Fox-tail millet
- Two species of 'perennial corn' with different chromosome numbers
- Chalco teosinte

Horses, Asses, cows, and oxen

²⁸ The following is based on Sorenson, *An ancient American setting*, 139, 184-85

Many critics point to the names of several animals and plant species mentioned in the Book of Mormon and allege that these species are anachronistic (i.e., they were not found in Central America prior to Columbus), thus proving the Book of Mormon to be false. Usually this is just an argument of silence that would have devastating consequences for belief in the Bible. For example, only two sites in the Old World have revealed remnants of some lion bones, notwithstanding the frequent mention of lions in the Bible (e.g., Isaiah 11 and 1 Kings 13). Indeed, textual evidence attests their existence in Israel up until 1500 CE. Moreover, no traces of camels, for example, as well as chariots have been discovered in Israel. However, this hardly disproves the claim that there were such in ancient Israel. And just because there are not many obvious horse remnants from 100 BCE in ancient America doesn't mean they didn't exist (there is a paucity of ancient evidence for raccoon, turkeys, and sloths, yet no one disputes they were there then). Furthermore, no traces of horse bones have been discovered in the land occupied by the Huns, although they were a nomadic people for whom horses represented both a major form of wealth and the basis of their military power. Whenever people come across new animals, they typically give it the name of a species that they are familiar with. The Spanish, for example, called the tapir, *Anteburro*, meaning "formerly an ass," bison were labelled "cows," turkeys called "peacocks," and antelope were described in terms of sheep. For plant species, the Mesoamerican prickly pear was called a "fig" although there were native figs, and used "plum" (*ciruelo*) to name a native non-plum species. Indeed, the names we call species reflect such, such as "starfish" (that is not a fish at all). In French, a potato is called an "earth apple" (*pomme de terre*), and the ancient Greeks called the hippopotamus "river horse," whence we get the name in English. When approaching an ancient document, one must not be Ethnocentric.²⁹ If the Book of Mormon used the term "swine" to refer to the hairy boar indigenous to Mesoamerica, one should not cry "foul."³⁰ Using a name of a fabric, animal, or other object in one's vocabulary for something similar is well attested. One historical example involves the naming convention used by Marco Polo when he encountered rhinoceroses on Java. Although he never encountered these animals before, he was able to distinguish the body, the four feet, and the horn. Since his culture provided him with the notion of a unicorn - a quadruped with a horn on its forehead to be precise - he designated these animals as "unicorns."³¹

Cattle/Oxen

The Hebrew word *b'hemah*, sometimes translated as "cattle" and in the Old Testament can refer to any large quadruped or animal. The Hebrew word *s'eh* also translates as "cattle," usually referring to any small or large quadruped. There are, of course, many New World species that could fall within this description, such as bison.

²⁹ Using one's cultural standards to judge another culture.

³⁰ For more information, see Sorenson, *An Ancient American setting*, 277-316

³¹ Umberto Eco, *Kant and the Platypus: essays on language and cognition* (San Diego: Harvest Book, 2000), 57

A related criticism pertains to the plausibility of Nephi finding oxen in the wilderness when, in modern terminology, an ox is a castrated bull. Notwithstanding, Webster's 1828 dictionary, available on-line at <http://www.christiantech.com/>, that reflects the language of Joseph Smith, defines "ox" as follows (emphasis added):

The male of the bovine genus of quadruped, castrated and grown to his size of nearly so. The young male is called in America a steer. The same animal not castrated is called a bull. These distinctions are well established with us in regard to DOMESTIC animals of this genus. WHEN WE SPEAK OF WILD ANIMALS OF THIS KIND, OX IS SOMETIMES APPLIED BOTH TO THE MALE AND FEMALE, AND IN ZOOLOGY, THE SAME PRACTICE EXISTS IN REGARD TO THE DOMESTIC ANIMALS.

In Hebrew, *teo* denotes a wild ox. The general word for "ox" is *aluph*, which has a root meaning "tame" or "gentle." Candidates for "ox" would be tapir, as the Spanish often referred to them as looking like oxen, as well as bison, a quadruped.

Ass

As mentioned previously, the Spanish called the Mesoamerican tapir, a species of tapir much larger than other kinds of tapir, as *Anteburro*, meaning "formerly an ass." If the Nephites labelled Mesoamerican tapirs as "ass," one should not have any problem or difficulty with such.

Horses

The following is an excerpt from "Out of the Dust" in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*, volume 10, No. 1, 2001. This provides new evidence for actual horses used in some way by peoples in Book of Mormon lands during the times of the Book of Mormon:

Publications from the late 1950s reported results from excavations working on the Yucatan Peninsula. Excavations at the site of Mayapan, which dates to a few centuries before the Spaniards arrived, yielded horse bones in four spots (two of the lots were from the surface, however, and might represent Spanish horses). From another site, the Cenote (water hold) Ch'en Mul, came other traces, this time from a firm archaeological context. In the bottom stratum in a sequence of levels of unconsolidated earth almost two meters in thickness, two horse teeth were found. They were partially mineralized, indicating that they were definitely ancient and could not have come from any Spanish animal. The interesting thing is that Maya pottery was also found in the stratified soil where the teeth were located. [See Harry E. D. Pollock and Clayton E. Ray, "Notes on Vertebrate Animal remains from Mayapan," *Current Reports* 41 (August 1957: 638; this publication is from the Department of Archaeology at the Carnegie Institution of Washington. See also Clayton E. Ray, "pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan," *Journal of Mammalogy* 38 (1957): 278.]

Subsequent digging has expanded the evidence for an association of humans with horses. But the full story actually goes back to 1895, when American paleontologist Henry C. Mercer went to Yucatan hoping to find remains of Ice Age man. He visited 29 caves in the hill area – the Puuc – of the peninsula and tried stratigraphic excavation in 10 of them. But the results were confused and he came away disillusioned. He did not find horse bones in three caves (Actun Sayib, Actun Lara, and Chektalen). In terms of their visible characteristics, those bones should have been classified as from the Pleistocene American horse species, then called *Equus occidentalis* L. However, Mercer decided that since the remains were near the surface, they must actually be from the modern horse, *Equus equus*, that the Spaniards had brought with them to the New World, and so he reported them as such [Henry C. Mercer, *The Hill-caves of Yucatan: A search for Evidence of man's antiquity in the caverns of central America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), 172.] In 1947 Robert T. Hatt repeated Mercer's activities. He found within Actun Lara and one other cave more remains of the American horse (in his day it was called *Equus conversidens*), along with bones of other extinct animals. Hatt recommended that any future work concentrate on Loltun Cave, where abundant animals and cultural remains could be seen [Robert T. Hatt, "Faunal and Archaeological Researches in Yucatan caves," *Cranbrook Institute of Science, Bulletin* 33, 1953. See Peter J. Schmidt, "La Alba Gonzalez Jacome (Mexico: Secretaria de Educacion Publica, 1988), 250.]

It took until 1977 before that recommendation bore fruit. Two Mexican archaeologists carried out a project that included a complete survey of the complex system of subterranean cavities (made by underground water that had dissolved the subsurface limestone). They also did stratigraphic excavations in areas in the Loltun complex not previously visited. The pits they excavated revealed a sequence of 16 layers, which they numbered from the surface downward. Bones of extinct animals (including mammoth) appear in the lowest layers.

Pottery and other cultural materials were found in levels VII and above. But in some of those artifact-bearing strata there were horse bones, even in layer II. A radiocarbon date for the beginning of VII turned out to be around 1800 B.C. The pottery fragments above that would place some portions in the range of at least 900-400 B.C. and possibly later. The report on this work concludes with the observation that "something went on here that is still difficult to explain." Some archaeologists have suggested that the horse bones were stirred upward from lower to higher levels by the action of tunnelling rodents, but they admit that this explanation is not easy to accept. The statement has also been made that palaeontologists will not be pleased at the idea that horses survived to such a late date as to be involved with civilized or near-civilized people whose remains are seen in the ceramic-using levels/ [Schmidt, "La entrada," 254.] Surprisingly, the Mexican researchers show no awareness of the horse teeth discovered in 1957 by

Carnegie Institution scientists Pollock and Ray. (Some uncomfortable scientific facts seem to need rediscovering time and time again.)

The mention of “horses” in the Book of Mormon cannot, legitimately, be deemed an “anachronism” any longer.

Cumom and Curelom

As for Cumoms and cureloms, the failure of Moroni, the Nephite translator of the Jaredite record, to translate these names from the original tongue of the Jaredites indicates that the animals were probably extinct by his day and provided the name the Jaredites rendered the animal in his text unchanged.