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## Geography and the Book of Mormon: Current Perspectives

*An angel came down from the mansions of glory.  
And told that a record was hid in Cumorah.  
Containing the fulness of Jesus's gospel*

*O Israë! Ò Israel!  
In all your abidings.  
Prepare for your Lord  
When you hear these glad tidings.*

(From Emma Smith's *Collection of Sacred Hymns*, 1835.)<sup>1</sup>

Abstract: **John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013) has sparked, again, a debate amongst enthusiasts who argue for a particular limited geographic setting for the Book of Mormon. This paper concludes that one cannot rightfully say that the LDS Church is entirely neutral about the topic.**

Because the Book of Mormon says that it is an account of a civilization on the American continent, supporters and detractors of the Book of Mormon point to New World anthropology and archaeology to support their views. It has always been so in the history of the Church, despite efforts by Church authorities to ramp down enthusiasm. What is the value of a geographic study of the Book of Mormon?

As Grant Hardy has said in his recent book *Understanding the Book of Mormon*,

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<sup>1</sup> Emma Smith, *Sacred Hymns for the Church of the Latter Day Saints: Selected by Emma Smith* (Kirtland, Ohio: F.G. Williams & Co., 1835).

We might look for anachronisms or parallels with ancient North American or Mesoamerican cultures in order to evaluate the historical claims of the book in general, but there are no independent records or authenticated artifacts from Nephite civilization that would help us get at an objective reality behind the narrative. The task of historians is to reconstruct the past by triangulating from multiple primary sources, and these do not exist for the Book of Mormon.<sup>2</sup>

The most productive effort to find real-world proofs thus far, Hardy referenced above, is the discussion of “parallels.” Archeologists have not found the names of “Nephi” or “Mormon” on pre-Columbian art, but there are parallels. The most basic example of a parallel is the discovery of complex ancient civilizations in the Americas, with cement, roads, implements of war and other items of technology the Book of Mormon mentions. As another example, the first Nephi speaks of a “tree of life” in his writings. In an obscure publication, Diane Wirth compares the Mesoamerican tree of life to the Book of Mormon’s text.<sup>3</sup>

A visit to the Harold B. Lee Library stacks and special collections at Brigham Young University and the University of Utah library will reveal hundreds of different books promoting one or more versions of a Book of Mormon geography; as well, there have been the occasional article in *The Improvement Era*, the *Juvenile Instructor* and the *Ensign*. Larry Poulsen, a retired biochemist and geography enthusiast, reports that there are over 150 different proposed geographies for the Book of Mormon. He favors LDS anthropologist Dr. John L. Sorenson’s Mesoamerican location.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), Kindle location 201.[018]

<sup>3</sup> Diane E. Wirth, *Decoding Ancient America: A Guide to the Archaeology of the Book of Mormon* (Springville, Utah: Horizon Publishers, 2007), at 79.

<sup>4</sup> Larry Poulson, “Book of Mormon Geography [2008 FAIR Conference],” published at <http://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2008-Larry-Poulsen.pdf>, accessed January 4, 2015. [058]

The Book of Mormon contains few hints as to the location of its story. But there are some. Book of Mormon prophet Alma (as edited by Mormon) describes a “narrow neck” of land from which a Nephite launched a ship. (Alma 63:5.) Anybody looking at a map, including Joseph Smith, could easily detect a “narrow neck of land,” the Isthmus of Darien, although nowhere does the Book of Mormon identify such area as an isthmus between two waters.

Bruce Warren has remarked that there is “very little specific directional and distance information is available in the Book of Mormon text.”<sup>5</sup> Although sympathetic with the Mesoamerican model of Dr. Sorenson, Warren says that the evidence is “circumstantial.”<sup>6</sup> Similarly, Ugo A. Perego has said that the Book of Mormon “contains only marginal information about . . . the geography of the land occupied by the people it describes.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Daniel Ludlow, “[c]ertainly the Book of Mormon contains some historical elements and geographic references, but not in the number or in the detail that some have hoped or others have claimed. . . . [G]eographic [references] are incidental . . . .”<sup>8</sup> “[I]t is not a history book.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce W. Warren, “Deciphering the Geography and An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon,” *BYU Studies* (Summer 1990), 30:3, at 127, xxx, [040]. am

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at xxx.

<sup>7</sup> Ugo A. Perego, “The Book of Mormon and the Origin of Native Americans from a Maternally Inherited DNA Standpoint,” in *No Weapon Shall Proper: New Light on Sensitive Issues*, ed. Robert L. Millet (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 171-217, republished at <http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/no-weapon-shall-prosper/book-mormon-and-origin-native-americans-maternally-inherited-dna>, accessed May 20, 2014[037].

<sup>8</sup> Daniel H. Ludlow, “The Challenge of the Book of Mormon,” in *The Book of Mormon: The Keystone Scripture*, ed. Paul R. Cheesman (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1988), 1-20,

Consistent with Ludlow, Grant Hardy writes that to “read it looking for . . . possible correlations with ancient Mesoamerican cultures, to insistently assess its veracity or meaning in light of academic sources of knowledge . . . is to wrench it out of its own framework and consequently miss what Mormon is trying to accomplish.”<sup>10</sup>

As to the faith’s modern-day founder, Joseph Smith, enthusiasts both cite him and discount his views on geography. Mesoamerican enthusiasts tend to say that Joseph Smith could have been as ill-informed about Book of Mormon geography as the rest of us. On the other hand, they also go to lengths to apply what little Joseph Smith has said to endorse favored theories. But, Joseph Smith never said anything plain about any particular view of Book of Mormon geography except to suggest that the ancient Nephite world filled the Americas.

The most thorough LDS academic treatment of Book of Mormon geography comes from Dr. John L. Sorenson, a diffusionist of some note. Diffusionists are a controversial lot; diffusionists constitute a notable branch of anthropology but are not part of the mainstream.<sup>11</sup> They teach, essentially, of cross-cultural connections between the New and Old World which predate (or are different than) the Norse and Spanish explorations. Typically, they advocate “voyage-dependent” connections.<sup>12</sup> Crackpot

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<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>10</sup> Hardy, Kindle location 3392.

<sup>11</sup> Robert H. Winthrop, *Dictionary of Concepts in Cultural Anthropology* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. 1991) 83-84 [diffusionism began with Egyptologists claiming links to the Americas; diffusionism has faded towards more nuanced anthropology emphasizing cultural evolution].

<sup>12</sup> Emmet John Sweeney, *Atlantis: The Evidence of Science* (United States: Algora Publishing, 2010), at 137; Mark K. Stengel, “The Diffusionists Have

Atlantean theorists and those who assert a connection between Egypt and Mesoamerica are or cite diffusionists<sup>13</sup> but that does not mean that diffusionists are crackpots; merely, there are not mainstream anthropologists.

Sorenson's most significant work outside his professional publications was the 1985 *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.<sup>14</sup> His recent (2013) *Mormon Codex* expands upon this earlier work. *Codex* suggests that the Hill Cumorah which the Book of Mormon references has a "highly likely correspondence to Cerro El Vigía, in the state of Veracruz, Mexico."<sup>15</sup> *Codex* asserts that Moroni must have carried the plates to modern-day New York.<sup>16</sup>

Sorenson states that Joseph Smith "became convinced in the last years of his life" that the Nephite lands were in Mesoamerica. Sorenson says that Joseph Smith told "several people in his last years" that Moroni left southern Mexico with plates in hand to journey to New York to "bury the plates in a hill near Palmyra."<sup>17</sup> Sorenson's most significant proof is an

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Landed," *The Atlantic Online* (Jan. 2000), at <http://www.theatlantic.com/past/docs/issues/2000/01/001stengel.htm>, accessed August 9, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> Isabel Medina-Gonzales, "The 19<sup>th</sup> Century Archaeological Experience of Mesoamerica," in David Jeffreys, ed., *Views of Ancient Egypt Since Napoleon Bonaparte: imperialism, colonialism and modern appropriations* (Portland, Oregon: Cavendish Publishing, 2003), at 123; Sweeny, at 137.

<sup>14</sup> John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City and Provo, Utah: Deseret Book and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1985)[019].

<sup>15</sup> John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2013), 142. Other significant contributions on this subject by Dr. Sorenson are John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book*, rev. ed. (Provo, UT: F.A.R.M.S., 1990, 1992) [017]

<sup>16</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, 694.

<sup>17</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, 695.

anonymous article in the 1 October 1842 *Times and Seasons*<sup>18</sup> (the official organ of the Church) which discussed John Lloyd Stephens' work, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* (1841).<sup>19</sup>

Sorenson's *Codex* describes this 1 October 1842 article as "concerning Smith and his cohorts' reading of John Lloyd Stephens book *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatán* (1841)."<sup>20</sup> *Codex* quotes the 1 October 1842 *Times and Seasons* article's statement that the "city of Zarahemla . . . stood upon this land," namely, Central America.<sup>21</sup> In a cite routinely used by Mesoamerican Book of Mormon theorists, the *Times & Seasons* article concludes with: "It will not be a bad plan to compare Mr. Stephens' ruined cities with those in the Book of Mormon: light cleaves to light, and facts are supported by facts. The truth injures no one . . . ." <sup>22</sup> Likewise, David A. Palmer, a chemical engineer who authored *In Search of Cumorah* (1984) cites this *Times and Seasons* article as the only source for the proposition that the "prophet Joseph Smith has stated very clearly that the approach to Book of Mormon geography must be primarily of an intellectual nature."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> "Zarahemla," *Times and Seasons*, vol. III, no. 23 (Oct. 1, 1842), at 927.

<sup>19</sup> John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan* (New York: Harper Bros., 1841), vol. I, republished at <http://books.google.com/books?id=rmEaAAAAYAAJ&dq=%22John%20Lloyd%20Stephens%22%20incidents%20central%20america&pg=PA9#v=onepage&q=%22John%20Lloyd%20Stephens%22%20incidents%20central%20america&f=false>, accessed June 9, 2014.

<sup>20</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, 694, fn. 99.

<sup>21</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, 694, fn. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Zarahemla, *Times and Seasons*, at 927.

<sup>23</sup> David A. Palmer, *In Search of Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Bountiful, Utah: Horizon Publishers & Distributors 1984), at 21[014].

Sorenson maintains that Stephen's "sensational" work was the first education Joseph Smith had about a "spectacular ancient civilization in Central America," an education "New York frontier dwellers" could not possibly have had.<sup>24</sup> "[A]n 'Indian' was just a savage" to those who been publishing newspapers in several states and in Europe.<sup>25</sup>

However, the Saints seemed to have extensive knowledge and interest in Spain's conquest of the New World. For example, Emma Smith's 1835 hymn, *Through all the world below*," had the following lyrics:

*Through all the world below.  
God we see all around.*

*While nature's works declare—  
God is there.  
When God to Moses shew,  
Glories more than Peru;<sup>26</sup>*

Missionaries of the Church were familiar with the ancient ruins of Mexico before Stephens' Yucatan travels, as the ruins of Mexico and Peru were discussed in missionary publications.<sup>27</sup> The Saints could not have possibly been unfamiliar with Josiah Priest's famous<sup>28</sup> 1835 work, *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West*, which documented traditions, culture and buildings of the Aztec (p. 205) and Incas (p. 251) with discussions of "statues, obelisks, mausolea, edifices, fortresses, all of stone,

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<sup>24</sup> John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, John W. Welch, eds., *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 2002), at 264.

<sup>25</sup> *Id.* at p. 262.

<sup>26</sup> Emma Smith, "Hymn 27 – Through all the world below," in *Sacred Hymns [etc.]*, at p. 35 [053].

<sup>27</sup> Charles Thompson, *Evidences in Proof of the Book of Mormon, Being a Divinely Inspired Record, Written by the Forefathers of the Natives we Call Indians [etc.]* (Batavia, New York: D.D. Waite, 1941), at pp. 53-54. [055]

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Brown, "The Early Mormon Chain of Belonging," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* (Spring 2011), vol. 44, p. 1, 18.



equal, with the architecture of Egypt, Greece, and Rome."<sup>29</sup> Priest's work discussed the Book of Mormon.<sup>30</sup> The *Times & Seasons* cited Priest's work on June 1, 1842 when Joseph Smith was its editor.<sup>31</sup>

Stephen's travels were nonetheless a popular watershed of knowledge about the Yucatan and Central America. President Martin van Buren had commissioned New York lawyer Stephens to undertake an exploration of Central American ruins.<sup>32</sup> Accompanying him was his traveling companion, Frederick Catherwood, who served as the expedition's sketch artist.<sup>33</sup> At the time of Stephens' exploration, the Central American ruins were well-known to western scholars.<sup>34</sup> At a time when anthropology and exploration largely was in the hands of amateurs, Stephens had a long history as a best-selling author and amateur explorer. His 1841 work about his visit to Central American proved to be immensely popular.<sup>35</sup> Stephens supposed the ruins of Central America were somehow linked to the mound-builders of North America, finds of supposed Phoenician origin in Massachusetts and other

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<sup>29</sup> Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities and Discoveries in the West: Being an Exhibition of the Evidence, [etc.]* (Albany, New York: Hoffman and White, 1835.) [056]

<sup>30</sup> *Id.* at p. 76. B.H. Roberts later used a later edition of Priest's work to support the argument for ruins near the Hill Cumorah. B.H. Roberts, *New Witnesses for God* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Deseret News, 1909), at vol. II, p. 75.

<sup>31</sup> "From Priest's American Antiquities," *Times & Seasons*, June 1, 1842, vol. III, pp. 613-14.

<sup>32</sup> Stephens (1841), at iii, 9; Peter O. Koch, *John Lloyd Stephens and Frederick Catherwood: Pioneers of Mayan Archaeology* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., 2013), at 1, republished at <http://books.google.com/books?id=GNqGVBftI3oC&lpg=PA278&dq=%22John%20Lloyd%20Stephens%22%20incidents%20central%20america&pg=PA5#v=onepage&q=%22John%20Lloyd%20Stephens%22%20incidents%20central%20america&f=false>, accessed June 9, 2014

<sup>33</sup> Koch, at 1.

<sup>34</sup> Stephens (1841), at 98-99.

<sup>35</sup> Koch, at 5.

finds in Ohio, Mississippi, Arkansas and elsewhere.<sup>36</sup> He recounted theories that these people were descendants of Jews, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Greeks, and Scythians of “ancient times.”<sup>37</sup>

The sophisticated building structures in the presence of “savages” perplexed Stephens. “We sat down on the very edge of the wall [of ruins in Copan], and strove in vain to penetrate the mystery by which were surrounded.”<sup>38</sup> “We asked the Indians who made them, and their dull answer was ‘Quien sabe?’”<sup>39</sup> Stephens added to academic and popular knowledge his surveys of ruins at Chiapas and Yucatan.<sup>40</sup>

Although the 1 October 1842 *Times & Seasons* anonymous article reviewing Stephen’s work is the single most significant statement about a Mesoamerican connection to be found in any official Church organ,<sup>41</sup> there is no proof that Joseph Smith authored it. Joseph Smith was in hiding in the latter part of 1842 due to repeated efforts to arrest him in connection with the assassination attempt on former Missouri governor Lilburn Boggs. B.H. Roberts reports that upon hearing that Illinois officers were in Nauvoo, “it had been decided by President Smith and his friends, that the best thing for

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<sup>36</sup> Stephens (1841), at 98.

<sup>37</sup> Stephens, at 96.

<sup>38</sup> Stephens, at 104.

<sup>39</sup> Stephens, at 104.

<sup>40</sup> Koch, at 4: “Most historians of Stephens’ era were convinced that there would never again be found cities in the Americas as magnificent or ancient as those discovered during the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs of Mexico or the Incas at Peru.”

<sup>41</sup> The *Times and Seasons*’ opening July 1839 prospectus said that it would be a “monthly Periodical” to the scattered saints “containing all general information respecting the church; as also, a history of the unparalleled [sic] persecution, which we, as a people, received in Missouri . . . .” Robinson & Smith, “Prospectus of the *Times and Seasons*,” *Times and Seasons*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Nov. x, 1839), at 15, 16 [009].

himself and Rockwell to do, in the then excited state of public opinion, was to keep out of the way for a season; so that the officers upon their return to Nauvoo were unable to find them."<sup>42</sup> On September 20, 1842, Illinois Governor Thomas Carlin issued a proclamation describing the legal basis for the issuance of arrest warrants for Joseph Smith and Porter Rockwell.<sup>43</sup> It further does not appear from *BYU Studies'* chronology of Joseph Smith's life for the September and October 1842 period that he had anything to do with the periodical.<sup>44</sup>

Mesoamerican theorists spend quite a bit of effort and ink linking Joseph Smith to the 1 October 1842 *Times & Seasons* article. Without acknowledging that Larry Poulson concluded in a 2008 FAIR presentation<sup>45</sup> that John Taylor authored the article (Joseph Smith gave his gift of the book from John Bernhisel to John Taylor<sup>46</sup>), Mesoamerican proponent Matthew Roper in 2010 attempts the proof that Joseph Smith authored the 1 October 1842 article. Although it would strain credulity to argue that Joseph Smith did not at least tacitly approve the 1 October 1842 article, Mesoamerican

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<sup>42</sup> B.H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Century 1* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1962), vol. II, p. 151[027]; B.H. Roberts, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book 1950)[028] vol. 5, p. 161 (in hiding).

<sup>43</sup> Gordon A. Madsen, Jeffrey N. Walker and John W. Welch, *Sustaining the Law: Joseph Smith's Legal Encounters* (xxxx) xxxx[029].

<sup>44</sup> "Joseph Smith Chronology," B.Y.U. Studies, at <http://josephsmith.byu.edu/default.aspx?year=1842>, accessed May 28, 2014.

<sup>45</sup> FAIR is "FairMormon," a non-profit volunteer group formed in 1997 as The Foundation for Apologetic Information and Research, Inc. It holds annual conferences on a broad array of largely non-academic (meaning, not associated with a particular university) subjects concerning Mormonism. Its articles defend the Sorenson model against its critics and criticize competing models. See [www.fairmormon.org](http://www.fairmormon.org), accessed January 4, 2015.

<sup>46</sup> Larry Poulson, "Book of Mormon Geography," unnumbered page 3.

enthusiasts spend much effort to make the connection more than just a tacit one.

Matthew Roper argues that Joseph Smith was editor as of the early part of 1842.<sup>47</sup> In February 15, 1842, the *Times and Seasons* reported. "The Editorial chair will be filled by our esteemed brother, President Joseph Smith, assisted by Elder John Taylor . . ." <sup>48</sup> As well, on March 16, 1842, Joseph Smith announced in the same edition of the paper that "[t]his paper commences my editorial career . . . ." <sup>49</sup> Roper points to a March 1842 tombstone advertisement showing that Joseph Smith was the editor.<sup>50</sup> The tombstone announcement for the 1 October 1842 paper says that Joseph Smith was editor and publisher.<sup>51</sup> Roper reports that "[t]he Prophet continued to serve as editor until mid-November, 1842<sup>52</sup> and, indeed, Joseph Smith again resigned on November 15, 1842 although the announcement is anachronistically dated 1841 when Joseph Smith was not the editor,<sup>53</sup> a fact Roper does not mention. If the 1841 date is accurate,

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<sup>47</sup> Mathew Roper, "Joseph Smith and the Question of Book of Mormon Geography," FAIR Presentation Aug. 5, 2010, at 19, published at <http://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2010-Matthew-Roper.pdf>, at 22, accessed June 8, 2014[042]

<sup>48</sup> "Valedictory," Feb. 15, 1842, in *Times and Seasons*, Feb. 15, 1842, vol. 3, no. 8, at 695.

<sup>49</sup> "To Subscribers," *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, vol. 3, no. 9, at 710. The note by Joseph Smith," *Times and Seasons*, Mar. 1, 1842, vol. 3, no. 9, at 718. The article appears in a portion of the periodical dated March 15, 1842.

<sup>50</sup> Roper (2010), at 22.

<sup>51</sup> Tombstone announcement, *Times and Seasons*, Oct. 1, 1842, vol. 3, no. 23, at 942.

<sup>52</sup> Roper (2010), at 22.

<sup>53</sup> Joseph Smith, "Valedictory," *Times and Seasons*, vol. IV, no. 1 (Nov. 15, 1841), at 8[008]: "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

Joseph Smith would be out of the picture entirely when the *Times & Seasons* published the 1 October 1842 article.

The most remarkable attempt to link the 1 October 1842 article to Joseph Smith was a wordprint, or stylometry, analysis. Roper asserts that such an analysis yields the conclusion that Joseph Smith authored the 1 October 1842 article. But, Roper's analysis is not a statistical study, as it is nothing more than an eyeballing of plotted frequencies of occurrence of "non-substantive" words as "and, but, however, in, on, the, above, upon."<sup>54</sup> Roper's and Field's study follows the problematic methodology of A.Q. Morton, a Protestant minister who supposedly proved that Paul as not the author of the Pauline epistles except for Romans, I and II Corinthians and Galatians.<sup>55</sup>

Although Roper and Fields do not mention Morton, their methodology mimics the 1980 wordprint analysis of the Book of Mormon of Wayne A. Larsen and Alvin C. Rencher, who cite and depend upon Morton.<sup>56</sup> It seems that rather than become an expert in Morton's methodology, Roper and Fields simply structured their analysis after Larsen's and Rencher's prior

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widely circulated as the *Times and Seasons*. I have appointed 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. JOSEPH SMITH."

<sup>54</sup> Roper and Fields say that Dr. Fields "has extensive experience in textual analysis and linguistic computing" (Roper & Fields, at 96) but his LinkedIn profile nowhere mentions this expertise.

<sup>55</sup> A.Q. Morton, *Literary Detection: How to prove authorship and fraud in literature and documents* (New York: 1978, Charles Scribner's and Sons), 182.

<sup>56</sup> Larsen, Wayne A., Alvin C. Rencher and Tim Layton, "Who Wrote the Book of Mormon? An Analysis of Wordprints," *BYU Studies* (1980), 20:3:225, republished at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1130&index=10>, accessed July 27, 2014.

work on the Book of Mormon without perhaps realizing that Larsen and Rencher used a simplified version of Morton of which Morton would not have likely approved. Morton's eyeballing of the data relied upon three factors: (1) the frequency of non-substantive words, (2) the placement of those words in a sentence, and (3) the frequency of sentences.<sup>57</sup> Roper, Fields, Rencher and Larsen look only the frequency of non-substantive words.

Morton also use a fourth "eyeballing" test to suggest that some works may be too short for his methodology. He concluded that Philemon and Titus are too short to permit a conclusion as to authorship.<sup>58</sup> Philemon has 989 words. The 1 October 1842 Times & Seasons article has 1514. It just may be that the 1 October 1842 article is far too short for even Morton, although Roper and Fields do not discuss this potential problem.

But, Morton's methodology is a poor one, according to reviewer Alexander Clark. "The methods of . . . A.Q. Morton do not amount to much more than 'compare and contrast.' In essence, these early analysts would simply choose 'style markers' according to little-to-no rational basis for the selection of these markers . . . ."<sup>59</sup> Clark noted that Morton's methodology also "proved" that each of James Joyce's books were written by different

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<sup>57</sup> A.Q. Morton, *Literary Detection: How to prove authorship and fraud in literature and documents* (New York: 1978, Charles Scribner's and Sons), 182.

<sup>58</sup> *Id.* at 182.

<sup>59</sup> Alexander Michael Simon Clark, *Forensic Stylometric Authorship Analysis Under the Daubert Standard* (December 15, 2011). Available at the Social Sciences Research Network at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2039824> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2039824>. For further criticisms of the Morton technique as used for the Book of Mormon, see D.I. Holmes, "A Multivariate Technique for Authorship Attribution and its Application to the Analysis of Mormon Scripture and Related Texts," *History and Computing*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1991, Pages 14, 20-21.

authors.<sup>60</sup> An Oxford-published text about stylometry characterized Morton's methodology as unreliable and leading to absurd results.<sup>61</sup> What this critique of Roper and Fields means, to summarize the wordprint analysis, is that there has been no legitimate wordprint analysis effort to pin Joseph Smith to the 1 October 1842 Times and Seasons article.

As with the resort to questionable stylometry, Mesoamerican enthusiasts attempt to extract as much as they can from vague statements attributable to Joseph Smith, on the one hand,<sup>62</sup> while urging that ecclesiastical views – including Joseph Smith's -- are not as important as a comparison of the text to a map, using secular means, on the other hand.<sup>63</sup> Sorenson attempts to draw a distinction between Joseph Smith the revelator of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith the reader of the Book of Mormon. "[W]hen Smith-as-mere Joseph later commented on geography, the picture he communicated is that all South and North America were involved."<sup>64</sup> "[L]ater statements by Joseph and his early associates reveal that he supposed the entire Western Hemisphere had been occupied by Nephites

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<sup>60</sup> Clark, at unnumbered page 14.

<sup>61</sup> Dennis W. Jowers, "Observations on the Authenticity of the Pastoral Epistles," *Western Reformed Seminary Journals* 12:2 (Aug. 2005): 7-11, published at [http://wrs.edu/Materials\\_for\\_Web\\_Site/Journals/12-2\\_Aug-2005/Jowers-Authenticity\\_Pastoral\\_Epistles.pdf](http://wrs.edu/Materials_for_Web_Site/Journals/12-2_Aug-2005/Jowers-Authenticity_Pastoral_Epistles.pdf), accessed July 27, 2014, discussing and citing Anthony Kenny, *A Stylometric Study of the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).

<sup>62</sup> In addition to the Roper and Fields, article, Dr. Sorenson cites to Joseph Smith for support in *Ancient American Setting*, p. 1-3, 47 and significantly so as discussed further in this article, in *Codex* and other works.

<sup>63</sup> See, in particular, William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," at 161 and generally.[006].

<sup>64</sup> Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization," at 268.

and Lamanites.”<sup>65</sup> Roper agrees that Joseph Smith “seems to have adopted the wording of fellow Latter-day Saints who thought of the Book of Mormon in broad terms inclusive of all the Americas.”<sup>66</sup> “It would appear that Joseph Smith and his close associates had not personally grasped the geographical scheme that the book itself consistently reveals.”<sup>67</sup> The modern limited geography theory has developed the view that when Joseph Smith was speaking of Book of Mormon geography, he was not speaking as a revelator, although it does not appear that Mesoamericanists are willing to go so far as to say that Joseph Smith erred.

Sorenson also has relied upon a 15 September 1842 *Times and Seasons* article. “So Joseph Smith was surprised, when in 1842 in Nauvoo, he and his associates read Stephens’s book. A [15 September 1842] comment in the *Times and Season*, the newspaper that Smith edited, clearly reflects that fact . . . .”<sup>68</sup> Yet, there is nothing in the 15 September 1842 article to show that Joseph Smith was surprised then by Stephens’s work. There could have been no surprise as the Church had published two earlier articles<sup>69</sup> as well as in the British *Millennial Star*<sup>70</sup> extolling Stephens’s work as generalized evidence of the Book of Mormon’s antiquity.

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<sup>65</sup> Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization,” at 269.

<sup>66</sup> Roper (2010), at 27. Roper’s article was written apparently to rebut claims by Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum that the Book of Mormon lands were limited to North America.

<sup>67</sup> Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization,” at 268.

<sup>68</sup> John L. Sorenson, “How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately [etc.],” at 264.

<sup>69</sup> “American Antiquities – More Proofs of the Book of Mormon,” *Times and Seasons*, vol. 2, no. 16 (June 15, 1841), at 440[033]; “The Book of Mormon,” *Times and Seasons*, vol. 2, No. 7 (Feb. 1, 1841), at 305[034].

<sup>70</sup> “Antiquities of America,” *The Latter-day Saints’ Millennial Star*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (Sep. 5, 1840), at 118[012].



These Church periodical descriptions of Stephens's work, however, cannot be read as has been suggested, that Mesoamerica is the exclusive or limited situs of Book of Mormon events. The *Millennial Star* and the *Times and Seasons* describe Book of Mormon proofs found in far-flung Native American sites in North America. One article stated that "proof of the truth of the Book of Mormon" can be found in ruins and artifacts "scattered over a vast extent of North and South America" as "proof of the truth of the Book of Mormon."<sup>71</sup> Other *Times and Seasons* articles identified Book of Mormon proofs of artifacts found in Texas<sup>72</sup>, Michigan<sup>73</sup> and Pennsylvania.<sup>74</sup>

Joseph Smith, nonetheless was enthusiastic about Stephens's finds in a letter written to John Bernhisel on 16 November 1841. Bishop John Bernhisel sent Joseph Smith a copy of Stephens' work, who then gave the book to John Taylor.<sup>75</sup> The several *Times and Seasons* articles enthusiastic about Stephens' book, obviously made in the context of Book of Mormon proofs,<sup>76</sup> show general acceptance among members of the Church in Nauvoo that the Book of Mormon account was somewhat vindicated by archaeology.

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<sup>71</sup> Untitled, *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, Vol. 1, No. 5 (Sep. 5, 1840), at 117[012].

<sup>72</sup> "Ancient Ruins," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1844), at 390[035]; "From the Texas Telegraph, Oct. 11," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 5, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1844), at 390[035].

<sup>73</sup> "Another Witness for the Book of Mormon," vol. 6, No. 9 (May 15, 1845), at 906-07[011].

<sup>74</sup> "Another Mormon Witness," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 6, No. 4 (Mar. 1, 1845), at 830[010].

<sup>75</sup> Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, 16 November 1841, as cited in Mathew Roper, "Joseph Smith and the Question of Book of Mormon Geography," FAIR Presentation Aug. 5, 2010, at 19, published at <http://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2010-Matthew-Roper.pdf>, accessed June 8, 2014[042]; see also Larry Poulson, "Book of Mormon Geography." [058]

<sup>76</sup> "Ancient Ruins," *Times and Seasons*, vol. V, no. 1 (Jan. 1, 1844), at 390; 1844)[030]; "Another Mormon Witness," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 6, No. 4

Sorenson's *Codex* cites very dubious hearsay sources attributed to Joseph Smith in support of the view that Joseph Smith became convinced of a Mesoamerican setting. Sorenson relies upon Mosiah Lyman Hancock's "Life Story," wherein Hancock – as a ten year old – recounts Joseph Smith's admonition to go to the land of the Nephites, or Mexico.<sup>77</sup> Actually, the cited statement from Hancock's recollection as a ten-year-old (or more likely much younger, as he was born April 9, 1834, slightly more than ten years before the martyrdom of Joseph Smith) is absurdly detailed, as he recounts Joseph Smith prophesying about the pioneers' trek through Iowa to "the valley of the Great Salt Lake," where the "United Order" will be practiced "even [as] the City of Enoch."<sup>78</sup> As to Sorenson's assertion that little Hancock was told to go to Mexico, where the Nephites lost their power, Hancock says that he saw Joseph Smith "[p]lacing his finger on the map, I think about where Snowflake, Arizona is situated, or it could have been Mexico. . . ."<sup>79</sup>

Dr. Sorenson's interpretation of this late recollection is likely wrong, as Hancock attempted to draw upon Joseph Smith to justify the Saints' retreat to Mexico to avoid prosecution for polygamy. The Mormon colonies were far distant from Sorenson's limited geographic model.<sup>80</sup> Dr. Sorenson limited

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(Mar. 1, 1845), at 830[010]; "Stephens' Work on Central America," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 4, no. 22 (Oct. 1, 1843), at 346[032].

<sup>77</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, 694 says: "On one occasion 10-year-old Mosiah Lyman Hancock heard Joseph tell his family in Nauvoo, Illinois, that 'the United States will not receive you with the laws which God desires you to live [presumably polygamy], and you will have to go to where the Nephites lost their power . . . . [You] will have to go South,' indicating at the same time on a map with his finger the direction of Mexico."

<sup>78</sup> Typescript of Mosiah Lyman Hancock, *The Life Story of Mosiah Lyman Hancock* (undated), in Harold B. Lee Library stacks, at 1, 19.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*, at 19.

<sup>80</sup> The full text upon which Sorenson relies: "The next day the P

the northern part of his Mesoamerican model to “all or part of the Mexican states of Veracruz, Oazaca, and Guerrero and limited adjacent areas.”<sup>81</sup> The Mormon colonies near the Sierra Madre mountains are over a thousand miles from Dr. Sorenson’s model.

The full text of Hancock’s recollection of Joseph Smith is:

I went and got my map for him. “Now,” he said, “I will show you the travels of this people.” He then showed our travels thru Iowa, and said, “Here you will make a place for the winter; and here you will travel west until you come to the valley of the Great Salt Lake! You will build cities to the North and to the South, and to the East and to the West; and you will become a great and wealthy people in that land. But, the United States will not receive you with the laws which God desires you to live, and you will have to go where the Nephites lost their power. They worked in the United Order for 166 years, and the Saints have got to become proficient in the laws of God before they can ever meet the Lord Jesus Christ, or even the city of Enoch.” He said we will not travel the shape of the horse shoe for there well will await the action of the government. Placing his finger on the map, I should think about where Snowflake, Arizona is situated, or it could have been Mexico, he said, “The government will not receive you with the laws that God designed you to live, and those who are desirous to live the laws of God will have to go South.”<sup>82</sup>

In the text that follows this paragraph, Hancock recalls Joseph Smith prophesying about two different political parties, the “United Order,” the Democrats and the Republicans, who will go to war, which will result in the creation of the “Independent American Party.” The United States will fight in foreign lands where “one half of the U.S. army will give up” until “the boys from the mountains will rush forth in time to save the American army . . . .”<sup>83</sup> Hancock’s concluding entry is in the spring of 1865, where he was living in southern Utah. It thus seems very probable that Hancock’s recollection as a ten-year-old was contaminated by events which occurred long after Joseph

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<sup>81</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, at p. 12.

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*, at 19.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

Smith's death; in any event, it is too detailed a recollection to be reasonable. Certainly, such a detailed prophecy combining reference to foreign wars, two different political parties, the Salt Lake Valley and the emigration to Mexico would have been much better documented than from the recollection of somebody probably less than ten years of age.

*Codex* cites a source from H. Donl Peterson for the proposition that Joseph Smith told "several people in his last years" that Moroni left southern Mexico with plates in hand to journey to New York to "bury the plates in a hill near Palmyra."<sup>84</sup> Peterson commented upon two versions of a map purportedly drawn by William McBride during one of Joseph Smith's sermons. The maps link Mesoamerica to an extended wandering by Moroni to New York. Peterson quotes another secondary source which claims Joseph Smith as the author of the map.<sup>85</sup> However, the maps use the words "Utah" and "Arizona" and thus are either not as Sorenson asserts or, once again, were contaminated by wishes of late origin. But, as Peterson points out, "[i]t is interesting to note that the brethren mentioned on these documents were contemporaries of the Prophet Joseph Smith, and they credited him with the notion that the travels of Moroni began in . . . Central America . . . ."<sup>86</sup>

*Codex* cites a source similar to Hancock, with the recollection of Charles Lowell Walker, who heard the testimony of William McBride, a multiple level of hearsay. Walker's diary reports that on January 26, 1881,

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<sup>84</sup> Sorenson, *Codex*, 695.

<sup>85</sup> H. Donl Peterson, "Moroni, the Last of the Nephite Prophets," in *The Book of Mormon: Fourth Nephi Through Moroni, from Zion to Destruction*, Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr., eds. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1995) 244-47, 244[020].

<sup>86</sup> *Id.*, at 247.

McBride recounted an address Joseph Smith made to the Nauvoo Legion on 18 or 23 June 1844, wherein Joseph Smith prophesied that the Saints would journey to the Rocky Mountains to live “the Marriage covenant,” and that “we should make stations and build up settlements all the way to new and old Mexico Until [sic] we crossed the Isthmus and get back to the place where the Covenant was broke [i.e., the United Order] by the old Nephites.”<sup>87</sup> Walker’s editor suggests that the reference to the United Order is a later insertion<sup>88</sup> and the typescript of the journal omits reference to the United Order.<sup>89</sup> This United Order reference is quite similar to the Hancock reference mentioned above and upon which Sorenson relies. Further, McBride preached that the great Nephite temple was located at Copan (Honduras), and that the United States government sent Stephens and Catherwood to Central America to prove the falsity of Joseph Smith’s claims but “all they did only proved the Book of Mormon to be an authentic Record of the ancient People of this vast continent.”<sup>90</sup> The Nephites then journeyed “from the South and southwest” to Cumorah where the records were buried.<sup>91</sup> Again, this long-after-the-fact recollection reads like folklore, as it is certainly likely that one of Joseph Smith’s stenographers or clerks would have captured an important sermon to the Nauvoo Legion.

The most popular current treatment of Book of Mormon geography – at least based upon Amazon sales ranks, is Bruce L. Porter’s and Rod L. Meldrum’s theory in a number of books, and in particular, the 2009

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<sup>87</sup> A. Karl Larson and Katherine Miles Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1980), at 524-25.

<sup>88</sup> Larson and Larson, at 525.

<sup>89</sup> *Diary of Charles L. Walker, 1855-1902*, typescript, Harold B. Lee Library.

<sup>90</sup> Larson and Larson, at 525.

<sup>91</sup> Larson and Larson, at 526.

*Prophecies & Promises – The "Heartland Model" – The Book of Mormon & The United States of America.*<sup>92</sup> Their work might instead be seen as a book-length assault on the Sorenson Mesoamerican model. Their essential conclusion, relying upon a long associated string of Book of Mormon textual proofs and statements of Joseph Smith and others, is that "this continent" and "this land" references in the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith-era statements "clearly" means that a limited geography theory can be found in the United States "heartland."<sup>93</sup> They argue that DNA evidence "is clear" that DNA evidence shows that the founding Native American population in North America originated, in part, from Europe or the Middle East (the source of the Jaredites and the Nephites) whereas no such DNA evidence may be found in Mesoamerica.<sup>94</sup> However, geneticists concluded years before *Prophecies and Promises* that the North American mitochondrial Haplogroup X arrived in North America 10,000 to 36,000 years ago, which does not explain the Nephite migration, nor the Jaredite migration in standard Biblical chronological terms.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, like Dr. Sorenson's

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<sup>92</sup> Bruce H. Porter & Rod L. Meldrum, *Prophecies & Promises – The "Heartland Model" – The Book of Mormon & The United States of America* (New York, New York: Digital Legend Press, 2009).

<sup>93</sup> *Id.* at Kindle location 633. Porter's and Meldrum's book is of questionable quality, in terms of editorial control and language. They use the words "clearly" or "clear" seventy-four times to argue that the Mesoamerican model is in error and that the Heartland model is the only "clear" choice.

<sup>94</sup> *Id.* at Kindle location 2313.

<sup>95</sup> Michael D. Brown, and others, "mtDNA Haplogroup X: An Ancient Link between Europe/Western Asia and North America?," *American Journal of Human Genetics* (1998) 63:1852. FAIR attempts a refutation of the Haplogroup X argument. FAIR points first to the date problem. FAIR then argues that a Haplogroup X theory does not support a "single Native American founding population" theory, but Porter & Meldrum do not appear to make that latter argument. "Book of Mormon/DNA evidence/Geography issues/Haplogroup X2a," undated, at [http://en.fairmormon.org/Book\\_of\\_Mormon/DNA\\_evidence/Geography\\_issues/Haplogroup\\_X2a](http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/DNA_evidence/Geography_issues/Haplogroup_X2a), accessed January 4, 2015.

work, *Prophecies & Promises* is an example of text-proofing Book of Mormon text and Joseph Smith's statements in combination with an appeal to "science."

It is far beyond the scope of this paper to contrast the methodological styles of Porter and Meldrum, on the one hand, and Dr. Sorenson, on the other hand. One case study deserves mention nonetheless. Dr. Sorenson concludes that the "narrow neck of land" reference, among other places, in Alma 22 must be an isthmus<sup>96</sup> and further that "we safely assume" that the isthmus divides the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans<sup>97</sup> even though the Book of Mormon says no such thing. "The 120-mile-wide Isthmus of Tehuantepec is just within the range of plausibility we established for the width of the "narrow neck."<sup>98</sup> But, as Dr. Sorenson says, and as quoting from the Book of Mormon, the "narrow neck" was "only the distance of a day and a half's journey for a Nephite . . . ,"<sup>99</sup> indicating that the editor of the Book of Mormon intended to convey the thought that the "narrow neck" was very narrow indeed and "only" something of little consequence. Given that the 120-mile span of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec is filled with unnavigable rivers and malarial swamps,<sup>100</sup> Mesoamerican theorists have spent some

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<sup>96</sup> *Codex*, at p. 18.

<sup>97</sup> *Codex*, at p. 19.

<sup>98</sup> *An Ancient American Setting*, at p. 36.

<sup>99</sup> *An Ancient American Setting*, at p. 17, quoting from Alma 22:32.

<sup>100</sup> According to the account in Don Jose Garay, *Survey of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec* (Ackerman & Co, London 1944), the government of Mexico commissioned a survey of the Isthmus. Garay's nine-month survey is contained in this book. Many parts of the northern part of the isthmus are impenetrable swamp and jungle. Although Garay discusses the prospect of navigation, he notes that the rivers are not navigable as they approach the hills and are difficult or impossible to ford at places. The study also recounts Cortes' experience in the area as he tried to use the isthmus as a means to access lower California.

time attempting to defend Dr. Sorenson's theory. [Dr. Sorenson, for instance, makes the "out there" argument that some Mexican foot runners can run 500 miles in six days. This feat must be the peak of human endurance. It is not the ordinary exploit of "a Nephite." Mexican runner had roads in the Aztec empire. They didn't have swamps to ford. ] Dr. Sorenson, for instance, has said that some Mexican foot runners can run 500 miles in six days,<sup>101</sup> although this feat must be the peak of human endurance, rather than the ordinary exploit of "a Nephite," and it is highly likely that the Mexican runners had strong roads or paths, and not rivers and swamps to ford. Michael R. Ash has supposed that the Book of Mormon meant something other than the width of an isthmus, but rather the width between two geographical mounts or political borders within the isthmus.<sup>102</sup> Thus, Ash seeks to salvage the Sorenson model to changing an isthmus to something that is not an isthmus which happens to be within an isthmus. This speculation heaped upon speculation, when the Book of Mormon does

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The author of this paper is an ultrarunner and has run several 100-mile and 24 hour events, usually running 100 miles in 24 hours. The world record for a barefoot 24-hour run is 136.98 miles on an indoor track. *Scott Douglas*, "New Record for 24-Hour Barefoot Run," in *Runners World & Running*, Aug. 11, 2014, published at <http://www.runnersworld.com/general-interest/new-record-for-24-hour-barefoot-run>, accessed January 1, 2015. The world record for a 24-hour run in the latest shoe technology on a track is held by Yiannis Kouros, whom this author has had the privilege to compete against. Kouros covered 303.506 km in 24 hours, or about 188 miles. "Yiannis Kouros," at [en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org), accessed January 1, 2015. These 24-hour races provide bounteous feasts and medical aid every one mile or so.

<sup>101</sup> Michael R. Ash, "Challenging Issues, Keeping the Faith: A journey across the 'narrow neck'," *Deseret News*, March 7, 2011, published at <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705387187/A-journey-across-the-narrow-neck.html?pg=all>, accessed January 1, 2015.

<sup>102</sup> Michael R. Ash, "Challenging Issues, Keeping the Faith: A journey across the 'narrow neck'," *Deseret News*, March 7, 2011, published at <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/705387187/A-journey-across-the-narrow-neck.html?pg=all>, accessed January 1, 2015.



not attempt to say that the narrow neck divided two seas, demonstrates the futility of discussion about Book of Mormon geography.

By contrast, Meldrum and Porter urged that support for the Heartland model turned on three proofs, first, “prophetic witnesses” and the Book of Mormon text, second, inspired statements from Joseph Smith, and third, “the geographical passages” in the Book of Mormon.<sup>103</sup> Yet, when their work turns to the single most significant geographic reference in the Book of Mormon, the “narrow neck of land,” they demur. They reason that an attempt to pinpoint the “narrow neck of land” would be akin to the fabled blind man’s analysis of a portion of an elephant.<sup>104</sup>

Fundamentally, the secular support for a limited Mesoamerican model (or any other limited model, but such is beyond the scope of this paper) is based upon little more than speculation. While Bruce Warren is critical of a model which competes with Dr. Sorenson’s model as lacking “any of the current mathematical or statistical approaches of contemporary geography,”<sup>105</sup> Warren might have also mentioned that *An Ancient American Setting* lacks any mathematical or statistical modeling used by cartographers and geographers.<sup>106</sup>

The Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (“FARMS”) and its successor, the Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, associated with Brigham Young University<sup>107</sup> have supported Dr. Sorenson’s

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<sup>103</sup> Porter & Meldrum, kindle location 215.

<sup>104</sup> Porter & Meldrum, Kindle locations 297, 518 and 2973. A Google scan of their website, [www.bookofmormonevidence.org](http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org), does not reveal any “narrow neck” discussion.

<sup>105</sup> Warren, at xxx.

<sup>106</sup> Need to back this up with professional journal information. If not, out.

<sup>107</sup> “BYU renames ISPART to Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship,” Mar. 1, 2006, Brigham Young University News Release,

work and defended him against his critics. Notable for a defense is William J. Hamblin's "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon" (1993) published in the *FARMS Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*.<sup>108</sup> Hamblin's work reviews a critic of Sorenson's version of a limited geography theory. The critic comments upon the inconsistencies between official or semi-official Church statements about Book of Mormon geography, on the one hand, and Sorenson's conclusions, on the other hand. Hamblin's article is particularly valuable in understanding the best of the arguments in favor of the LGT in light of past statements of Church leaders. Hamblin characterizes the dispute as "not which general authority or Latter-day Saint scholar believes which model (no geographical correlation has ever been put forward as revelation), but which model best matches the geographical data contained in the Book of Mormon."<sup>109</sup> He urges the thought that the "overwhelming trend" is for scholars and "leaders of the Church" to accept an LGT, although he identifies no "leaders" nor any of their publications or sermons.<sup>110</sup> Thus, what Church authorities have said on the subject has little significance as their statements do not arise to the level of "revelation."

BYU Professor Andrew H. Hedges has attempted to salvage a New York location for the ancient Hill Cumorah while preserving the possibility of a

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published at [news.byu.edu/archive06-Mar-maxwell.aspx](http://news.byu.edu/archive06-Mar-maxwell.aspx), accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>108</sup> William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," at 161[006].

<sup>109</sup> *Id.*, 182.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

Mesoamerican location for Nephite and Jaredite events.<sup>111</sup> Hedges criticizes Palmer's and Sorenson's assumptions that the Book of Mormon makes demands upon the Hill Cumorah's size that the New York hill does not match. "Sorenson argues that the hill must have been 'high enough that the wounded survivors would be safe on top from being spotted by the Lamanites below.' Again, however, the text hardly requires such an interpretation."<sup>112</sup> ". . . . Sorenson . . . creates long chains of probable events in an effort to arrive at the probable conclusion."<sup>113</sup>

Deanne Matheny, who holds a doctorate in anthropology, has been a member of the BYU faculty and is listed on the Maxwell Institute's website as a contributing author, has said:

For me these models require too many changes and arbitrary interpretations, too many deviations from the plain meaning of the words in the text of the Book of Mormon, for either of them to achieve even a partial fit with the geographical and archaeological evidence. There are too many areas where one must either assume that evidence exists but has not yet been found or that something other than the words actually used were intended. Using this sort of approach, the Book of Mormon scene could be superimposed on just about any area of Mesoamerica or the Andean region and even some areas of the present United States. One would only need assume that the plates, which are no longer available, were the only surviving examples of the writing. Too much side-stepping of this sort can lead to the absurd.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Andrew H. Hedges, "Cumorah and the Limited Mesoamerican Theory," in *Religious Educator* 10, no. 2 (2009): 111-134, republished at <http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-10-number-2-2009/cumorah-and-limited-mesoamerican-theory>, accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Andrew H. Hedges, "Problems with Probabilities: A Response," in *Religious Educator* 10, no. 2 (2009): 159-162, republished at [rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-10-number-2-2009/problems-probability-response](http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/volume-10-number-2-2009/problems-probability-response), access May 20, 2014. "Rather than deceiving ourselves with fuzzy notions of probability, I would advocate an approach to the Book of Mormon geography that begins with identifying, from the text, what the *possibilities* are." (Emphasis added.)

<sup>114</sup> Deanne G. Matheny, "Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography," in Brent Lee Metcalfe, ed., *New Approaches to the*

Unfortunately for Dr. Matheny, she made the political error of publishing her comments in Brent Metcalfe's *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon*, a book widely regarded as anti-Mormon. Dr. Sorenson, in response, "plead[s] semiguilty" to the use of "unrelated bits and pieces of information" to construct a limited geography theory, arguing that archeological study requires a "bits and pieces" analysis. Dr. Sorenson characterizes Dr. Matheny's review as not so much of an attack upon his work, but as an anti-Mormon attack upon the Book of Mormon itself, an argument not remotely supported by Dr. Matheny's critique.<sup>115</sup>

*Dialogue* published a review by Earl M. Wunderli (1984), critical of Dr. Sorenson's *An Ancient American Setting*, which review states the typical criticisms lodged against the limited geography theory. "Sorenson's model requires contorting terminology and text to make a case riven by esoteric complication."<sup>116</sup> In a footnote, Wunderli questioned Dr. Sorenson's supposition that Joseph Smith merely assumed a hemispheric model rather than "imagin[ing] there could be an alternative."<sup>117</sup> "Sorenson can more easily challenge Joseph Smith if Smith simply assumed a hemispheric geography rather than learning of it by revelation, as he arguably did from

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*Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Signature Books 1993), as republished at <http://signaturebookslibrary.org/?p=10224>.

<sup>115</sup> John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994), as published at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1429&index=10>, accessed December 25, 2014. "[N]o hint of a positive evaluation of the Nephite record is apparent in her critique. I have found by experience that scholars cannot be too careful in phrasing their results relating to a sensitive issue like 'archaeology and the Book of Mormon' to avoid twisted attributions. Neither can we be too careful of the publishing company we keep." *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Earl M. Wunderli, in "Critique of a Limited Geography for Book of Mormon Events," (*Dialogue* 1984)

<sup>117</sup> Wunderli, at 164, n. 9.

the angel Moroni."<sup>118</sup> However, Wunderli's reference is to Moroni's statement contained in the "Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith," following the "Testimony of the Eight Witnesses," wherein Moroni declared there as "an account of the former inhabitants of this continent. . . ."<sup>119</sup> Moroni's statement is a rather slender reed upon which to say that Joseph Smith preferred a hemispheric model over a limited model. It seems that Mr. Wunderli no longer asserts the Book of Mormon is a legitimate history<sup>120</sup> which should discredit his views amongst believers.

FARMS and Maxwell Institute (before a 2012 change in philosophy and management)<sup>121</sup> as well as Dr. Sorenson have criticized views that compete with Dr. Sorenson's theories.<sup>122</sup> In Sorenson's *Instant Expertise on Book of Mormon Archaeology* (1976), a BYU Studies production, Sorenson describes books about Book of Mormon geography as "swashbuckling" where "Mormons are willing to spend money for instant evidence of knowledge rather than labor for the knowledge themselves."<sup>123</sup> Sorenson criticized

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<sup>118</sup> Wunderli, at 164, n. 9.

<sup>119</sup> Wunderli, at 163.

<sup>120</sup> See a 1996 post at <a href="http://www.humanistsof Utah.org/1996/EarlWunderli\_Journey-6-96.html">http://www.humanistsof Utah.org/1996/EarlWunderli\_Journey-6-96.html</a>. A review of his 2013 book by AML may be found here: <a href="http://forums.mormonletters.org/yaf\_postst1474\_Wunderli-An-Imperfect-Book-What-the-Book-of-Mormon-Tells-Us-About-Itself-reviewed-by-Dale-E-Luffman.aspx">http://forums.mormonletters.org/yaf\_postst1474\_Wunderli-An-Imperfect-Book-What-the-Book-of-Mormon-Tells-Us-About-Itself-reviewed-by-Dale-E-Luffman.aspx</a>. He does not believe the Book of Mormon to be an ancient text.

<sup>121</sup> Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Shake-up hits BYU's Mormon studies institute," June 26, 2012, *The Salt Lake Tribune*, published at [www.sltrib.com/sltrib/utes/54358137-78/mormon-institute-peterson-studies.html.csp](http://www.sltrib.com/sltrib/utes/54358137-78/mormon-institute-peterson-studies.html.csp), accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>122</sup> Sorenson, "Instant Expertise on Book of Mormon Archaeology," *BYU Studies*, vol. 16, no. 3 (1976), at 429[007].

<sup>123</sup> Sorenson, "Instant Expertise on Book of Mormon Archaeology," at 429.

works by Jack West,<sup>124</sup> Paul Cheesman,<sup>125</sup> Venice Pridiss<sup>126</sup> and Dewey and Edith Farnsworth,<sup>127</sup> referring to “naïve use of sources, logical inconsistencies, cut-and-paste quotations, and harmful effects on the Church” and other rather strident descriptions.<sup>128</sup> “[Z]eal does not improve poor scholarship.”<sup>129</sup> Sorenson’s 1976 article is a good example of the gloves-off approach to a defense of the Mesoamerican model against all comers.

The Book of Mormon Archaeological Foundation (“BMAF”) asserts implicit ecclesiastical endorsement for its particular Mesoamerican views:

We at the Book of Mormon Archaeological Forum are privileged to have four senior emeritus members of the First Quorum of Seventy on our Education and Research Board. All of them, after much study and research, have come to the conclusion that Book of Mormon lands are in Mesoamerica. Elder Milton R. Hunter, former member of the First Quorum of Seventy, in the 1950’s publicly promoted Mesoamerica as the lands of the Book of Mormon, even while he was an active member of that quorum.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Jack West, *Trial of the Stick of Joseph* (Sacramento, California: Rich Publishing Co., 1976). Sorenson says that the “writing is disjointed, and a consistent argument is hard to discern.” West’s book is still advertised by Deseret Book although as of June 1, 2014, is listed as “unavailable.” <http://deseretbook.com/Trial-Stick-Joseph-Jack-H-West/i/2861056>, accessed June 1, 2014.

<sup>125</sup> Paul Cheesman, *These Early Americans: External Evidences of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974). Sorenson criticized Deseret Book’s the heavy promotion of the book.

<sup>126</sup> Venice Priddis, *The Book and the Map. New Insights into Book of Mormon Geography* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1975).

<sup>127</sup> Dewey & Edith Farnsworth, *The Americans before Columbus* (Sacramento, California: Rich Publishing Co., 1975).

<sup>128</sup> Sorenson, “Instant Expertise on Book of Mormon Archaeology,” p. 429-30.

<sup>129</sup> Sorenson, “Instant Expertise on Book of Mormon Archaeology,” p. 431.

<sup>130</sup> Stephen L. Carr, “general authority Statements Regarding Book of Mormon Geography,” April 2011 (Book of Mormon Archaeological Foundation), published at [http://www.bmaf.org/articles/general\\_authority\\_geography\\_carr](http://www.bmaf.org/articles/general_authority_geography_carr), accessed December 25, 2014. Despite its title, the article is an abbreviated summary

BMAF's work product is published in a somewhat primitive website at [www.bmaf.org](http://www.bmaf.org). It appears to host a number of papers by V. Garth Norman, a master's degree holder in anthropology and archaeology from BYU who, according to his LinkedIn profile, owns a private consulting company. Norman has a Mesoamerican view similar to Dr. Sorenson's, but with differences. BMAF lists as its ecclesiastical supporters Elder Ted E. Brewerton (former pharmacist), Elder Robert E. Wells (former accountant), Elder Merrill C. Oaks (physician) and Elder Clate W. Mask (former Church Educational System administrator), all of who are not active general authorities and are not anthropologists or archeologists.<sup>131</sup> BMAF uses these board members to bolster claims to ecclesiastical endorsement for its views, as these authorities are not social scientists, much less experts in Mesoamerica.

Moreover, the officers of BMAF do not include social scientists, although its "Research & Educational Board" includes one doctoral-level social scientist, Dr. F. Richard Hauck, with a degree in anthropology and archaeology.<sup>132</sup> BMAF publishes on its website a number of papers in defense of a Mesoamerican model and critical of other models. An example of BMAF's views may be seen in an article published by its staff in 2012, entitled "Response to George Potter's "Ten Reasons why Mesoamerica is Not Book of Mormon Lands."<sup>133</sup> A significant portion of the article accuses

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of authority statements to the effect that the Church takes no position, as well as an apologia against Joseph Fielding Smith's views. Many critical statements are missing.

<sup>131</sup> [http://www.bmaf.org/about/who\\_are\\_we](http://www.bmaf.org/about/who_are_we), accessed December 25, 2014.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* and [http://www.bmaf.org/bio/f\\_richard\\_hauck](http://www.bmaf.org/bio/f_richard_hauck), accessed December 25, 2014.

<sup>133</sup> BMAF Staff, Response to George Potter's "Ten Reasons why Mesoamerica is Not Book of Mormon Lands," March 2012 (Book of Mormon Archaeological

Potter of a “double standard,” by holding a Mesoamerican view to a standard his North American view cannot meet.

It is quite incongruent for Book of Mormon geography enthusiasts to say, on the one hand, that there can be nothing wrong with enlisting secular social scientific principles to support their particular views, on the one hand, and yet try and pin Joseph Smith or some other general authority to their theories. Nonetheless, many of the authorities after Joseph Smith have made statements about Book of Mormon geography in a rather authoritative manner perhaps intended to convey the idea that in general, Book of Mormon geography was not a proper subject for discussion, and in specific the Hill Cumorah’s location has been settled in New York. In other words, when general authorities have taken a position on the subject, they have discouraged Book of Mormon geography on the ground that it has not been revealed, but on the other hand maintain that the position of the Hill Cumorah has been fixed.

Church authorities do not support any limited geographic model with possible minor exception. According to one Church manual (2012) currently in curriculum use, the “Church has no official position about Book of Mormon geography except that the events occurred in the Americas.”<sup>134</sup> The manuals are a good indicator of current Church positions, as they are closely vetted by committees and general authorities before publication. Church manuals in the current curriculum either do not connect the Hill Cumorah

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Foundation), published at [http://www.bmaf.org/articles/response\\_ten\\_reasons\\_\\_staff](http://www.bmaf.org/articles/response_ten_reasons__staff).

<sup>134</sup> *Book of Mormon: Seminary Teacher Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012), 196[001]. The Institute manual says nothing one way or the other about geography. *Book of Mormon Teacher Manual: Religion 121-122* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2005)[002].



where Joseph Smith reported that he had found the gold plates to the Hill Cumorah reported in the Book of Mormon as the location of great battles and of the deposit of Mormon's plates.<sup>135</sup>

As far as statements both critical of Book of Mormon geographic studies and yet supportive of the New York location of the ancient Hill Cumorah, President Anthony Ivins' sermons display a good example of the historic church position on geography. Ivins had been sustained as First Counselor in the First Presidency of the Church by President Heber J. Grant on May 25, 1925.<sup>136</sup> In the General Conference following the Church's 1928 purchase of the Hill Cumorah,<sup>137</sup> in April 1928, Ivins said that the Book of Mormon and prior statements by Elder B. H. Roberts "definitely establish . . . that the Hill Cumorah, and the Hill Ramah are identical . . . . We know positively that . . . it was from this hill that Joseph Smith obtained possession" of the gold plates.<sup>138</sup> President Ivins said that the "purchase of

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<sup>135</sup> *Book of Mormon: Seminary Teacher Manual; Book of Mormon Teacher Manual; Doctrine and Covenants Instructor's Guide: Religion 324-325* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981)[003]; *Doctrine and Covenants and Church History: Seminary Teacher Manual* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013)[004].

<sup>136</sup> *Anthony W. Ivins: (rancher, mayor, church leader)*, Washington County Historical Society (2014) at <http://wchsutah.org/people/anthony-w-ivins.php>, accessed May 18, 2014.

<sup>137</sup> For a rather complete account of the Church's purchase of the Hill Cumorah, the significance Church members have placed on the Hill as an ancient and modern source of wisdom, see Cameron J. Packer, "Acquiring Cumorah," in *Religious Educator* 6, no. 2 (2005): 29-50, republished at <http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/no-weapon-shall-prosper/book-mormon-and-origin-native-americans-maternally-inherited-dna>, accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>138</sup> President Anthony W. Ivins, Conference Report, April 1928-Morning Session. The full quote is: "The passages which I have quoted from the Book of Mormon and the more extended discussion of this subject by Elder B. H. Roberts which was published in The Deseret News of March 3, 1928, definitely establish the following facts: That the Hill Cumorah, and the Hill Ramah are identical; that it was around this hill that the armies of both the Jaredites and Nephites, fought their great last battles; that it was in this hill that Mormon deposited all of the sacred records which had been entrusted to

this hill . . . is an event of more than ordinary importance to the membership of the Church . . . .The memories of the remote past which cluster round this sacred spot, its close association with the opening of the present gospel dispensation . . . make the acquisition of this hill almost an epochal accomplishment in the history of the Church.<sup>139</sup>

One year later, in 1929, President Ivins stated: "Where was the City of Zarahemla? and other geographic matters. It does not make any difference to us. . . . We do not offer any definite solution. As you study the Book of Mormon keep these things in mind and do not make definite statements concerning things that have not been proven in advance to be true."<sup>140</sup>

Elder Mark E. Peterson also criticized the study of Book of Mormon geography while, at the same time, affirmed his firm view of location of the Hill Cumorah: "I do not believe we should give credence to highly speculative theories about Book of Mormon geography. I do not believe that

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his care by Ammaron, except the abridgment which he had made from the plates of Nephi, which were delivered into the hands of his' son, Moroni. We know positively that it was in this hill that Moroni deposited the abridgment made by his father, and his own abridgment of the record of the Jaredites, and that it was from this hill that Joseph Smith obtained possession of them."

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> Anthony W. Ivins, Conference Report, April 1929, 15-16, retrieved from Gospelink 2001, CD-ROM (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000). The full quote is: There is a great deal of talk about the geography of the Book of Mormon. Where was the land of Zarahemla? Where was the City of Zarahemla? and other geographic matters. It does not make any difference to us. There has never been anything yet set forth that definitely settles that question. So the Church says we are just waiting until we discover the truth. All kinds of theories have been advanced. I have talked with at least half a dozen men that have found the very place where the City of Zarahemla stood, and notwithstanding the fact that they profess to be Book of Mormon students, they vary a thousand miles apart in the places they have located. We do not offer any definite solution. As you study the Book of Mormon keep these things in mind and do not make definite statements concerning things that have not been proven in advance to be true.

there were two Hill Cumorahs, one in Central America and the other one in New York, for the convenience of the Prophet Joseph Smith, so that the poor boy would not have to walk clear to Central American to get the gold plates."<sup>141</sup>

There appear to be no examples of the First Presidency saying that the Hill Cumorah of the Nephites and the Jaredites is in any place other than modern New York. The earliest examples of First Presidency (or "Presidency," as in the case of Joseph Smith's presidency with Oliver Cowdery) pronouncements are contained in the Church's official history maintained by Oliver Cowdery and others, but "jointly authored" by Joseph Smith, or so the Joseph Smith Project maintains.<sup>142</sup> In a July 1835 entry, known as "Letter VII," in the *LDS Messenger and Advocate*, republished in The Joseph Smith Papers as official history, Cowdery describes an area between Palmyra and Manchester where "between these hills, the entire power and national strength of both the Jaredites and Nephites were destroyed."<sup>143</sup> "[Y]ou will read Mormon's account of the last great struggle of his people as they were encamped around this hill Cumorah."<sup>144</sup> "This hill, by the Jaredites, was called Ramah . . . ."<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Mark E Peterson, CR April 1953.

<sup>142</sup> "Historical Introduction," History, 1834-1836 (ID # 6458), The Joseph Smith Papers, published at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1834-1836?p=91#!/paperSummary/history-1834-1836&p=91>, accessed May 19, 2014.

<sup>143</sup> Oliver Cowdery, Letter VII, July 1835, in History, 1834-1836 (ID # 6458), p. 119, The Joseph Smith Papers, published at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1834-1836?p=91#!/paperSummary/history-1834-1836&p=90>, accessed May 19, 2014.

<sup>144</sup> Cowdery, Letter VII, p. 120.

<sup>145</sup> Cowdery, Letter VII, p. 122.

In Letter VIII, October 1835, Cowdery picks up his account of the history of the Hill Cumorah, the “hill of which I was speaking,” where “records were placed by Nephi,” and where the “Nephites were destroyed” and where “the records were found.”<sup>146</sup> Rather than being the small drumlin, as often characterized by LGT theorists, or the “small hill” as characterized on the Church’s website, Cowdery rhapsodizes of the “hill Cumorah – it has a singular and imposing appearance for that country . . . .”<sup>147</sup>

Other authorities in the First Presidency making unambiguous statements about the location of the ancient Hill Cumorah as being the same as the hill in New York were Joseph Fielding Smith (19xx),<sup>148</sup> President Marion G. Romney (1975).<sup>149</sup> Apostles and other general authorities making

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<sup>146</sup> Cowdery, Letter VIII, Oct. 1835, in *History, 1834-1836* (ID # 6458), pp. 125, *The Joseph Smith Papers*, published at <http://josephsmithpapers.org/paperSummary/history-1834-1836?p=91#!/paperSummary/history-1834-1836&p=90>, accessed May 19, 2014.

<sup>147</sup> Cowdery, Letter VIII, p. 126.

<sup>148</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, ed., *Doctrines of Salvation: Sermons and Writings of Joseph Fielding Smith* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Books: xxxx). Volume 3, pp. 233-234: “This modernist theory of necessity, in order to be consistent, must place the waters of Ripliancum and the Hill Cumorah some place within the restricted territory of Central America , notwithstanding the teachings of the Church to the contrary for upwards of 100 years . . . It is difficult for a reasonable person to believe that such men as Oliver Cowdery, Brigham Young, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, David Whitmer, and others, could speak frequently of the spot where the Prophet Joseph Smith obtained the plates as the Hill Cumorah and not be corrected by the Prophet, if that were not the fact.” The Church’s *Deseret Book*, which publishes *Doctrines of Salvation*, says that it is a collection of “authoritative sermons.” <http://deseretbook.com/Doctrines-Salvation-Vols-1-3-Sermons-Writings-Joseph-Fielding-Smith/i/5020291>, accessed on May 18, 2014.

<sup>149</sup> October General Conference, 1975: “In the western part of the state of New York near Palmyra is a prominent hill known as the “hill Cumorah.” (Morm. 6:6.) On July twenty fifth of this year, as I stood on the crest of that hill admiring with awe the breathtaking panorama which stretched out before me on every hand, my mind reverted to the events which occurred in that vicinity which occurred some twenty five centuries ago—events which brought to an end the great Jaredite nation.”

similar unambiguous statements about the Hill Cumorah were Orson F. Pratt (1872 and 1878),<sup>150</sup> George Albert Smith (1906),<sup>151</sup> James E. Talmage (xxxx),<sup>152</sup> B.H. Roberts (19xx),<sup>153</sup> Bruce R. McConkie (19xx),<sup>154</sup> John H. Vandenburg (1974).<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Orson Pratt, Feb. 11, 1872 Journal of Discourses Vol. 14, pg. 331: "The great and last battle, in which several hundred thousand Nephites perished was on the hill Cumorah, the same hill from which the plates were taken by Joseph Smith, the boy about whom I spoke to you the other evening." Apostle Orson Pratt, Aug. 25, 1878 Journal of Discourses Vol. 20, pg. 62: "Thirty-six years prior to this time his nation was destroyed in what we term the State of New York, around about a hill, called by that people the Hill of Cumorah, when many hundreds of thousands of the Nephites—men, women and children, fell, during the greatest battle that they had had with the Lamanites."

<sup>151</sup> Elder George Albert Smith, Conference Report, April 1906, p.56: "We visited the Hill Cumorah and were accorded the courtesy of going thereon by the wife of Mr. George Sampson, a brother of Admiral Wm. Sampson, who before his death owned the property.....We were delighted to be there. Looking over the surrounding country we remembered that two great races of people had wound up their existence in the vicinity, had fought their last fight, and that hundreds of thousands had been slain within sight of that hill."

<sup>152</sup> Articles of Faith, Ch. 14, Pg. 255-256: "On the occasion of his first visit to Joseph Smith, Moroni told of the existence of the record, which, he said, was engraved on plates of gold, at that time lying buried in the side of a hill near Joseph's home. The hill, which was known by one division of the ancient peoples as Cumorah, by another as Ramah, is situated near Palmyra in the State of New York. . . . The final struggles between Nephites and Lamanites were waged in the vicinity of the Hill Cumorah, in what is now the State of New York, resulting in the destruction of the Nephites as a nation, about 400 A.D. The last Nephite representative was Moroni, who, wandering for safety from place to place, daily expecting death from the victorious Lamanites, wrote the concluding parts of the Book of Mormon, and hid the record in Cumorah. It was the same Moroni who as a resurrected being, gave the records into the hands of Joseph Smith in the present dispensation."

<sup>153</sup> B.H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon, p. 277: "This time it will have to do with so important a matter as a war of extinction of two peoples, the Nephites and the Jaredites, on the self same battle site, with the same 'hill' marking the axis of military movements. By the Nephites this 'hill' was called the 'Hill Cumorah,' by the Jaredites the 'Hill Ramah'; it was that same 'hill,' in which the Nephite records were deposited by Mormon and Moroni, and from which Joseph Smith obtained the Book of Mormon, therefore the 'Mormon Hill,' of today—since the coming forth of the Book of Mormon—near Palmyra, New York."

A belief in a Chilean landing by Lehi mitigates against a Mesoamerican theory. From 1879 to 1918, Orson Pratt's canonized notes to the Book of Mormon stated that the landing is "believed to be on the coast of Chili, S. America."<sup>156</sup> James Talmage's reorganization of the Book of Mormon into columns in 1920 dropped the Chilean reference.<sup>157</sup> John Welch, citing a 15 September 1842 statement in the *Times & Seasons* about a Lehite landing near Panama, questions the commonly-held view that Joseph Smith was the source of the Chilean statement.<sup>158</sup> Matthew Roper asserts that Orson Pratt was the origin of the Chilean landing theory and, further, that Joseph Smith was not the origin for such a view<sup>159</sup> notwithstanding a rather official-looking 1882 Church publication by Franklin D. Richards and James A. Little

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<sup>154</sup> Mormon Doctrine; pg. 174: "Both the Nephite and the Jaredite civilizations fought their final great wars of extinction at and near the Hill Cumorah (or Ramah as the Jaredites termed it), which hill is located in the western part of the state of New York ... Joseph Smith, Oliver Cowdery, and many early brethren, who were familiar with the circumstances attending the coming forth of the Book of Mormon in this dispensation, have left us pointed testimony as to the identity and location of Cumorah or Ramah."

<sup>155</sup> CR April 1974.

<sup>156</sup> The Book of Mormon (Liverpool: William Budge, 1879), 47; The Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1879), 47; The Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1908), 47; The Book of Mormon (Chicago: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1911) 47; The Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1918), 47. See facsimiles for the Book of Mormon, with dating of non-dated versions and some explanatory material, at <http://bookofmormononline.net/fax>, accessed August 10, 2014.

<sup>157</sup> The Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1920).

<sup>158</sup> John Welch, *Reexploring the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1992), 57 citing "Facts are Stubborn Things: From an extract of Stephens' Incidents of Travels in Central America," *Times and Seasons*, vol. 3, no. 22 (Sept. 15, 1842), at 921.

<sup>159</sup> Matthew Roper, "Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations," *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004), 236. Roper's 2004 article is, as are most FARMS articles, arguments against a hemispheric model and in favor of a Mesoamerican setting. His article seeks to discredit Pratt's statement.

attributing the Chilean theory to a "Revelation to Joseph the Seer."<sup>160</sup> Sorenson opposes the Chilean landing on the second page of *An Ancient American Setting*, citing doubts of B.H. Roberts and John A. Widstoe, but relies upon the 15 September 1842 Panama landing *Times & Seasons* article.<sup>161</sup> On the one hand, it would be difficult to discount decades of a canonized footnote in light of an anonymous contradictory editorial in a Church newspaper. On the other hand, the absence of the Chilean reference in the modern Book of Mormon text suggests that church authorities responsible for the preservation and transmission of an accurate text had sufficient doubts about Pratt's conclusions.

On May 25, 1903, President Joseph F. Smith presided over a conference in Provo to discuss competing geographic theories of the Book of Mormon. He said that that the location of the City of Zarahemla was "not of vital importance" and "he advised against students considering it of such vital importance as the principals of the Gospel."<sup>162</sup>

An editor of the *Instructor* in 1918 reported that he witnessed an effort by some brethren to obtain approval from President Joseph F. Smith of a map showing the exact landing place of Lehi and his company. President Smith declined to officially approve of the map, saying that the Lord had not yet revealed it, and that if it were officially approved and afterwards found to be in error, it would affect the faith of the people.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> Sorenson (1985), 2.

<sup>162</sup> "Book of Mormon Students Meet: Interesting Convention Held in Provo Saturday and Sunday: President Smith Presides," *Deseret News*, May 25, 1903, p. 7, col. 5, reproduced at <http://news.google.com/newspapers?id=z9U0AAAIAIAJ&sjid=UUoDAAAIAIAJ&pg=4393%2C4476117>.

<sup>163</sup> George D. Pyper, "The Book of Mormon Geography," *The Instructor* No. 73 (April 1938), 160 [this is a secondary cite; I have not seen this article].

Harold B. Lee stands alone as a Church authority who would not necessarily locate the ancient Nephite Hill to New York. He said in 1966: "Some say the Hill Cumorah was in southern Mexico (and someone pushed it down still farther) and not in western New York. Well, if the Lord wanted us to know where it was, or where Zarahemla was, he'd have given us latitude and longitude, don't you think? And why bother our heads trying to discover with archaeological certainty the geographical locations of the cities of the Book of Mormon like Zarahemla?"<sup>164</sup>

Elder Dallin H. Oaks of the Quorum of the Twelve has expressed enthusiasm for a limited geography theory, and it is a remarkable expression given decades of entrenchment against speculative geographic studies. In an address to the 1993 annual FARMS dinner, he said:

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

In contrast, if the Book of Mormon only purports to be an account of a few peoples who inhabited a portion of the Americas during a few millennia in the past, the burden of

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<sup>164</sup> Harold B. Lee, "Loyalty," address to religious educators, 8 July 1966; in *Charge to Religious Educators*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Church Educational System and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1982), 65; cited in Dennis B. Horne (ed.), *Determining Doctrine: A Reference Guide for Evaluation Doctrinal Truth* (Roy, Utah: Eborn Books, 2005), 172–173.



argument changes drastically. It is no longer a question of all versus none; it is a question of some versus none.<sup>165</sup>

The most significant indicator of modest acceptance are two Sorenson articles about his theories, including a 1984 September Ensign article, *Digging into the Book of Mormon: Our Changing Understanding of Ancient America and Its Scripture*, Ensign Sept. 1984.<sup>166</sup> Dr. Sorenson's articles, however, do not suggest that the Hill Cumorah is in Mexico. The absence of such a prominent leg in Dr. Sorenson's theories in his articles suggests that he could not publish it. This article's author's attempts to investigate with knowledgeable editors of the Ensign the circumstances of the absence of mention of a two-Cumorah theory may have led to the deletion of an entire thread in the popular [www.mormondialogue.org](http://www.mormondialogue.org) internet discussion panel where one former *Ensign* reviewer admitted publicly that the Church did not want to tackle the issue, later met with denials by Dr. Sorenson.<sup>167</sup> Similarly, Stan Larson asserts from Ferguson's writings that Deseret Books refused previously to sell Thomas Stuart Ferguson's *Cumorah – Where?* because the assertion of a second Cumorah was too controversial.<sup>168</sup>

Additionally, the Church produced and exhibited Kieth Merrill's 67 minute film, *The Testaments: Of One Fold and One Shepherd* (2000)

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<sup>165</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, "The Historicity of the Book of Mormon," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 237-48, republished at [rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/11-historicity-book-mormon](http://rsc.byu.edu/archived/historicity-and-latter-day-saint-scriptures/11-historicity-book-mormon), accessed May 20, 2014.

<sup>166</sup> <http://bobcrockettlaw.com/1359-2/Our%20Changing%20Understanding%20of%20Ancient%20America%20and%20Its%20Scripture>

<sup>167</sup> The thread was "Digging into the Book of Mormon," dated around 2010.

<sup>168</sup> Stan Larson, "The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, 23, no. 1 (Spring 1990): 55-93, at p. 60.

featuring a Mesoamerican location for Nephite events.<sup>169</sup> Merrill has since disavowed a Mesoamerican LGT and has agreed with Rod Meldrum's and Bruce Porter's Heartland LGT theory<sup>170</sup> although that is more of a testament of Meldrum's and Porter's popularity rather than Merrill's expertise.

But still, the Church's official website publications and its scriptural resources do not support a two Cumorah theory. A two-Cumorah theory is essential to most Mesoamerican limited models. As far as statements contained in rather official sources, the Church's website's discussion of the Hill Cumorah identifies it as a "small hill located in western New York" where "Moroni hid the gold plates" and where Joseph Smith obtained the plates.<sup>171</sup> This explanation cannot be read to infer that the Nephite and Jaredite hill was the same as Joseph Smith's hill, as the Book of Mormon identifies the site of the final Nephite battle as the Hill Cumorah (Mormon 6:6) but nowhere says that Moroni deposited the plates in that same hill.

In the Church's canon, the *Introduction* to the Book of Mormon names the Hill Cumorah as the place where Moroni deposited the plates. The *Introduction's* reference to the Hill Cumorah is vague, as the reference could be either the New York Hill Cumorah or the Nephite/Jaredite Hill Cumorah.

The Book of Mormon's footnote and index sources, however, imply that the place where the Nephite final battle occurred is the same as the Hill Cumorah where Joseph Smith found the plates. The Doctrine & Covenants, at section 128:20 refers to the Hill Cumorah: "And again, what do we

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<sup>169</sup> See the film's IMDB reference at [http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0258247/?ref=nm\\_film\\_dr\\_3](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0258247/?ref=nm_film_dr_3), accessed May 18, 2014.

<sup>170</sup> Kieth W. Merrill, "It's not about artifacts and evidence," Customer Review, April 29, 2012, at <http://www.amazon.com/review/RTCLPB4EI72O>.

<sup>171</sup> <http://lds.org/scriptures/gs/cumorah-hill?lang=eng&query=cumorah>

hear? Glad tidings from Cumorah! Moroni, an angel from heaven, declaring the fulfilment of the prophets -- the book to be revealed." "Glad tidings" coming from Cumorah isn't exactly definitive, but certainly would not apply to a hill where Joseph Smith did not find the plates. The footnote to Mormon 6:6 (the site of the final battle) links to section 128 of the Doctrine and Covenants, the "glad tidings" section, as well as to Joseph Smith History 1:52, which does not call the hill by its name but refers to the retrieval of the records. The Book of Mormon's *Index* lists together in one combined reference the Jaredite, Nephite and Joseph Smith hills, even when – in the case of the Joseph Smith History – the name of the hill is not mentioned.<sup>172</sup> The most reasonable reading of the collateral references is that the Church intended to convey the idea that the place where Mormon buried his records is the same place where Joseph Smith retrieved Moroni's plates, but the texts are vague.

In recent years, proponents and opponents of a Mesoamerican theory of the Book of Mormon have focused upon two enigmatic letters which purport to have come from the office of the First Presidency. Unfortunately, they don't really answer questions and fuel the fire for continued debate over the issue of official Church criticism of a limited geographic theory that might call for two Cumorahs. The letter first is dated October 16, 1990, signed by F. Michael Watson and addressed to a bishop in Oklahoma. Elder Watson was called to be the Secretary to the First Presidency in April 1986, and in 2008 called to the First Quorum of Seventy.<sup>173</sup> Elder Watson's letter

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<sup>172</sup> *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ; The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; the Pearl of Great Price* (Salt Lake City: Intellectual Reserve, 1981, 2013), at *Index*, p. 66.

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org.nz/article/f-michael-watson>, accessed May 18, 2014.

states that the Hill Cumorah known to the Nephites is located in New York.<sup>174</sup>

The second letter from the First Presidency's office is more in the nature of a comment upon a cover sheet which typically transmits facsimile letters.<sup>175</sup> On April 23, 1993, Carla Ogden sent the form to Brent Hall of FARMS. FAIR's website reports without reference that she was the Senior Executive Secretary for the Office of the First Presidency as of 2009.<sup>176</sup>

In his 1993 article defending the Sorenson model, Hamblin incorrectly cites the letter as "Correspondence from Michael Watson" when Watson's name is nowhere mentioned in the document.<sup>177</sup> Roper makes the same citation error in his rather significant FARMS 2004 apologetic defense (actually, a critique of early sources suggesting a hemispheric model) of the Mesoamerican theory.<sup>178</sup> There is no doubt that Ogden was working in Watson's office at the time, as Watson was working in the office of the First Presidency, but it is misleading to cite the letter as Watson's work or to imply that it had the endorsement of Ezra Taft Benson.

Mesoamericanists favor the Ogden letter simply because it says the Church takes no position, a rather weak foundation for the cottage industry of limited geography. Ogden's transmittal says, in part: "The Church emphasizes the doctrinal and historical value of the Book of Mormon, not its

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<sup>174</sup> See a copy of the letter at [http://randomrunner.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/watson\\_1st\\_cumorah\\_letter.pdf](http://randomrunner.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/watson_1st_cumorah_letter.pdf).

<sup>175</sup> See a copy of Ogden's statement at [http://randomrunner.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/1st\\_pres\\_large\\_01.pdf](http://randomrunner.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/1st_pres_large_01.pdf).

<sup>176</sup> [http://en.fairmormon.org/Book\\_of\\_Mormon/Geography/Statements/Twentieth\\_century/First\\_Presidency\\_Letter](http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon/Geography/Statements/Twentieth_century/First_Presidency_Letter), accessed May 18, 2014.

<sup>177</sup> Hamblin (1993), at 181.

<sup>178</sup> Roper (2004), at 107.

geography. While some Latter-day Saints have looked for possible locations and explanations because the New York Hill Cumorah does not readily fit the Book of Mormon description of Cumorah, there are no conclusive connections between the Book of Mormon text and any specific site that has been suggested.”

Both letters are of dubious provenance. It would be helpful, for example, to have a statement establishing provenance of the Ogden facsimile from Brent Hall or of the Watson letter from the Oklahoma bishop. Brent Hall has apparently authored one short article for FARMS, but not on the subject of Book of Mormon archaeology.<sup>179</sup>

The Ogden facsimile’s provenance is particularly precarious as almost all facsimile transmissions bear a ribbon of information either at the top or bottom, which the facsimile machine time-stamps. This one lacks it. As well, there seem to be information missing in some of the fields of the facsimile form. The possibilities for the absence of the fax strip are: (1) the Office of the First Presidency intentionally programmed the fax machine to omit the information ribbon, as these machines produce them automatically unless programmed otherwise; under this scenario, Ms. Ogden would have also have omitted information called for in the form; (2) when the Ogden facsimile was copied for Internet distribution, the ribbon of information and other pieces of information about the sender’s identity were redacted; (3) the Ogden facsimile may have been created from memory, after the fact, by somebody who didn’t think to add the ribbon of information and other

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<sup>179</sup> Brent Hall, Review of Chris Heimerdinger, *Gadiantons and the Silver Sword: A Novel*. Salt Lake City: Covenant, 1991. 268 pp. \$11.95, in Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 4/1/ (1992), at <http://publications.maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/fullscreen/?pub=1427&index=13>, accessed May 18, 2014.

private data. All of these are reasonable explanations for the missing data, and sufficient to cause one to want more provenance. Of course, the provenance issue can practically vanish with a statement from Brent Hall authenticating the document as a true copy and not one reconstructed from memory.

But, the Ogden facsimile merely quotes from the Encyclopedia of Mormonism, so it is not controversial as to its content.<sup>180</sup> Despite being privately published, the Encyclopedia was extensively vetted by Church authorities for doctrinal consistency. Yet another hint that perhaps Church authorities might not see the Hill Cumorah as a pin in a known map.

The Watson letter was drafted on October 16, 1990, a Saturday, in proportionate font typically not found on typewriters in 1990 (although likely found at the Church in 1990). It would be highly unusual, but not impossible, for a church clerical person to be working on a Saturday in his office.

### **Final Thoughts**

Book of Mormon geography is a cottage industry which finds *almost* no support today from formal ecclesiastical sources in the Church. The part that is not *almost* includes (1) the employment of Mark Alan Wright, a Mesoamericanist, in BYU's Department of Religion, (2) Ensign publication of Dr. Sorenson's articles, (3) popular acceptance and BYU publications, the old *FARMS* program, a (4) the production of video materials, (5) Elder Milton R. Hunter's work, and so on. The competing theories suffer from the problems of an appeal to uncertain and vague ecclesiastical sources, a misuse of those

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<sup>180</sup> Need cite from Encyclopedia.

sources and from an incomplete or stunted secular comparison of an ancient text to geography.

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