



Type: Magazine Article

Anachronisms and the Book of Mormon

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Source: *Improvement Era*, Vol. 52, No. 10 (October 1949)

Published by: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Page(s): 644, 659–660

Abstract: This article argues that there is a marked absence of anachronisms in the Book of Mormon. One method of detecting a fraudulent historical document is to examine it for anachronisms. It is almost impossible to keep such errors from slipping into documents when one is producing the document in a time period other than that about which it is being written.



NACHRONISMS and THE BOOK OF MORMON

ANACHRONISMS (errors in time) are perhaps the worst plagues which beset those who would tell of the past, in the printed page, in speech, or on the screens of the motion picture houses. Because it is so difficult to keep these errors out, one of the best methods of detecting a forgery from a historical document is to examine it for things that did not exist at the time the article was supposed to have been made.

To insure authenticity in the movies, it is said that the larger studios have twenty thousand volume libraries. A large amount of a motion picture's budget goes into research and technical advice to insure the authenticity that millions of weekly movie attenders demand. The War Department gave technical assistance for the production *This Is the Army*. Yet, this picture, which excelled in music and color, had scarcely been released before an alert Boy Scout wrote to the studio asking why the American Eagle in the closing sequence, faced left. He knew, from his work in scouting, that this should never be.

Even with a large staff of experts and with the expenditure of vast sums of money, no motion picture production is without errors. We should not expect it otherwise since, as human beings, we do err, and no human production is perfect.

By comparison, let's examine another composition arranged by Thomas W. Brookbank and which is reproduced in the book *Seven Claims of the Book of Mormon*, by Elder John A. Widtsoe and Franklin S. Harris, Jr., (1936).

Let us quote extensively:

The English of the Book of Mormon would therefore show, first, the absence of modernisms, and, secondly, a Hebrew reflection in words and sentence structure. These are both very evident as the following selections from an extensive literature will show.

The contractions "can't," "couldn't,"



"don't," and others of a like character and of constant use among English-speaking people, do not occur in the Book of Mormon. . . . Such forms are foreign to the ancient Jewish sacred speech.

No titles such as "Mr.," "Mrs.," "Miss," "Prof.," "Dr.," "D.D.," "LL.D.," "M.A.," "B.A.," "Hon.," "Ph.D.," "Lady," "Gentleman," "Sir," "Madam," "Esquire," "Excellency," "Highness," "Grace," "Peer," "Lord," "Baron," "Earl," "Reverend," or their plurals, together with many others that might be cited, are found in that book. A few, however, used to designate office, do occur as, for example, "King," "Captain," (general army office) and "Governor."

The English of the Book of Mormon would show first, the absence of modernisms, and second, a Hebrew reflection in words and sentence structure.

There are no surnames in the Book of Mormon, since surnames first came into general use about A.D. 1040.

In no instance is there a letter "q," "x," or "w" in an uncorrupted proper name in the translated Nephite records. Nor is one of them in an uncorrupted

Hebraic proper name found in the Bible. Not one of these letters occurs in the Hebrew alphabet under any name, and the Nephites as Israelites, or Hebrews, could not therefore make use of modernizing them.

The Book of Mormon makes no use of modern names for cloths, such as "calico," "muslin," "delaine," "linsey," "broadcloth," and scores of others. No modern names for many articles of wearing apparel occur in that book, as for example, "skirts," "pantaloon," "waistcoats," "collars," "cuffs," "gloves," "boots," "shirts," and others.

No names for intoxicants familiar to modern times and people are used in it. It makes no mention of whiskey, gin, ale, brandy, punch, porter, beer, and so on. The ancient word "wine" does occur.

The book does not speak of colleges or universities, nor does it refer directly to any such schools of learning. Libraries, art collection, museums, and like institutions are not mentioned, nor is their existence in any way implied.

Several single words and phrase terms which are in common use among modern English authors are wholly wanting in the pages of that work. To instance some of them we have, "namely," "as follows," "the following," "to wit," "the foregoing," "the above," "to sum up," "for instance," "for example," "to recapitulate," and so on. Even the rare use of such words was foreign to the ancient Hebrew speech.

Christian denominational names in use a century ago throughout the world are not to be found in the translated Nephite records; nor is Mohammedanism spoken of; and the same may be said of many "isms" of one character or another, which have sprung up among men during the last several centuries. All names also of Christian religious orders, such as Jesuits, Franciscans, and various others are excluded from that book.

No principle of science is mentioned under a modern name; no principle is referred to in any way which the very latest developments do not sustain as sound, scientific teachings.

No tariff or free trade questions are noticed.

Newspapers and magazines are not

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spoken of, nor is their existence implied.

When giving relative values which obtained in the Nephite monetary system (see Alma 11), any statement concerning or involving a decimal principle would have been well-nigh fatal to the claim that the Book of Mormon records are a translation from ancient historical writings. Decimals, as we understand and use them, were not invented until after the beginning of the Christian era. The Book of Mormon does not give even an intimation of the relative value of any piece of the Nephite money when compared with some specified coin of America or England.

No weekday names occur in the book. Not one of the names of the days of the week as they are now used is traceable to an original Hebraic source. Names of months are not given in the Nephite records. The naming of them was unknown to the ancient Israelites. Special days or seasons of Christian Church observance are all passed in silence. Easter, Lent, and not a few others receive no mention.

Watches and clocks are not referred to; neither are the hours of the day as measured by such instruments. No mention is made of cannons, rifles, muskets, shot, shell, or ammunition.

No reference is made to modern medical practices. Diseases under modern names are not spoken of; neither are modern drugs mentioned. Names of modern beverages do not occur, as tea, coffee, or chocolate.

No modern geographical names are used. No place is located by means of latitude and longitude. This convenient and accurate system first came into use about A. D. 382.

When writing largely as he did of the Lamanites, who for centuries have been known to English-speaking peoples as Indians, and whom he in his younger days knew by no other appellation, how does it happen, if the Book of Mormon be fictitious, that Joseph Smith never once substitutes the name "Indians" for "Lamanites"?

No reference is made to trial by jury.

There is a different point of view from which this matter of what had been left out of the Book of Mormon is to be considered. Reference is made to things and matters which with perfect consistency might be spoken of in one part of the book while the mention of them even indirectly in another part would have been a disastrous

(Concluded on following page)



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error. We find that the book of Ether does not purport to give an outline of the history of an Israelitish people, but of a Babylonian colony. Some of the omissions which had to be observed in the abridgment of the Etheric narrative are:

(a) References to the law of Moses; to the writing of the ten commandments by the finger of the Lord; to his descent on Mount Sinai; to a single one of his many marvelous works in behalf of the Israelites.

(b) Abraham and his calling to be the father of the faithful could not be mentioned; nor could stories relating to Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, and a host of other renowned servants of God.

(c) Nothing could be said respecting the Aaronic nor the Melchizedek priesthoods; nor the Levites; nor the tabernacle nor its location.

(d) Jerusalem, Canaan, Palestine, Egypt, the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, the Jordan, Nazareth, with their sacred and blessed memories could not safely be spoken of unless a knowledge of them is accounted for as coming from the hand to the Lord. (T. W. Brookbank, *Millennial Star* 86:36-39, 52-55, 59-60.)

The elimination of common English words from the Book of Mormon vocabulary is evidence that no modern writer wrote the book originally. The frequent use of "exceeding" and "exceedingly" when for most of them "very" alone or in phrase combination could be substituted. "Very" as an adverbial modifier is not used until near the close of Nephi's second book.

"Quite" is a term in daily use among English-speaking people, yet it is not used in the Book of Mormon. "Just" in combinations such as "just now" or "just come," does not occur in the Book of Mormon anywhere. "Guess" is a word that Joseph Smith, a native of Vermont, might be expected to use frequently; but it occurs only once in the book, and then in the past tense. (Helaman 16:16.) "Namely" is a common word, but it is not used as an original word in the Nephite records.



(Thomas W. Brookbank, *THE IMPROVEMENT ERA* 14:500-505.)

Doesn't it seem singularly strange that Joseph Smith could use words so consistently without knowledge of the customs and mores of ancient peoples; without special training; with no staff of experts; and with no means by which to hire such help, and could write an account of an ancient people such as the Jaredites covering about 2,500 years of time, and then again of the Nephites covering another one thousand years, each of these accounts being peculiar to its own time and conditions? In these accounts Joseph Smith gives locations, distances, migrations by land and sea; notwithstanding at this time, Joseph Smith had never traveled outside of his immediate vicinity and had probably never seen an ocean. In these accounts are given the doings of governments and courts with officers and laws.

Joseph Smith knew almost nothing of these people. They had, according to the Book of Mormon, monetary systems, systems of weights and measures, religions, agriculture, with all the customs and activities of people and nations. Doesn't it seem strange, indeed, that none of the common errors that writers and the motion picture industry make are found in the Book of Mormon? Grammatical errors, yes, because God used man as he is, but it is evident that he was not using Joseph Smith to provide the facts; they were already provided in the record on the golden plates.

When the Lord used Joseph Smith as Joseph Smith, there were human errors, but where he used the record as recorded by the prophets at the time and under the conditions as the records were made, there are no errors.

Taking into consideration, then, the manner in which the Book of Mormon came forth, and also the searching scrutiny to which the book has been subjected, it seems that we may well conclude that if the claims set out by Joseph Smith were not true, they would long ago have been disproved and exposed. His claims have stood well over a century of time, standing as firm today as they did the day they were made.