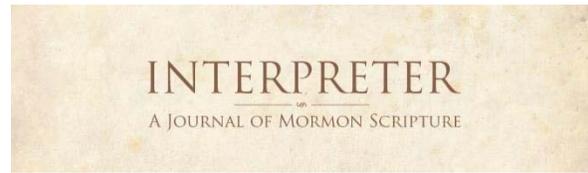




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“War of Words and Tumult of Opinions”: The Battle for Joseph Smith’s Words in Book of Mormon Geography

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and Tumult of Opinions”:
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in Book of Mormon Geography**

Neal Rappleye

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“WAR OF WORDS
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THE BATTLE FOR JOSEPH SMITH’S WORDS
IN BOOK OF MORMON GEOGRAPHY

Neal Rappleye

Review of John L. Lund. *Joseph Smith and the Geography of the Book of Mormon*. The Communications Company, 2012. 209 pp. + xviii, including index.

In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?

–Joseph Smith Jr.¹

Over the years, a plethora of theories have been advanced regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon.² No doubt that many Latter-day Saints who have inquired on the

¹ Joseph Smith—History 1:10.

² For discussion and overview of a variety of different models, see John L. Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events: A Source Book* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1992), 38–206; Michael R. Ash, *Shaken Faith Syndrome: Strengthening One’s Testimony in the Face of Criticism and Doubt*, 2nd edition (Redding, California: FairMormon, 2013), 174–78. Also see the “Book of Mormon/Geography/All models by name table,” in the FairMormon Answers database, http://en.fairmormon.org/Book_of_Mormon_geography/All_models_by_name_table (accessed May 11, 2014). For some history of thought on Book of Mormon geography, see Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 7–35; Matthew Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 225–276; Joseph L. Allen and Blake J. Allen, *Exploring the Lands of the Book of Mormon*, rev. ed. (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 2011), 371–399.

subject have felt much like the young Joseph Smith: caught between a “war of words and tumult of opinions,” he or she wonders “What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together?” And how is one to know; how does one go about trying to judge between the competing views?

Perhaps ironically, the words of Joseph Smith himself have become a primary battleground in recent years. Though some have been using statements from Joseph Smith (or attributed to Joseph Smith) to try and bolster their geographic model for decades, only in recent years has the question of what Joseph Smith did or did not say (and if anything he said was revelation) become a focal point in the debate. This began around 2007, when Rod Meldrum produced a DVD version of a presentation he had been giving on the Book of Mormon, DNA, and geography. Included in this presentation was a segment on Joseph Smith’s views, concluding that “Joseph knew” exactly where events in the Book of Mormon had taken place.³ Two years later, Meldrum would produce a five-disc set, *Book of Mormon Evidence*. The second disc in this set expanded on Meldrum’s original presentation of Joseph Smith’s views, once again concluding that “Joseph knew.”⁴ Meldrum would also author/co-author two books that included sections claiming that Joseph Smith knew where the Book of Mormon lands were located.⁵ In his presentations, Meldrum adamantly insists that

3 Rod L. Meldrum, *DNA Evidence for Book of Mormon Geography: New Scientific Support for the Truthfulness of the Book of Mormon*, DVD (2007), section 3.

4 Rod L. Meldrum, *Book of Mormon Evidence*, 5 DVD set (2009), disc 2. This presentation can be viewed online in five segments, at http://www.firmlds.org/video_gallery.php, videos 11–15. Further references will use these videos.

5 Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises: The Book of Mormon & the United States of America* (Mendon, New York: Digital Legend, 2009), 91–118; Rod L. Meldrum, *Exploring the Book of Mormon in America’s Heartland: A Visual Journey of Discovery* (Melona, New York: Digital Legend, 2011).

Joseph Smith identified the “heartland” of the United States as the place where Book of Mormon events took place, and that he knew this by revelation.

Also in 2007, John Lund began to promote the idea that Joseph Smith explicitly identified Zarahemla, the narrow neck, Bountiful, and other Book of Mormon sites as being in Central America.⁶ Lund, like Meldrum, insisted such identifications were based on revelatory knowledge that Joseph Smith had. The crux of Lund’s claims rests on some editorials published in the *Times and Seasons* of which the authorship is in dispute. Lund believes that he has established that Joseph Smith did indeed write the relevant editorials, but he only touched on this research in his 2007 book.⁷ This research is the focus of Lund’s 2012 work, *Joseph Smith and the Geography of the Book of Mormon*, under review here.

Meanwhile, in 2010 Matthew Roper of the Neal A. Maxwell Institute of Religious Scholarship extensively examined the claims Meldrum made regarding Joseph Smith’s knowledge of Book of Mormon geography.⁸ After thorough analysis of all the primary sources Meldrum’s argument hinges on, Roper concluded that such claims are not founded on a firm foundation.

The preponderance of evidence does not support the claim that Joseph Smith’s revelations included details about Book of Mormon geography, but rather suggest that this, as with many other questions, was an issue in which Joseph Smith, as time allowed him to give it

6 John L. Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?* (The Communications Company, 2007), 19–36.

7 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 17–18, 31–32.

8 Matthew Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” *FARMS Review* 22/2 (2010): 15–85, esp. 51–70.

attention, followed the dictates of his own judgement and expressed his own opinion.⁹

At the same time, Roper also discussed the *Times and Seasons* editorials, and mentioned ongoing research that he and others were involved in that suggested that Joseph Smith had indeed written the editorials in question.¹⁰ This research, recently published, will be further discussed below.

As can be seen from the above, several researchers, with several different approaches, have entered the battle for Joseph Smith's words on Book of Mormon geography. As Lund's book focuses on the *Times and Seasons* editorials, that is the battlefield we will explore here. I strongly recommend Roper's already mentioned work on the other primary sources. Before reviewing the research that suggests Joseph Smith was responsible for the relevant editorials, some historical context on the *Times and Seasons* and the editorials is in order.

A Brief History of the *Times and Seasons*

The *Times and Seasons* was the Church's premier periodical during the Nauvoo era, running from November 1839 to February 1846. It started out as a monthly publication for about the first year, and then began printing an issue on a bi-weekly basis until it was discontinued completely. It was launched by the prophet's brother, Don Carlos Smith, but the editorship of the paper for the first couple of years was somewhat turbulent. In March 1842, Joseph Smith became the editor, and remained so until October of that same year, after which John Taylor

⁹ Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 84.

¹⁰ Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 75–83. Also see Paul Fields, Matthew Roper, and Atul Nepal, "Wordprint Analysis and Joseph Smith's Role as Editor of the *Times and Seasons*," *Insights* 30/6 (2010): 1–2.

(with some assistance from Wilford Woodruff until April 1844) became the editor for the remainder of the paper's history.¹¹

Both Lund and Roper discuss the history of the *Times and Seasons* and how Joseph Smith came to be the editor.¹² Late 1841 into 1842, the editorship was in the hands of Ebenezer Robinson and Gustavus Hill. According to Roper, "In the fall of 1841, the Prophet began expressing concerns about Robinson and Hill's ownership and operation of the paper. By this time, most of the Twelve had returned from Great Britain, and Joseph was increasingly anxious to place someone else in charge of the paper."¹³ Meetings were held in November of that year to address the concern, but it appears no action was taken until early in 1842. At that time Joseph Smith received a revelation that instructed the Twelve to "take in hand the editorial department of the *Times and Seasons*" (pp. 47, 53).¹⁴

Different parties seem to see different significance in this. In his video presentations, Meldrum presents this as evidence that Joseph Smith was *giving up* the editorial responsibilities to the Twelve, and hence would no longer be involved. After quoting the revelation, Meldrum states, "Certainly, Joseph Smith would have done exactly as the Lord indicated and *turned over* the responsibility for the *Times and Seasons* to the Twelve."¹⁵ But at this point, Joseph Smith did not have editorial responsibilities

11 See Reed C. Durham Jr., "Times and Seasons," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), available online at http://eom.byu.edu/index.php/Times_and_Seasons (accessed May 14, 2014).

12 Lund does so in a two-columned format that is meant to imitate the format of the actual *Times and Seasons* newspaper (see pp. 52–56). Cf. Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 75–81.

13 Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 75.

14 Also cited in Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 76. The revelation can be found in *History of the Church*, vol. 4:503.

15 See approx. min. 1:45–1:55 in video 14 at http://firmllds.org/video_gallery.php (accessed May 14, 2014), transcription, punctuation, and emphasis all mine.

or even *ownership* of the paper to “turn over” to anybody. The revelation was not for Joseph to “turn over” anything, but to have the Twelve *take over* the editorial department from Robinson and Hill. Brigham Young had to pay a handsome price to secure the press and then turn it over to the Church.¹⁶ It is *after* the Twelve take over that Joseph Smith is then appointed as editor-in-chief of the paper, evidently being so appointed by the Twelve (p. 53).¹⁷ Thus, Lund sees this as signaling that “the *Times and Seasons* now became an official Church publication” (p. 54). For Lund, that the Lord would intervene with the editorship of the paper via a revelation is a sign that this was a highly significant channel for Church-sanctioned information (p. 47).

Lund appears to be on the right track here. Rather than being evidence of a hands-off approach from Joseph Smith in the editorial department, as Meldrum would have it, it provides evidence of a very hands-on approach. Joseph was paying attention to what appeared in the *Times and Seasons*, was concerned enough about its content to seek guidance from the Lord on the matter, and in turn the Lord actually gave a revelation, thus signifying just how important the venue truly was to the Saints and to the Lord. When Joseph Smith announced his editorship of the paper, he was sure to include a denouncement of the previous issues:

This paper commences my editorial career, I alone stand responsible for it, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward. I am not responsible for the

¹⁶ See Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” 76–77.

¹⁷ Cf. Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” 77.

publication, or arrangement of the former paper; the matter did not come under my supervision.¹⁸

Under those circumstances, it is hard to imagine Joseph taking his editorial responsibilities casually, thus not noticing, and letting stand, several editorials that contradicted any previous revelation he may have had on Book of Mormon geography (or any other subject, for that matter). He declared full responsibility for “all papers having [his] signature.” Contra Meldrum, this is not just for individual *articles* having his signature,¹⁹ but rather the paper as a whole, which would feature a signature block from Joseph Smith at the end of each edition of the paper, as was customary for editors to do during this time period (see pp. 57–58).

In light of the above, it seems that, regardless of who actually *wrote* the now-controversial editorials on Book of Mormon geography, to insist that Joseph Smith was not aware of them or did not approve of them seems tenuous, at best. But the case gets worse for those who wish to distance the prophet from these writings.

18 Joseph Smith, “To Subscribers,” *Times and Seasons* 3/9 (March 1, 1842): 710. All issues of the *Times and Seasons* can be read online at <http://lib.byu.edu/collections/mormon-publications-19th-20th-centuries/t/#times-seasons>.

19 Immediately after quoting Joseph Smith’s announcement of his editorship, placing emphasis on the line “and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward,” Meldrum states, “One of the very interesting things that we find the historical documents is that none of these editorials that indicate a Mesoamerican setting for the Book of Mormon were actually signed by Joseph Smith himself.” (See approx. min. 2:21–2:38 of video 14 at http://firmlids.org/video_gallery.php). Meldrum thus insinuates that Joseph Smith is not “responsible” for these articles. But Joseph Smith’s signature block does appear at the end of those editions, and it is that signature for the whole paper to which Joseph is referring when he declares responsibility for “all papers having my signature henceforward.”

Joseph Smith and the Central America/Book of Mormon Editorials

Editorials and other material associating the Book of Mormon with Central America—and specifically using the findings of John Lloyd Stephens and Fredrick Catherwood—appeared in the *Times and Seasons* before, during, and after Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor of the paper. These appear across a span of more than three years. “Before, during, and after his editorship,” Lund points out, “Joseph was not opposed to correcting an error” (p. 83). As noted above, when Joseph was dissatisfied with the editorship of the paper, he had it taken over by the Twelve, who subsequently appointed him as editor. In addition to this episode, Lund points to other instances where Joseph Smith took action to correct what was printed in the *Times and Seasons*, both during and after his editorship of the paper (pp. 83–84). However, Lund notes, “There were no objections by Joseph to any of the several editorials that specifically mention Stephens and Catherwood before, during, or after his editorship” (p. 70).

It is very hard to imagine that over a wide time span, that included several months in which Joseph himself was the responsible editor, Joseph never noticed or objected to repeated articles contradicting any given revelation. This becomes clear with a brief review of the editorials on Central America and the Book of Mormon from before, during, and after Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor.

Before...

Early in the year 1841, while Joseph’s younger brother Don Carlos was still the editor of the *Times and Seasons*, an article entitled “American Antiquities—More Proofs of the Book of Mormon,” was published, which, after a brief editorial introduction, reprinted a report from the *New York Herald*

Weekly, on lectures given by Stephens and Catherwood.²⁰ The title of the article itself makes the explicit connection between these finds and the Book of Mormon. Though this appeared the same year Joseph expressed concern over the editorship of the *Times and Seasons*, that was not until later in the year, *after* Don Carlos had passed away (in August, per Lund, p. 53) and the editorial chair passed into the hands of Robinson. There is presently no evidence that Joseph disapproved of his brother’s work as editor of the paper.

During...

It is actually during Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor that we see a proliferation of editorials on the Book of Mormon and Central America. This fact, on its face and independent of any question of authorship, ought to be taken as evidence of Joseph Smith’s approval of such content in the paper. The following five articles, some signed “ED.,” some unsigned, appeared during Joseph’s time as editor (March–October 1842):

- “Traits of the Mosaic History,” *Times and Seasons* 3/16 (June 15, 1842): 818–820 (signed ED.)
- “American Antiquities,” *Times and Season* 3/18 (15 July 1842): 858–860 (signed ED.)
- “Extract from Stephens’ ‘Incidents of Travel in Central America,’” *Times and Seasons* 3/22 (September 15, 1842): 911–915
- “Facts Are Stubborn Things,” *Times and Seasons* 3/22 (September 15, 1842): 921–922
- “Zarahemla,” *Times and Seasons* 3/23 (October 1, 1842): 927–928

Notice that the first two are signed “ED.” for “Editor.” Lund claims, “Assistant editors did not sign as editor, unless the editor read, approved, and authorized him to do so” (p. 53).

²⁰ “American Antiquities—More Proofs of the Book of Mormon,” *Times and Seasons* 2/16 (June 15, 1841): 440–442.

Unfortunately, there is no documentation by Lund to support this assertion, a regrettably common occurrence throughout the book. Nonetheless, in the absence of concrete historical evidence to the contrary, these logically should be attributed to Joseph Smith, as he was the editor at the time. Meldrum and others have sought to circumvent such common sense conclusions by pointing out,

...some issues had an article written by Joseph and another article accredited to “ED.” in the same issue. In other words, there were two authors, one was Joseph, the other was “ED.” or editor within the same issue. Had Joseph written both articles, wouldn’t they have both been attributed to him?²¹

While it is true that there are articles signed as ED. and others directly signed by Joseph Smith, careful attention to *genre* quickly answers this objection. Editorials are *always* either signed ED. or simply unsigned, never signed by the Editor’s name. Other writings from Joseph which were not written as a part of his editorial responsibilities were signed by his name. These include personal correspondences, notices, affidavits, and other writings made in his capacity as prophet, mayor, lieutenant general, etc. (rather than his role as editor). This is meticulously documented by Lund in “Addendum Five” (pp. 149–161).²²

When was Joseph Smith in Hiding?

The typical excuse for not attributing the three unsigned articles to Joseph Smith, which are the most explicit in connecting the

21 Rod L. Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?” at The FIRM Foundation website, March 15, 2012, online at <http://firmllds.org/feature.php?id=21> (accessed May 15, 2014).

22 Cf. the expanded version, “Web Addendum Five,” online at <http://drjohnlund.com/> (accessed May 15, 2014).

Book of Mormon to Central America via the work of Stephens and Catherwood, is that he was in “hiding” at the time, and therefore *could not* have written the editorials. Rod Meldrum, for example, claims that Joseph Smith was in hiding from August 8, 1842, through October 20, 1842. Thus, they are not written or authorized by Joseph Smith.

Joseph Smith’s life, in the words of one historian, is a “biographer’s dream.”²³ It is well documented by primary sources, many of which are first-hand. This means claims like this can be checked against a rich historical record. Probably Lund’s most important contribution to this discussion is his meticulous documentation of Joseph Smith’s whereabouts during his time as editor of the *Times and Seasons*, pertinent selections of which are provided in “Addendum Nine” (see pp. 179–187).²⁴ Drawing on that documentation, Lund forcefully responds to this charge:

That is blatantly false. Joseph was in Nauvoo for the October 1, 1842 editorial naming Zarahemla as being geographically situated in Guatemala. He was in Nauvoo before and during the time of the publication of the September 15, 1842 editorials naming the narrow neck of land as being in Central America. Joseph Smith was home from August 20, 1842, until October 7, 1842, when, at 8:20 p.m., he left for Father Taylor’s farm about fifty miles from Nauvoo. (p. 164)

In addition, when Joseph was in hiding, he “was never more than a few miles from his home in Nauvoo” (p. 164). Joseph still performed many of his responsibilities. It is even

²³ Larry E. Morris, “Joseph Smith and Interpretive Biography,” *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 359.

²⁴ Cf. the expanded version, “Web Addendum Nine,” online at <http://drjohnlund.com/> (accessed May 15, 2014), which lays out the activities of Joseph Smith for virtually every day from March 1, 1842–November 16, 1842.

documented that, while hiding, he proofread a segment of his history in preparation for its printing in the next issue of the *Times and Seasons*, and a copy of that issue was sent to him, which he read (pp. 164–165), while on another occasion, still in hiding, he drafted a notice to be published in the *Times and Seasons* (p. 186).²⁵ So, *even if* he were hiding at the time of the Central America/Book of Mormon editorials (which he was not), the evidence suggests that he would have still been aware of and involved in the publishing of the paper.²⁶

Not only was Joseph Smith not hiding at this time, but Matt Roper demonstrates that both Woodruff and Taylor were ill around the time the September 15, 1842, issue was published.

Significantly, both Woodruff and Taylor were seriously ill during this time. “I commenced work this day,” Woodruff recorded on 19 September, “for the first time for 40 days.” This means that Woodruff had been absent from the printing office for more than five weeks previous to 19 September. On 21 September the Prophet recorded that he had also met with John Taylor, “who is just recovering from a severe attack of sickness” and that he counseled Taylor “concerning the printing office.” The two met again two days later. We do not know how long Taylor had been ill, but the fact that the two had been seriously ill suggests that

25 More details on this are available in Lund, “Web Addendum Nine,” 13, entries for October 11 and 15, 1842, plus n. 6.

26 There are items in the same issues of the *Times and Seasons* that are signed by Joseph Smith, a fact which Meldrum well knows (see approx. min 11:00 in video 14 at http://firmllds.org/video_gallery.php, accessed May 14, 2014). The implications should be obvious: one cannot insist that Joseph Smith simply could not have written for the *Times and Seasons* while in hiding when known writings of Joseph Smith appear in those issues of the *Times and Seasons*. Hiding or not, Joseph Smith could and did write for those issues of the paper.

the Prophet may have had to bear additional editorial burdens at that time.²⁷

This may indicate that Joseph Smith *alone* was handling the editorial responsibilities for the September 15, 1842, edition, in which two of the Central America/Book of Mormon articles appear. Regardless, however, Joseph met multiple times with Taylor between the September 15 and October 1, 1842, editions, leading Roper to conclude, “Regardless of who wrote the *Times and Seasons* articles linking the Book of Mormon to Central America, Joseph Smith could not have been unaware of what was being written. Indeed, even if those articles were written by John Taylor or Wilford Woodruff, clearly Joseph knew what was being written.”²⁸

After...

After Joseph Smith, John Taylor was appointed the editor of the *Times and Seasons*. Under his editorship, Central America and the works of Stephens and Catherwood once again were highlighted in the pages of the newspaper. In May 1843, a letter introducing the Kinderhook plates was published in the *Times and Seasons*. In a rather long editorial preface to the letter, John Taylor speaks of the ancient ruins of Mexico and Central America as evidence of the Book of Mormon.²⁹ A few months later, the following appeared in an editorial by Taylor:

This is a work that ought to be in the hands of every Latter Day Saint; corroborating, as it does the history of the Book of Mormon. There is no stronger circumstantial [sic] evidence of the authenticity of the

27 Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” 78. For the meetings with Taylor, see Lund, “Web Addendum Nine,” 12.

28 Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” 78.

29 “Ancient Records,” *Times and Seasons* 4/12 (May 1, 1843): 185–186.

latter book, can be given than that contained in Mr. Stephens' works.³⁰

Later still, early in 1844, in an editorial preface introducing an article reprinted from the *Texas Telegraph*, Taylor once again invoked the Stephens and Catherwood volume as evidence of the Book of Mormon.³¹ All of these were published prior to Joseph Smith's martyrdom.

After the prophet's death, the *Times and Seasons* published a letter from his younger brother, William Smith, addressed to W. W. Phelps. In the letter, dated November 10, 1844, William calls the *Times and Seasons* "the columns of the Prophet," despite the fact that Joseph Smith had been dead for over four months and had not been the editor of the paper for two whole years. This suggests that the paper was nonetheless closely associated with the prophet, and views expressed in the paper were likely taken as representative of his own even after he was no longer the editor of the paper. More to the point, in this same letter, William Smith frequently and freely connects the ruins explored by Stephens and Catherwood with the Book of Mormon.³²

So the frequent use of the ruins in Central America discovered by Stephens and Catherwood continued after Joseph Smith's time as editor, several times while the prophet was still alive. This in a paper that, even after his death, was still being taken as representative of him, as the William Smith letter indicates. Granted, Joseph was busy with a lot more to do than check up on the *Times and Seasons*, but it is nonetheless curious that this was repeated over and over again, without correction, in a paper that served as an important voice for the

30 "Stephens' Work on Central America," *Times and Seasons* 4/22 (October 1, 1843): 346.

31 "Ancient Ruins," *Times and Seasons* 5/1 (January 1, 1844): 390–391.

32 William Smith to W. W. Phelps, November 10, 1844, *Times and Seasons* 5/23 (December 15, 1844): 755–757.

Church at the time, much as the *Ensign* and *Liahona* magazines do today, as Lund points out (pp. 47–50). Not only is there no evidence that Joseph disapproved of this connection, or that he felt it contrary to any revelation from God, but there is good evidence to suggest that he, in fact, supported associating the Central American ruins with the Book of Mormon. Not the least of that evidence is the fact that he probably wrote the five editorials that appeared under his editorship (as discussed below).

Joseph Smith and John Taylor: Trusted Friend, or Rogue Apostle?

Before addressing the question of authorship, however, there is one more point I will explore. Those who want to disassociate Joseph Smith from excitement over the Central American ruins frequently turn to John Taylor (often with Wilford Woodruff as an accomplice) as the culprit. He was assistant editor under Joseph Smith, similar editorial commentary appeared under his own editorship (as mentioned above), and the Bernhisel letter (to be discussed later) appears in his handwriting. Meanwhile, Wilford Woodruff was the one who brought Stephens' books into Nauvoo in the first place, worked in the printing office while Joseph Smith was editor, and was assistant editor under Taylor.

Even if it were true that Taylor and Woodruff, and not Joseph Smith, were responsible for all the enthusiasm for the Central American ruins, there remains an absence of any evidence that Joseph Smith was not on board. In fact, the evidence suggests that he was.

First, there is the fact that when Joseph stepped-down from his position as editor-in-chief of the *Times and Seasons*, he personally chose John Taylor to takeover. Joseph Smith had this to say when he did:

I have appointed Elder John Taylor, who is less encumbered and fully competent to assume the responsibilities of that office, and I doubt not but that he will give satisfaction to the patrons of the paper. As this number commences a new volume, it also commences his editorial career.

JOSEPH SMITH³³

Joseph felt Elder Taylor was “fully competent” to serve as the paper’s editor, an opinion no doubt based on whatever editorial or writing tasks Taylor fulfilled on behalf of Joseph as his assistant editor. If Taylor wrote the editorials from September and October 1842, as some suggest, then Joseph’s overall vote of confidence only a month later would suggest that he supported the editorial direction Taylor had taken.

A year later, and one month after Taylor had published an editorial on Central American ruins and the Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith wrote a letter to address the Saints through the *Times and Seasons*, encouraging them to subscribe to it rather than secular newspapers of the day. The whole letter serves as a clear endorsement of the editorial direction of the paper and closes declaring, “[W]hen you support my friends, you support me.” The “friends” he is speaking of are obviously Taylor and Woodruff, who are currently responsible for the paper, and whom he addresses at the beginning of the letter.³⁴ This marks a second opportunity for Joseph Smith to correct the misguided speculations of these rogue apostles, and yet it marks his second ringing endorsement of Taylor’s (and Woodruff’s) editorial choices.

Now we come to the Bernhisel letter. John Bernhisel was a Bishop of the Church back in New York in 1841, when John Lloyd Stephens’ *Incidents of Travel in Central America*,

33 “Valedictory,” *Times and Seasons* 4/1 (November 15, 1842): 8.

34 “To the Saints,” *Times and Seasons* 4/24 (November 1, 1843): 376–377

Chiapas, and Yucatan was published. He purchased copies of the two-volume set and sent them back to Nauvoo as a gift to the prophet Joseph Smith. Wilford Woodruff picked them up from Bernhisel on his way back to Nauvoo from his mission in Great Britain. Woodruff recorded in his journal that on his way to Nauvoo, he read from the volumes and was thrilled, as he felt it provided strong evidence for the Book of Mormon. It is likely he delivered them to the prophet with excitement.³⁵ Joseph Smith sent a letter back to Bernhisel thanking him for the gift. The letter reads:

I received your kind present by the hand of Er [Elder] Woodruff & feel myself under many obligations for this mark of your esteem & friendship which to me is the more interesting as it unfolds & developes many things that are of great importance to this generation & *corresponds with & supports the testimony of the Book of Mormon*; I have read the volumes with the greatest interest & pleasure & must say that of all histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive.³⁶

Because this letter is in the handwriting of John Taylor, Meldrum and others feel that they can dismiss it as not representing Joseph Smith's views, but rather Taylor's. But Joseph Smith commonly had his letters, and even his journal entries, written out by scribes, and if we held all such documents with this same level of skepticism then scarcely a thought at all could be attributed to the prophet himself (see the similar

35 All this history, including quotation from Woodruff's journal, is documented in Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 71-73.

36 Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, November 16, 1841, as cited in Roper, "Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography," 74; emphasis added.

point made by Lund, pp. 17–19). To me, the fact that the letter, signed “Joseph Smith,” is written in Taylor’s hand suggests that Joseph trusted Taylor to accurately record and express his (Joseph’s) own views on the book. This would not be likely if Joseph’s feelings towards it—and its relationship to the Book of Mormon—were dramatically different from Taylor’s.

These three lines of evidence—the two endorsements of Taylor’s editorial work, and his being trusted to pen the letter to Bernhisel—come to together to paint a picture of Taylor as Joseph Smith’s trusted friend, with whom he shared an excitement over recent archaeological finds thought to be related to the Book of Mormon, not some rogue apostle spinning theories contrary to what Joseph knew by revelation.

Some Additional Historical Considerations

Lund points out that the list of people who accepted the Central American ruins found in Stephens’ book as evidence of the Book of Mormon includes many of Joseph Smith’s closest associates, including Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and Orson Hyde (p. 75). To that list can be added the Pratt brothers, Orson and Parley, as documented by Roper.³⁷ Two of Joseph Smith’s brothers (Don Carlos and William Smith) have already been mentioned. It becomes increasingly difficult to maintain that this association was contrary to Joseph Smith’s revelatory knowledge when so many of his closest associates are apparently unaware of the contradiction.

Authorship of the 1842 Editorials

Addressing the issue of authorship for the five editorials on Central America and Book of Mormon during the time of Joseph Smith’s editorship, Meldrum insists “that their authorship is historically unknown,” and that “official Church

³⁷ Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon,” 244–245, 251–252.

historians claim that they simply do not know who authored those articles.”³⁸ There are two interesting points about this approach. First, if the authorship is “unknown,” then, logically, we cannot be certain Joseph Smith did *not* write them. So long as the authorship remains unknown, it cannot be asserted, as Meldrum often does, that these editorials were not written by Joseph Smith or do not represent his views. This is problematic, since Meldrum wants to insist that Joseph Smith knew by revelation that *only* the so-called “heartland” of the United States is where the Book of Mormon took place. Until Joseph Smith is definitively ruled out as author of these editorials, such a position cannot be maintained.

This leads to the second point: Meldrum and his followers seem content to leave the question of authorship in the realm of the “unknown.” But what is unknown is not necessarily *unknowable*, and the good historian will seek to know the currently unknown. Whatever else might be said of Lund’s work, he has at least made the attempt to resolve this vexing historical question.

Meldrum himself understands, in principle at least, that the authorship *can* be discovered by analyzing the style of writing. In his 2009 video presentation, he asserts, “In other words, when they would write, they would use specific words, and they had certain patterns that they would write [in], and so articles that are signed ‘ED.’ if you take a look at the linguistics, many times could be determined who it was that wrote those articles.”³⁹ However, neither Meldrum nor his supporters has attempted a rigorous analysis of the style and linguistics to assess authorship. Instead, he commonly offers up two points of style he feels are at odds with Joseph Smith’s writing

38 Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?”

39 See approx. min. 5:03–5:23 in video 14 at http://firmllds.org/video_gallery.php (accessed May 14, 2014), transcription, punctuation, and brackets all mine.

style: (1) frequent use of the first-person plural (we, us, our) throughout the editorials; and (2) reference to Joseph Smith in the third-person.⁴⁰

Lund responds to both of these points. On the first, he notes that the “Editorial We” was very common in the 19th century, even citing a source that states that this was a “near universal” practice (p. 58). This appears to, again, boil down to a genre issue. Joseph Smith may not have typically written in the first-person plural in, say, his personal correspondence (Meldrum compares the editorials to the style of a letter in his video presentation),⁴¹ but it seems likely that in his capacity as editor, he would follow the standard stylistic conventions of the day. Lund also points out that it was common practice of the day to refer to oneself in the third-person (p. 55–56). Unfortunately all the examples he attributes to Joseph Smith are also miscellaneous unsigned items from the *Times and Seasons* during Joseph Smith’s editorship.⁴² While one would generally assume that Joseph, as the editor, was the responsible author, the nature of these materials gives Meldrum and others the same wiggle room they appeal to with the editorials in question. In any event, these two points hardly constitute an insurmountable case against Joseph Smith’s authorship.

Meanwhile, Lund has taken the challenge to find the author of these editorials very seriously. Taking the authorship of the two signed editorials as a given (p. 49), Lund subjected the three unsigned editorials, from the September 15 and October 1, 1842, editions, to what he calls an “Author Identification

40 See, for example, Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?”, where both of these points are raised, or in the video clip reference above.

41 See approx. min. 10:52–12:15 in video 14 at http://firmllds.org/video_gallery.php (accessed May 14, 2014).

42 Due to a misattribution, I was not able to look up one of the references.

Study” (pp. 87–104).⁴³ As early as 2007, Lund reported having used seven different discriminators, and gave details on three of them.⁴⁴ In a brief summary of that earlier study, Lund reported, “All seven author discriminators identified conclusively Joseph Smith was the author of the editorials in question.”⁴⁵

In 2012, Lund used 11 different discriminators (nine “objective,” two “subjective”) to create an author profile for the *Times and Seasons* editorials, and then compared that against the same discriminators in the known writings of Joseph Smith, Wilford Woodruff, and John Taylor. Table 1 shows the results for the nine “objective” discriminators.⁴⁶

Table 1: Nine Authorship Discriminators Compared Between Joseph Smith, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, and the *Times and Seasons*.

Discriminators	<i>Times & Seasons</i>	Joseph Smith	John Taylor	Wilford Woodruff
(1) Words Exclusive to One Author	(Based on words in the articles)	13	0	0
(2) Probable First and Only Time Word Use	(Based on words in the articles)	2/906	13/906	35/906
(3) Average Vocabulary Size (per 906 words)	300	297	372	364
(4) Most Likely to Use a Word	(32 key words extracted from articles) ⁴⁷	23/32	7/32	2/32
(5) Average Sentence Length	36	40	25	22

43 Cf. “Web Addendum Four,” online at <http://drjohnlund.com/> (accessed May 15, 2014).

44 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 17–18.

45 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 18.

46 For full explanation of the discriminators, one will have to consult Lund, either his book or web addendum.

Discriminators	<i>Times & Seasons</i>	Joseph Smith	John Taylor	Wilford Woodruff
(6) Closest Match to non-contextual Word Usage Frequency	(Based on frequency in articles of 13 non-contextual words)	11/13	3/13	4/13
(7) Percentage of Sentences ≤ 10 Words	8%	10%	26%	22%
(8) Percentage of Sentences ≥ 100 Words	4%	6%	1%	0.333%
(9) Percentage of Rhetorical Questions	4%	5%	15%	5%

Based on this data, plus his two “subjective” discriminators (for 11 in all), Lund concludes:

The results of the eleven separate author identification tests were overwhelmingly clear in identifying Joseph Smith as the one who authored the editorials in question. The comprehensive Author Identification Study confirmed Joseph Smith’s authorship of the September 15, 1842, and October 1, 1842, editorials in the *Times and Seasons*. (p. 103)

He also declares that the results “conclusively sustained Joseph Smith as the author of these editorials” (p. 103). Such strongly worded pronouncements regarding the results of the study can be found throughout the book. Here are just a few more examples:

⁴⁷ Lund actually reports using 86 key words, of which Joseph Smith was the most likely to use 68 of them. However, the results are not reported from Woodruff and Taylor. In “Addendum Four” (pp. 143–146), he does provide a table with a 32-word sample of his larger pool and provides the numbers I used in this table.

There can be no equivocation when faced with convincing evidence that Joseph Smith did indeed author the foregoing editorial. The convincing evidence is the comprehensive Author Identification Study that will be reported on in detail. (p. 38)

It is a simple matter; do the facts support Joseph's authorship? Did Joseph Smith author and/or approve these editorials? The overwhelming evidence from the comprehensive Author Identification Study is that he did. (p. 38)

The conclusive results of the comprehensive Author Identification Study.... (p. 40)

There can be little question that the data, as presented by Lund, strongly supports Joseph Smith's authorship of the *Times and Seasons* editorials. However, there are some methodological flaws that suggest greater caution is warranted. First, there is the question of just how strong these discriminators really are. They are not the kind of discriminators usually used in statistical analyses meant to determine authorship attribution. This evokes the question of whether or not they are powerful enough discriminators to distinguish between one author and another. As Lund presents the data, they certainly seem to clearly distinguish between authors, but Lund provides no control group or test cases.

Usually studies of this type include a control group or test cases, where samples from the candidate authors are tested against writings of known origins, both other samples of their own and samples from other candidate and non-candidate authors, to determine whether the selected discriminators can successfully identify the authorship of those writings. Usually only after a method has been shown to successfully discriminate between authors above 90 or 95 percent of the time does the

researcher proceed to demonstrate results of their study. Nothing like this appears in Lund's study. How often does, say, discriminator 4 or 5 successfully identify the author of a 900- to 1000-word block? What is the discriminating power of each discriminator individually, and then what is their power collectively? Lund reports massive sample sizes from each candidate author (p. 89). He needs to divide up those samples into 900- to 1000-word blocks and then run some tests on some of those blocks to see how often each of those discriminators can successfully identify the author of those word blocks.

Another problem has to do with sample size—not the size of the candidate author samples, but rather the size of sample the *Times and Seasons* editorials allows us to collect. There are only 906 words when all three are combined. Generally speaking, 900–1000 words are a sufficient sample size, but when they are being compared against a vastly larger sample, such as the three runs of 35,000-word samples (for each candidate author), for a total of over 105,000 words per author (p. 89), the results can be skewed. This is another reason this huge sample needs to be broken down into word blocks of comparable size (900–1000 words), after which the discriminators need to be applied to each word block.

This sample size problem becomes evident when reading about the necessary sample required to accurately gauge average sentence length (ASL). Lund explains:

To create a credible base to measure “Average Sentence Length” required a sample of at least 15,000 words per author. To insure a solid sample base 35,000 words per author were used. To replicate the study and to establish a margin of error for each candidate author, three separate samples of 35,000 words per author were gathered. Combined, the three samples totaled more

than 106,000 words per author. This was seven times the amount necessary for a valid sample! (p. 96)⁴⁸

While this was obviously meant to really impress the reader, Lund appears oblivious to the obvious problem this creates. If 15,000 words are required to establish an ASL for a given author, then the 906 words of our unidentified *Times and Seasons* author are woefully inadequate to the task. In multiplying the sample size for all the candidate authors, Lund may help us be more confident in the ASL of each candidate, but it does nothing to assure us that the ASL of the *Times and Seasons* articles accurately represents that author's ASL. This problem can be illustrated by looking at the individual ASLs of each editorial, conveniently provided by Lund in "Addendum Seven" (pp. 167–172). They are 21, 46.5, and 46.3. Notice that there is a wide variance between one of the articles, with an ASL of 21, and the other two much closer to that of Woodruff and Taylor than Joseph's. It is precisely because there can be these kind of wide variances that proper sample sizes are important.

Finally, there is the problem of assessing just what the probabilities actually are. We are never really told. There are frequent examples of things like this, used when explaining discriminator 2:

Depending on the topic and the context of an article, such as a technical paper, it is possible to use a word or two that one might not use in any other context. One of three "Probable First and Only Times [PFOT] Uses" would be permissible as an acceptable error factor. Four to six PFOT uses become mathematically extremely

⁴⁸ The necessary sample size for all his other discriminators is never given, but it is inferred on p. 89 and 103 that similar sample sizes are required for all the other discriminators. As an aside, when a discriminator requires larger sample sizes in order to accurately discriminate between authors it is usually (though not always) a sign that it is a weak discriminator.

improbable. Seven to ten PFOT uses (10/906) or one word every 91 words was sufficient to eliminate any candidate author in an editorial of 906 words. (p. 93, brackets added)

This sounds reasonable, but given its claims to mathematical improbabilities, one cannot help but wonder on what basis these claims rest. How do we know that four to six PFOT are “mathematically extremely improbable”? What tests were run to determine that seven to ten PFOT is enough “to eliminate any candidate author” of a 906-word block? This ties back into the power of the discriminators and whether they can *really* discriminate between authors, and if they can do so for small samples of approximately 900–1000 words.

Some of the additional material provided in the web addendum partially answers or addresses these problems, but none of them are completely resolved for all the provided indicators. While it would be a bit extreme to say that these flaws render Lund’s data analysis completely useless, it does make it rather questionable. Lund’s analysis certainly favors Joseph Smith as author, but to what degree of certainty, we cannot tell. To some, this uncertainty probably does render Lund’s analysis worthless. What can be said for it is that it is more thorough and rigorous than Meldrum’s attempts to dismiss Joseph Smith’s authorship essentially on the grounds of two discriminators (which are even less well understood than Lund’s), and no apparent sample size.

The Wordprint Studies of Roper et al.

Fortunately, another statistical word analysis of these articles was just recently published, this one along the lines of more conventional stylometric, or “wordprint,” studies. As previously mentioned, Matt Roper began reporting on the preliminary results of this study in 2010, but the results were

finally published a few months ago (as of this writing).⁴⁹ Roper, with Paul J. Fields (a research consultant who specializes in statistical analysis) and Atul Nepal (a doctoral student with experience in both statistical and textual analysis), applied a “discriminant analysis” to all five Central American editorials that were published while Joseph Smith was editor. The authors explain:

This technique finds combinations of features (discriminant functions) that can categorize (discriminate) items into known classes, just as plants or animals can be categorized into species based on distinguishing features. The discriminant functions can be used to classify a new item of unknown group membership into its appropriate group based on its features.⁵⁰

In addition to the five Central American editorials, the authors also created separate groups of text composed of other editorials appearing in the *Times and Seasons* during Joseph Smith’s editorship, including writings explicitly signed by Joseph Smith (these were not mixed with the Central American editorials). They then collected 29 1000-word blocks from the known writings of Joseph Smith, 30 from John Taylor, and 24 from Wilford Woodruff to form the samples with which to compare the Central American editorials (as well other *Times and Seasons* editorials). The authors state that in selecting these samples, they tried to stay as close to the editorial genre as possible, and also remain close in time to 1842 (since an authors style can change over time). Finally, they selected 70

⁴⁹ See Matt Roper, Paul J. Fields, and Atul Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 84–97.

⁵⁰ Roper, Fields, and Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” 92.

non-contextual words to serve as their discriminators. “Using these words,” they explain, “as the distinctive literary features for the candidate authors, we developed a set of discriminant functions that could classify each writing sample as belonging to the correct author over 98 percent of the time.”⁵¹

The results are summed up, with graphs, in their article.⁵² What they found was that items appearing in the *Times and Seasons* signed by Joseph Smith were clearly written by him. Unsigned editorials also strongly clustered around Joseph Smith’s writing style, while editorials signed “Ed.” were closest to Joseph Smith’s style as well, though also pulled somewhat in the direction of John Taylor. This may suggest some collaboration between Joseph and Taylor, with Joseph as the primary author (consistent with their roles as editor and assistant editor). Finally, the Central American/Book of Mormon editorials were closest in style to Joseph Smith, though they also indicate some evidence of John Taylor’s influence. They thus concluded:

Our analysis suggests that the editorials on the Central America ruins and the Book of Mormon, published during Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor of the *Times and Seasons* show a strong alignment with his personal writing style and the editorials to which he signed his name. Consequently, the evidence points to Joseph Smith as the author of the Central America editorials.⁵³

But they also to point out, “We need not presume that the five Central America editorials were the work of only one author. The evidence is more supportive of a collaborative effort

51 Roper, Fields, and Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” 92. Quote, plus all other information reported in this paragraph, can be found on this page of their paper.

52 Roper, Fields, and Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” 93–96.

53 Roper, Fields, and Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” 94.

within the *Times and Seasons* office between Joseph Smith and John Taylor.”⁵⁴ Joseph Smith would remain the primary author, however, and regardless of whether Joseph wrote the articles independently or with help from his assistant editor, it remains problematic for Meldrum’s claims regarding Joseph Smith’s revelatory knowledge. Roper et al. explain, “Even if the Central America editorials were a collaborative work, that still does not reduce the authoritative nature of the statements in the articles since Joseph clearly stated that he took full responsibility for what was published in the paper under his editorship.”⁵⁵

This rigorous statistical analysis from Roper et al. strongly suggests that Joseph Smith was the author (or at least the primary author) of the editorials connecting Central America to the Book of Mormon. Lund’s study, while problematic, can be used to supplement their work with additional indicators of Joseph Smith’s authorship. While the Roper et al. study stands on its own, it helps to have complimentary work, conducted independently, corroborating their finds. Lund’s authorship study, thorough but flawed, is probably the second most important contribution of his book.

The Reaction from the Heartland

Of Lund’s study, Meldrum dismissively said it is “based solely on comparing word usage of several early brethren of the Church.” He proceeds with even more dismissive remarks:

It is simply an attempt to link the articles in question to the Prophet Joseph, because these few unsigned and unknown authored articles make up the last remaining historical hope for Mesoamerican theorists to shore up their collapsing speculations that Joseph Smith

⁵⁴ Roper, Fields, and Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” 94.

⁵⁵ Roper, Fields, and Nepal, “Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins,” 96.

abandoned his earlier revelations wherein he indicated a North American setting.⁵⁶

It was, however, Meldrum himself who has insisted that by analyzing the style and linguistics of the author of these editorials can be determined. Stylometrics merely represents the use of statistical tools to achieve that end, and to do so as rigorously and objectively as possible.

When Meldrum was informed of the preliminary report from Roper et al., before the full study was published, he responded:

All your word print analysis is showing is that data can be manipulated if so desired, all done in an effort to mislead people and make false claims that this somehow “proves” that Joseph Smith was the author and had changed his mind from his own claims of revelation on the matter and had abandoned his these [sic] revelatory statements.... The analysis was done by Mesoamericanists for Mesoamericanists... and it is a shameful disgrace of so-called scholarship.⁵⁷

All that without even being able to examine the study or its results.⁵⁸ Just a month earlier, however, when debating a critic of Mormonism, Meldrum appealed to wordprint analysis in defense of the Book of Mormon. “There was no statistical

56 Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?”

57 Email from Rodney Meldrum to Louis Midgley, October 4, 2011. First ellipses mine, second ellipses in original. I thank Midgley for sharing this with me.

58 It is doubtful Meldrum even read the preliminary report, since he told Midgley, in the email quoted earlier, “Enough wasted time for another several months. I’m sorry, but I most likely will find better and more productive things to do with my time than pour [sic] over the articles you published.” In other words, reading research that challenges Meldrum’s theories is a waste of time, and it is a foregone conclusion — before that work is even published — that it is all just deceitful, Mesoamericanist propaganda.

word count analysis back then [when the Book of Mormon was published], yet it has been shown by such analysis that the B[ook] o[f] M[ormon] was written by multiple authors, as it claims.”⁵⁹ The kind of statistical analysis employed by Roper et al. is the same kind that has been used to demonstrate that the Book of Mormon has multiple authors.⁶⁰ By dismissively brushing it off as “manipulating” data in one case, while using it to support his point in another, Meldrum has set up a double standard.

Meldrum should take the evidence from both Lund and Roper for Joseph Smith’s authorship of these editorials seriously and, if he can, engage it with his own scholarly analysis. At present, Meldrum’s reaction is not that of a serious scholar who is genuinely interested in understanding and resolving this historical question, but rather that of an ideologue protecting his pet theory from potentially harmful data.

What Historians Think

In responding to Lund, Meldrum claims, “The fact still remains that official Church historians claim that they simply do not know who authored those articles.”⁶¹ Be that as it may, unknown is not the same thing as *unknowable*, as already pointed out. But still, it seems Meldrum is mistaken on this point. Lund points out that editorials during Joseph Smith time as editor of the *Times and Seasons* were accepted as representing Joseph Smith’s words, and hence used as such in the 2007 Joseph

59 Richard Packham and Rod L. Meldrum, “Is the Book of Mormon Historically Accurate,” part 4, September 7, 2011 at PublicSquare, online at <http://www.publicsquare.net/book-mormon-historically-accurate/> (accessed May 17, 2014).

60 For some history of wordprinting the Book of Mormon, highlighting all the major studies, see Matthew Roper, Paul J. Fields, G. Bruce Schaale, “Stylometric Analyses of the Book of Mormon: A Short History,” *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 21/1 (2012): 28–45.

61 Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?”

Smith Priesthood/Relief Society manual (p. 47–48, 82).⁶² For this volume, the Church Curriculum Department used a rubric provided by the Church History Department to assess the likelihood that a document was written by Joseph Smith.⁶³ Lund sees this as a “semi-official” endorsement of Joseph Smith’s authorship on the part of the Church (p. 39, 196 n.68).

Meldrum reproduces an email from someone at the Church History Library to support his claim regarding the view of “official Church historians.” But the email does *not* say that the author of the editorials is unknown, but only that the views expressed therein “should not be taken as a *prophetic* statement by Joseph Smith.”⁶⁴ This is entirely true, even if Joseph Smith is the author (see below).

Lund mentions several others who attributed these editorials to Joseph Smith, including Joseph Fielding Smith, Larry Dahl and Donald Q. Cannon,⁶⁵ Sydney B. Sperry, Hugh Nibley, Dan Ludlow, John A. Widstoe, B.H. Roberts, and even John Taylor (pp. 49, 71, 74, 196 n.70)—who *must* be considered a primary source on this question, as he was in position to know who wrote the articles. If it were not for the fact that some want to co-opt Joseph Smith to prop up their pet theories regarding Book of Mormon geography, there would be little

62 See *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2007), 559.

63 This is described in Ron Barney, “The Reliability of Mormon History Produced by the LDS Church,” presentation given at the 2009 FairMormon Conference, online at <http://www.fairmormon.org/perspectives/fair-conferences/2009-fair-conference/2009-the-reliability-of-mormon-history-produced-by-the-lds-church> (accessed May 17, 2014).

64 Email from Sherry Smith, LDS Church History Library, March 14, 2012; emphasis mine, reproduced in Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?”

65 Meldrum is quite fond of Cannon’s work on the Zelph incident. See approx. min. 9:26–10:43 in video 12 at http://firmllds.org/video_gallery.php (accessed May 14, 2014)

dispute that the Central American/Book of Mormon editorials were representative of Joseph Smith's views on the subject.

Significance: Joseph Smith, Geography, and Method

It can no longer be denied that, at the very least, Joseph Smith was involved enough to know what was being published in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842, and that he never had a retraction published, and never put a stop to such editorials, which continued to be published up through 1844. The combination of historical and statistical evidence reviewed above makes it virtually impossible to maintain that Joseph Smith did not write the 1842 Central American/Book of Mormon editorials. The question now arises: so what? So what if Joseph Smith associated Central American ruins with Book of Mormon cities?

For Lund, the implications are huge. He insists that there was “no room in the serious Church newspaper for wild speculations” (p. 50), and hence the editorials should be seen as “definitive statements” (p. 24), “prophetic utterance” (p. 38), and “a major doctrinal pronouncement” (p. 83) with “historic consequences” (p. 74). Perhaps Lund was just being hyperbolic, but I feel that he has overblown the significance here. Yes, they are important—they serve as evidence that Joseph Smith was interested in Book of Mormon geography, open to new information on the topic, and willing to compare present knowledge with the text to look for correlations. For some, this could provide a model for how to go about doing Book of Mormon geography.⁶⁶ They also *devastate* the claim made by Meldrum that revelatory knowledge from Joseph Smith rules out Mesoamerica as the lands of the Book of Mormon. But Lund seems to have made the same mistake Meldrum does, just from the other side—that Joseph Smith “knew,” based on

⁶⁶ See David A. Palmer, *In Search for Cumorah: New Evidences for the Book of Mormon from Ancient Mexico* (Springville, Utah: Horizon, 1999), 21–22.

revelatory knowledge, that the primary Book of Mormon lands were in Mesoamerica. Such a claim would be as overstated as Meldrum's, and stems from a similarly misguided methodology for doing Book of Mormon geography. A discussion and critique of both Lund's and Meldrum's methods will bear this out and reveal the inherent problems in their approaches.

Methodology and Priority of Evidence

The study of Book of Mormon geography has long been riddled by amateurs and hobbyists with a disregard for method and theory. The result has been a cornucopia of diverse schemes. All who engage in this enterprise understand this, but (unsurprisingly) few see themselves as contributing to the problem.

About a year ago, I set out to explore different Book of Mormon geographies, paying specific attention to matters of method. What I discovered was that outside of John Sorenson and a small handful of others,⁶⁷ there was very little attention devoted to method. What little I did find was largely reactive to (but not substantially engaging with) Sorenson's work: new

67 For Sorenson's work on methods, see John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 1–95; Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 209–367; John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Map* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000); John L. Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex: Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book and FARMS, 2013), 1–115. Other serious methodological discussion can be found in F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1988), though Hauck's method is flawed. See the review, John E. Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 20–70; reprinted with revisions in *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (2011): 13–43, a quality discussion of methodology in on its own. Also see William J. Hamblin, "Basic Methodological Problems with the Anti-Mormon Approach to the Geography and Archaeology of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 2/1 (1993): 161–197; Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: An Analytical & Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Greg Kofford Books, 2007–2008), 1:327–356.

challengers to the “Mesoamericanists” realizing the need to dethrone Sorenson via a new, alternative method, and some who like the Mesoamerican setting, but don’t like the specific configuration Sorenson’s method leads to. There are also some who are reacting to the “Heartlanders.” For the most part, these have failed to provide more than a superficial discussion of method, and the alternatives they have proposed are not new, fresh, or innovative, but instead are the old, stale, out-of-date ideas Sorenson was combating decades ago, repackaged in fancy garb.

In general, there are three types of evidence: (1) the so-called “prophetic” evidence, coming from either prophetic passages in the Book of Mormon, or things said by Joseph Smith or another modern-day prophet; (2) anthropological evidence, i.e., archaeological, cultural, linguistic, or even genetic data from ancient America; (3) geographic evidence—the actual lay of the land, geologic, topographic, and hydrologic information, etc. Most researchers will engage all three types of evidence, but how much weight is given to evidence from each category can make a major difference. There is also the issue of which evidence is looked at *first*, or given *priority*. It is this evidence that tends to be determinative—that is, the evidence looked at first will define the general area the researcher designates as “Book of Mormon lands,” after which the other forms of evidence are typically engaged (selectively) in a supporting role in order to back-up the already decided upon location. Thus, I have found it helpful to group all the different methods into three broad categories:

1. Prophetic priority: Those who use statements from leaders of the Church, or prophetic passages from the Book of Mormon, first to determine the general (and in some cases, specific) location of Book of Mormon lands. From there, some blend of anthropological evidence

and geographic evidence will also be advanced to support the identified area.

2. Anthropological priority: Those who use archaeological, cultural, or, in some cases, genetic data to find the lands of the Book of Mormon. Afterward, the geographic passages in the Book of Mormon (sometimes used only selectively) will be interpreted in ways that agree with this designated location, and selected statements from Church leaders supporting the identification will (sometimes) also be utilized.

3. Geographic priority: Those who first consult passages of the Book of Mormon containing geographic information (sometimes comprehensively, other times only a select handful), and propose Book of Mormon lands based on how well the features of physical geography fit the criteria derived from the text. After finding the best fit, the anthropological data will also be compared, and statements from Church leaders may also be used to enhance the argument.

Obviously, not all that fall into one group are exactly the same, and the degree of rigorousness varies within each grouping. Nonetheless, this schema proves useful for comparing methods by identifying methods which share the same, or similar, priorities.

Lund and Meldrum both use prophetic priority methods, but they come to radically different conclusions due to emphasis on different sources for “prophetic” insight and their different uses of other forms of evidence. The pitfalls of the prophetic priority approach can be illustrated by looking at each of their methods in turn.

Lund's Method...

It might be easy to confuse Lund's method as one of geographic priority. After all, in his book *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?*, he has a chapter on "Mapping the Lands of the Book of Mormon,"⁶⁸ in which he quotes John E. Clark, approvingly, as saying, "Dealing with geography is a two-step exercise. An internal geography must first be deduced from clues in the book, and this deduction must then become the standard for identifying a real world setting."⁶⁹ Lund refers to maps of the "internal geography" as "templates," and explains, "Somewhere in Mesoamerica, this template or map is going to fit with some adjustments."⁷⁰ Notice here that *Mesoamerica* is a pre-determined conclusion. Before turning to the text of the Book of Mormon and seeking a geographic correlation to the real world, Lund has already decided that Mesoamerica is the right place.

There is some *other priority* at work here. Lund hints at this when he explains that he created his Book of Mormon maps based on "internal information given in the Book of Mormon *plus* the insights added by Joseph Smith."⁷¹ It is through Joseph Smith's "added insights" (in the *Times and Seasons* articles) that Mesoamerica is identified as the right place. "Joseph Smith identified the general area where Stephens and Catherwood traveled in Guatemala near Copán and Quiriguá as the Land of the Zarahemla. Joseph's statement qualifies Mesoamerica as a fixed point for Zarahemla."⁷² Before mapping the Book of Mormon lands, Lund places "angelic and

68 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 53–64.

69 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 53, quoting from an audio-recording of John E. Clark.

70 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 57.

71 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 57, emphasis mine.

72 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 56. Lund's use of "fixed points" is also a popular technique among Book of Mormon geographers. This technique has its own set of problems that I will not go into in the present article.

prophetic considerations” above all else as he goes point by point through various Book of Mormon places he feels Joseph Smith identified.⁷³

Lund pursues this same methodology in his latest book. Lund explains:

I am an advocate for Mesoamerica or southern Mexico and Central America as the primary American lands for the Book of Mormon. This bias results from two “Supreme Sources.” One “Supreme Source” is the actual and verifiable words of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The other “Supreme Source” is the Book of Mormon itself. (p. 6)

Which of these “supreme sources” takes priority? “The key to Book of Mormon geography will always be Joseph Smith” (p. 27).

The pitfall of nearly every method that prioritizes the “prophetic” evidence is that there really isn’t any such thing. Joseph Smith had no revelations on Book of Mormon geography, and neither has any other prophet. In a moment of true irony, Meldrum identifies this flaw in Lund’s method:

For Lund to proclaim, as he has done in his article, that Joseph Smith stated that Zarahemla was in Guatemala is exaggerated, unsubstantiated and possibly untrue. If Lund’s claims were true, why wouldn’t Church leadership simply adopt that position and come out in open endorsement of Lund’s “Book of Mormon lands?” Yet the fact stubbornly remains that the Church is officially neutral on the subject.⁷⁴

73 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 19–36.

74 Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?” The irony, of course, is in the fact that Meldrum uses a prophetic priority method, claiming that “Joseph knew” and identified Book of Mormon lands. Hence, the question can just as quickly be turned around on him: “If [Meldrum’s] claims

Ignoring, for the moment, the fact that Meldrum is susceptible to this *exact* same criticism, he nonetheless makes an important point in regard to Lund's claims. Lund, of course, realizes both that the Church has no official position⁷⁵ and that Joseph's statements, in the *Times and Seasons* or elsewhere, are not revelations. But he insists, "Joseph Smith's opinion about the geography of the Book of Mormon is more important than the opinions of others" (p. 7). Lund explains his reasoning thus:

There are and will be sincere LDS scholars who disagree with the basic premise that Joseph Smith is an unimpeachable source.... Relegating Joseph's statements to opinion gives them permission to pursue their own theories about the geography of the Book of Mormon.... Obviously, I have taken a different stance in regards to the statements of Joseph Smith. Without declaring every word that Joseph wrote or spoke as revelation, there is still merit in sustaining Joseph's opinion over that of someone less acquainted with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon.

Joseph Smith *is* an unimpeachable source for most Latter-day Saints. Independent of being a Prophet, he was a Seer, whose insights alone qualify his opinion to be held in higher esteem and given greater weight than even the most ardent scholar of the Book of Mormon. He was, by vision, a first person witness of the society of the Nephites and Lamanites. Therefore, I have taken the position that the statements made by Joseph Smith

were true, why wouldn't Church leadership simply adopt that position and come out in open endorsement of [Meldrum's] 'Book of Mormon lands?' Yet the fact stubbornly remains that the Church is officially neutral on the subject."

75 Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, xv.

and the angel Moroni will have preeminence over the opinions of others.⁷⁶

In a similar statement found in his 2012 work (pp. 13–14), Lund goes further, claiming not just that Joseph Smith “witness[ed]... the society of the Nephites and Lamanites,” but rather that he saw “by angelic visitation and panoramic visions the original inhabitants of this continent and the geographical lands upon which they dwelt” (pp. 13–14). Lund thus argues that while Joseph Smith did not necessarily receive a revelation explaining where Book of Mormon lands were, he had visions wherein he saw Book of Mormon life and lands, and thus when he saw the images and read the descriptions from Stephens and Catherwood, they were familiar to him from his visions (pp. 13–17, 76–79).⁷⁷ “He instantly recognized the architecture, the Maya temples, the stone monuments, and the ruins because of Catherwood’s detailed drawings.”⁷⁸ Hence, “Joseph’s many visions of the primary American events in the Book of Mormon were given physical presence when two explorers named Stephens and Catherwood’s [sic] discovered evidences of a high civilization in Central America” (p. 65). In Lund’s view, then, Joseph’s commentary in the *Times and Seasons*, though not revelation itself, is opinion based on revelatory knowledge: it wasn’t revealed to Joseph Smith that it *was* Zarahemla, but to Joseph (who saw Zarahemla in vision) it certainly *looked* like it.

The basis for Lund’s argument is that (a) Lucy Mack Smith, the Prophet’s mother, reported Joseph telling the family stories wherein he related details about the lifestyle, material culture, and architecture of Book of Mormon peoples (pp. 14–15), details the prophet probably learned through the many visions he had from Moroni (pp. 15–16), and (b) Joseph Smith saw the

⁷⁶ Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 11, emphasis in original.

⁷⁷ Also see Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 20–22.

⁷⁸ Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 22.

hill where the plates were deposited so vividly that he was able to go it, and recognize it (pp. 15, 76–77), and therefore would probably recognize other locations from his visions.

Without denying that it is *possible* that when Joseph Smith saw the drawings of Catherwood in Stephens' books he at least vaguely recognized them as similar to what he saw in vision, I am unconvinced by Lund's argument. It is true that Joseph Smith was able to find the New York Hill Cumorah due the vision he saw of it, but there is no documentation that Joseph Smith saw any other Book of Mormon location with such specificity. He certainly never *said* that the buildings he saw in Stephens' books were the same (or similar to) ones he saw in vision. Furthermore, there was good reason for such detail to be given for the New York hill—namely, Joseph had to actually go there! No similar reason exists for him to see other Book of Mormon places with the same degree of detail. Joseph had the same vision, showing him where the plates were, no less than four times in a matter of hours, and then visited the actual place shortly thereafter (essentially *right* after the fourth vision of the place), while Joseph only saw *drawings* (accurate though they may be) of Mesoamerican ruins, and that more than a decade after the visions he had. Clearly, the two cases are not the same. As such, I see no justification for assuming, as Lund does, that Joseph knew the ruins explored by Stephens and Catherwood were Nephite (or Lamanite) based on any kind of revelatory knowledge.

This argument also has the potential to cut the other way. Lund, along with (necessarily) most Mesoamerican proponents, believes in the “two-Cumorah theory,” that is, that the original Hill Cumorah, where the extermination wars of the Book of Mormon were fought, is located in Mesoamerica (pp. 25–26, 127–141).⁷⁹ But Joseph Smith's contemporaries

⁷⁹ Also see Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 36–41. For the standard scholarly treatments on the topic, see Palmer, *In Search for Cumorah*;

(and some would argue Joseph himself) frequently associated the hill in Manchester, New York, with the hill in the Book of Mormon.⁸⁰ Just as with the Central American ruins, whether Joseph made such an identification or not is irrelevant because he never corrected others who did. If Joseph Smith really saw “the very events and the geographical settings” (p. 15) of Book of Mormon history as vividly as Lund maintains he did, why didn’t he ever correct his close associates who claimed that the final battles took place in New York? This silence from Joseph Smith is as much a challenge to Lund’s claims as his failure to denounce the Central American/Book of Mormon editorials is for Meldrum’s.

Other than that, Lund’s argument that for “most Latter-day Saints” Joseph Smith is an “unimpeachable” source on Book of Mormon geography (p. 13) is little more than an appeal to popularity. Such popular acceptance is, itself, worth questioning. Notice how John E. Clark handles this same piece of information.

Most Mormons fall into a more subtle error that also inflates Joseph’s talents; they confuse translation with

Sydney B. Sperry, “Were There Two Cumorahs?,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 4/1 (1995): 260–268; John E. Clark, “Archaeology and the Cumorah Question,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 13/1–2 (2004): 144–151. Also see the debate on the topic between Hedges (for the New York hill) and Roper (two-Cumorah advocate): Andrew H. Hedges, “Cumorah and the Limited Mesoamerican Theory,” *Religious Educator* 10/2 (2009): 111–134; Matthew P. Roper, “Plausibility, Probability, and the Cumorah Question,” *Religious Educator* 10/2 (2009): 135–158; Andrew H. Hedges, “Problems with Probability: A Response,” *Religious Educator* 10/2 (2009): 159–162. For my response to this debate, see Neal Rappleye, “Cumorah, Cumorah, Where Art Thou, Cumorah?” at *Studio et Quoque Fide: A Blog on Latter-day Saint Apologetics, Scholarship, and Commentary*, August 14, 2012, online at <http://www.studioetquoquefide.com/2012/08/cumorah-cumorah-where-art-thou-cumorah.html> (accessed May 22, 2014).

80 There is no firsthand account of Joseph Smith ever calling it Cumorah. The earliest documented reference to the New York hill as that of the Book of Mormon is from Oliver Cowdery in 1835. See Palmer, *In Search for Cumorah*, 20.

authorship. They presume that Joseph Smith knew the contents of the book as if he were its real author, and they accord him perfect knowledge of the text. This presumption removes from discussion the most compelling evidence of the book's authenticity—Joseph's unfamiliarity with its contents. To put the matter clearly: Joseph Smith did not fully understand the Book of Mormon. I propose that he transmitted to readers an ancient book that he neither imagined nor wrote.⁸¹

When we hold Joseph Smith's opinion about the Book of Mormon up as irreproachable, we play right into our critics' hands, mistakenly granting the assumption that he is the book's author. A translator, however, does not necessarily know a book like an author would. Hence, as Clark points out, when careful examination of the Book of Mormon text reveals that Joseph Smith did not understand the particular details of, say, its geography,⁸² that strongly suggests that he is not the author, but rather that the book is what it claims to be—an ancient record which Joseph translated.

Clark, also points out the dangers of uncritically accepting the opinions of Joseph Smith as authoritative on this issue.

The dangerous area is where opinion is thought to clarify ambiguities in the text, of which there are many. The minimal fact that various statements are attributed to Joseph Smith that place cities in different lands suggests that he continued to be interested throughout

81 John E. Clark, "Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins," in *The Worlds of Joseph Smith: A Bicentennial Conference at the Library of Congress*, ed. John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: BYU Press, 2006), 85.

82 See John L. Sorenson, "How Could Joseph Smith Write So Accurately about Ancient American Civilization?" in *Echoes and Evidences of the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry, Daniel C. Peterson, and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), 267–269.

his life in the location of Book of Mormon lands and, consequently, that it remained an open question for him. If he knew where they were, why did he continue guessing? Should we not be similarly open-minded today? Do we go with the Prophet's early statements or his later statements?⁸³

Opinions, then, whether they be a prophet's or a scholar's, should only be regarded as more superior to others when they prove consistent with the text and withstand careful scrutiny. In choosing to uncritically privilege Joseph's opinions, Lund runs the risk of allowing them to trump the certain knowledge of Book of Mormon authors, which is also an element of Meldrum's method.

Meldrum's Method...

Although Meldrum also employs a prophetic priority method, his takes a fairly different form. Meldrum, writing with Bruce Porter, sets the stage for presenting his "new" method of Book of Mormon geography by quoting George Q. Cannon, who stated that the Book of Mormon "was not written to teach geographical truths."⁸⁴ Meldrum then explains, "The Book of Mormon is a comprehensive record of the gospel of Jesus Christ and the 'prophecies and the promises' to and for those who are led by the 'hand of the Lord' to the land of promise. It was not written nor intended as a geographical text."⁸⁵

As such, Meldrum proposes that we make what he calls the "prophecies and promises" contained in the Book of Mormon the primary evidence for determining the location of Book of Mormon lands. All in all, Meldrum sees a hierarchy of four

83 John E. Clark, "Evaluating the Case for a Limited Great Lakes Setting," *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1-2 (2002): 28.

84 Quoted in Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 9.

85 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 11.

categories of evidence, two types of “spiritual” evidence, and two types of “physical” evidence:

1. Book of Mormon prophecies and promises testified of in relation to the Promised Land and the people associated with it.
2. Inspired and revealed statements of the Prophet Joseph Smith on geography.
3. Physical “real world” evidence, such as correlating civilizations in the correct time frame, archaeological findings as described within the text, cultural lifestyles, genetic relationships and linguistic ties.
4. Geographical indicators or passages contained within the Book of Mormon.⁸⁶

According to Meldrum, these categories of evidence are arranged “in an order of credibility and strength to qualify as a viable source to determine a setting for the ‘Promised Land’ described in the Book of Mormon.”⁸⁷ He then claims that this arrangement comes *not* from himself, but is demanded by the Book of Mormon: “The Order or hierarchy of witnesses to be used are not the author’s arbitrary selection but are rather determined by the Book of Mormon itself.”⁸⁸ For this, Meldrum appeals to the title page and declares, “The Title Page [of the Book of Mormon] sets the primary standard for the witnesses to be used in the research for a geographical setting for the Book of Mormon.”⁸⁹

The essence of this argument is as follows: (1) the Book of Mormon was not written, as President Cannon said, for geography, but (2) was written to reveal the prophecies and promises to the Lamanites, thus (3) the proper way to

86 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 14-15.

87 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 15.

88 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 16.

89 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 17.

determine the geography of the Book of Mormon is to use these prophecies and promises. “Therefore,” writes Meldrum, “these prophecies about ‘remnant’ and ‘Gentiles’ upon this land becomes a primary witness and testimony that should *supersede any geographical passage* in the search for a setting for the Promised Land.”⁹⁰

While Meldrum may, on the surface, appear to have a point, the reality is that his methodology leads to logical absurdities. First, it must be stressed that Meldrum’s method and hierarchy are *not* mandated or determined by the Book of Mormon, and the title page sets no kind of standard for doing Book of Mormon geography research. The title page says nothing about Book of Mormon geography research. As Meldrum himself quoted President Cannon, “The Book of Mormon is *not* a geographical primer. It was not written to teach geographical truths.”⁹¹ As such, it provides no standards for seeking such truths or doing such research, and *anyone* who is trying to determine Book of Mormon geography, regardless of whether they privilege the “prophecies and promises” or the actual geographic details in the text, is using the book in an unintended way.

However, someone who uses the geographic details may not be misusing those *details*.⁹² The prophecies and promises in the Book of Mormon were not given with anything about the physical setting of the events in mind. Meanwhile, the passages with geographic details obviously *were* given with the contours of the physical setting in mind. The purpose of giving the details, it would seem, is to allow the reader to orient themselves and understand the things that are going on. V.

90 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 17, emphasis added.

91 Quoted in Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 9, I have altered the emphasis given to this quote from that found in *Prophecies and Promises*.

92 Notice, that this is not the purpose of the whole Book of Mormon, rather the narrow purpose of the textual details about geography. What else would be the point of those details?

Garth Norman, an archaeologist who has researched Book of Mormon geography for over 40 years, puts it this way: “Book of Mormon scribes were not primarily concerned about historic details.... On the other hand, Mormon gave very specific geographic details at times... that could have no other purpose than to paint the landscape where these events occurred.”⁹³ The production of an internal map (discussed further below) is an attempt to do precisely that—get oriented to what the landscape was like and make sense of the movements that are going on in the text. Such maps are helpful in this way, regardless of any kind of real world setting.⁹⁴ Thus, the logical and appropriate thing to do if you want to understand the physical setting of Book of Mormon events is to look at the way the Book of Mormon authors described that setting, for those details were most likely given for the very purpose of helping the reader understand the geographical surroundings. If geography is the purpose for going to the text, then the *only* logical thing to do would be to read the geographical content.

Second, Meldrum’s methodological hierarchy is extremely problematic. He makes use of the prophecies about the promised land without attempting to understand how the Nephites conceptualized the promised land and its accompanying prophecies at all. The proper understanding of the Nephites’ concepts of promised land seriously undercuts Meldrum’s attempt to limit the Book of Mormon to certain modern political boundaries.⁹⁵ Lund’s own approach to these prophecies could be better, but at least seems to get the gist of

93 V. Garth Norman, *Book of Mormon—Mesoamerican Geography: History Study Map* (American Fork, Utah: ARCON/Ancient America Foundation, 2008), iix.

94 See Sorenson’s *Mormon’s Map*, for example.

95 For how the Nephites conceptualized the Promised Land, see Steven L. Olsen, “Prospering in the Land of Promise,” *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 229–245; Steven L. Olsen, “The Covenant of the Promised Land: Territorial Symbolism in the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 22/2 (2010): 137–154.

it right (pp. 22, 26–29).⁹⁶ What’s more, as already pointed out, there are no prophetic statements made by Joseph Smith on the matter.⁹⁷ We can turn Meldrum’s own argument against him here: “If [Meldrum’s] claims were true, why wouldn’t Church leadership simply adopt that position and come out in open endorsement of [Meldrum’s] ‘Book of Mormon lands?’ Yet the fact stubbornly remains that the Church is officially neutral on the subject.”⁹⁸

This leaves only criteria 3 and 4, which, stripped of the first two “prophetic” criteria, are essentially an anthropological priority method. When trying to figure out Book of Mormon geography, Meldrum gives the *least* weight to actual geography. Kevin Christensen proposes a very interesting hypothetical question which serves to illustrate the inherent problems with this kind of approach.

Suppose that in the ongoing Book of Mormon historicity debate we could swap currently plausible solutions for current problems. That is, suppose we had better evidence for metals and horses, a scrap of recognizably reformed Egyptian script, and even some profoundly unlikely DNA that somehow pointed directly to 600 BC Jerusalem. At the same time, suppose we did not have a unique fit for the river Sidon, nor an archaeologically suitable Cumorah, nor the rise and fall of major cultures at the right time (Olmec and Preclassic), nor a Zarahemla candidate that explained various circumstances in the text (physical, geographic, and

96 Also see Lund, *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon*, 43–51, esp. 45–47.

97 I refer readers again to Roper’s thorough review of Meldrum’s claims in this regard. Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” 51–70.

98 Meldrum, “Did Joseph Smith Identify Zarahemla in Guatemala?” That the Church has no official position is also stated in Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, xviii.

linguistic), nor evidence of a major volcanic eruption at the right time, nor fortifications of the right kind, nor a candidate for the Waters of Mormon complete with a submerged city, nor a good candidate for the Gadianton movement, nor the other abundant cultural details that Sorenson, Gardner, Clark, and others have detailed.... Given that exchange of current solutions for current puzzles, would the present case for New World Book of Mormon historicity be stronger or weaker?⁹⁹

A look at the kind of evidence to which Meldrum appeals reveals that this is the kind of exchange Meldrum is asking us to make in shifting our sights from Mesoamerica to the Heartland. But is having artifacts (that might be explained in other ways) really more compelling than having an accurate physical setting made of geographic features (such as a river Sidon and hill Cumorah) that are relatively stable and essentially unchanging? John E. Clark, who is a professional archaeologist, has explained:

It has been my experience that most members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, when confronted with a Book of Mormon geography, worry about the wrong things. Almost invariably the first question that arises is whether the geography fits the archaeology of the proposed area. This should be our second question, the first being whether the geography fits the facts of the Book of Mormon—a question we all can answer without being versed in American archaeology. Only after a given geography reconciles all of the significant geographic details given in the Book of Mormon does the question of archaeological and historical detail merit attention. The Book of

⁹⁹ Kevin Christensen, “Hindsight on a Book of Mormon Historicity Critique,” *FARMS Review* 22/2 (2010): 167.

Mormon must be the final and most important arbiter in deciding the correctness of a given geography; otherwise we will be forever hostage to the shifting sands of expert opinion.¹⁰⁰

The archaeological and scientific picture can change dramatically as fresh finds shed new light. If we prioritize archaeology, we will, as Clark puts it, “be forever hostage to the shifting sands of expert opinion.” Meanwhile, the geographic details remain constant. Hence, while anthropological data is important and cannot be ignored (it still should be the “second question,” as Clark says), it must take a backseat to the dictates of the land.

All of the scientific and archaeological evidence marshaled by Meldrum is controversial, at best,¹⁰¹ but leaving that aside, the artifacts and DNA to which he appeals are irrelevant if mountains, rivers, valleys, hills, lakes, and seas aren’t where the authors of the text said they were. If it is deemed less important for the physical setting to fit the text, then we might as well place the events back in the Middle East, where we know the DNA and the artifacts will confirm an Israelite presence. “It will do no good to find evidences in Alaska for the Nephites,” John Sorenson explains, “if the Nephites were not in Alaska, anymore than to find evidence in Tibet. We need to be in the right place and in the right time period if we are going to use...

100 Clark, “A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies,” 21; reprinted in *Mormon Studies Review* 23/1 (2011): 13-14.

101 For discussion of some of the artifacts Meldrum likes to use, see Brant A. Gardner, “This Idea: The ‘This Land’ Series and the U.S.-Centric Reading of the Book of Mormon,” *FARMS Review* 20/2 (2008): 147-154. Though this review is not directed toward Meldrum, it is a critique of Wayne May, who is a cohort of Meldrum’s, and they both use this evidence. For the scientific claims, see Gregory L. Smith, “Often in Error, Seldom in Doubt: Rod Meldrum and Book of Mormon DNA,” *FARMS Review* 22/1 (2010): 17-161.

archaeological evidences, or linguistic evidence.”¹⁰² The logical absurdity of having any other form of evidence “supersede any geographical passage,” as Meldrum put it, is that you can end up with a geography that contradicts the physical setting described by Nephi, Mormon, and Moroni, and other writers—the only ones who truly and undeniably knew what the physical environment of the Nephites was like.

The Strength of Geographic Priority

My critique of Lund and Meldrum is intended to make clear the weaknesses of prophetic priority methods, and also illuminate why the only legitimate method to follow is one that starts with the geographic details.¹⁰³ There is no genuine prophetic information revealing the specific location of Book of Mormon lands, and without knowing the correct geographic region, we simply cannot know what cultural and archaeological information is actually relevant to the text (and such data is always incomplete). Absent a solid geographic setting, cultural details can easily be cherry-picked from anywhere in a way that makes them seem to fit the text. We must first have a location, “Only when we have an idea of that can we know which historical traditions or archaeological sequences can be compared most usefully with Mormon’s text.”¹⁰⁴

It should be quickly pointed out, however, that just as there are different variations on “prophetic priority” methods, so too with geographic priority methods. Sorenson, Clark,

102 John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon in Ancient America,” (FARMS Transcript, 1994), 6.

103 For a detailed critique of one version of the “anthropological priority” (which I was, at the time, calling “archaeological priority”), see Neal Rappleye, “Models and Methods in Book of Mormon Geography: The Peruvian Model as a Test-Case,” *Interpreter* (blog), January 28, 2014, at <http://www.mormoninterpreter.com/models-and-methods-in-book-of-mormon-geography-the-peruvian-model-as-a-test-case/> (accessed May 26, 2014).

104 John L. Sorenson, *Images of Ancient America: Visualizing Book of Mormon Life* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 188.

Roper, Brant A. Gardner, and William J. Hamblin all advocate similar methods, and hence (unsurprisingly) have more or less accepted Sorenson's model.¹⁰⁵ Other advocates of geographic priority methods include Lawrence Poulsen, V. Garth Norman, Krik Magleby, F. Richard Hauck, and David A. Palmer.¹⁰⁶ What is fascinating is that, although their methods are quite diverse, and their models differ sometimes considerably, they all agree that *only* Mesoamerica can fit the geographic details in the text. As far as I am aware, *all* major practitioners of a geographic priority method have converged on Mesoamerica as the *only* region in which the textual details fit.

With the above in mind, consider Meldrum's criticisms of this type of method. Meldrum claims, "Over the last few years the majority of geographical theorists have reached a consensus on how to begin the development of a map for Book of Mormon geography."¹⁰⁷ Meldrum explains,

Using this method, proposed Book of Mormon theories have ranged from North to South America, from Granada across an entire ocean to find a home on the Malay Peninsula or Southeast Asia. They have ranged in extent from the entire western hemisphere to a geography encompassing a restricted distance of less than two hundred miles. Each investigator applied the same method of using Book of Mormon geographic

¹⁰⁵ For their works detailing this, see note 67. On Roper, see quote below.

¹⁰⁶ See, respectively, Lawrence Poulsen, *Lawrence Poulsen's Book of Mormon Geography*, online at <http://bomgeography.poulsenll.org/> (accessed May 26, 2014); Norman, *Book of Mormon—Mesoamerican Geography*; Capitan Kirk (Kirk Magleby), "Book of Mormon Model," at *Book of Mormon Resources*, July 28, 2012 (updated October 2, 2013), online at <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2012/07/book-of-mormon-model.html> (accessed May 26, 2014); Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*; Palmer, *In Search for Cumorah*.

¹⁰⁷ Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 5.

passages, and each came to a completely different conclusion.¹⁰⁸

Hence, “The method of using the geographical passages from the Book of Mormon as a primary source to create a hypothetical map has resulted in multiple theories and conflicting interpretations.”¹⁰⁹ Forcing the conclusion, “The geographical passages lack enough clear information to make a determination, or the method of using these selected passages must be viewed as having severe shortcomings or even insurmountable flaws.”¹¹⁰

There are several problems with this conclusion, however. First, the so-called methodological “consensus” is a fiction. There is a group of LDS scholars (Clark, Gardner, Roper, Hamblin, to name a few) who all agree that Sorenson’s *method* is the best—and they, consequently, also agree that Sorenson’s *model* is the best. But among practitioners of Book of Mormon geography, as demonstrated above, there is no such agreement in *either* method *or* model. Among some of the several methods at work prior to Meldrum’s arrival are several “prophetic priority” methods not unlike his own.¹¹¹

Second, strictly speaking, the use of a comprehensive “hypothetical map,” or “internal map,” to correlate the text to the land has only been fully practiced and published by

108 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 8.

109 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 8.

110 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 8-9.

111 Long before the “Heartland” theory was the “Limited Great Lakes” models, which clearly shares an intellectual heritage with that of the Heartlanders. In making their case, they often rest their general selection of the land on the same Book of Mormon prophecies, and on statements from Joseph Smith (plus other leaders), just as Meldrum does. See, for example, Duane R. Aston, *Return to Cumorah: Piecing Together the Puzzle Where the Nephites Lived* (Salt Lake City, UT: Publishers Press, 1998), 5 (appeals to Joseph Smith for location of Cumorah), 8–20 (makes case for NY Cumorah using many of the same early Church history sources used by Meldrum), 14, 137–141, 159–160 (all appeals to the same Book of Mormon promises as Meldrum).

Sorenson, with Clark and Gardner echoing him on this matter. Hence, such a method has, quite successfully, led to only one model. Third, Meldrum makes no attempt to distinguish between those who have made limited and highly selective uses of the geographic data in the text from those who have made fairly comprehensive use of hundreds of passages in the Book of Mormon.

Failing to recognize the methodological diversity that exists, and the varying levels of rigorousness in which these methods are applied, Meldrum simply has the wrong answers to his own question, “If the Book of Mormon had sufficient geographic information to positively produce a cohesive internal map, why would there exist so many different geographies?”¹¹² The correct answer to Meldrum’s question is most people are not making comprehensive use of the Book of Mormon data in creating an internal map. Roper has correctly explained Meldrum’s (and Porter’s) error:

Porter and Meldrum wrongly attribute the abundance of Book of Mormon geographical models to the practice of constructing an internal geography based upon the Book of Mormon text (p. 11). Yet the truth is that much of the diversity of opinion on the question is due to the *failure* of most proponents to *do so*. Only after this first exercise is done in a thorough and comprehensive manner can one then proceed to the secondary issue of how this internal picture may or may not correlate with a particular real-world setting.¹¹³

112 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 9.

113 Roper, “Joseph Smith, Revelation, and Book of Mormon Geography,” 26. The parenthetical page number is to Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 11.

In a work cited by Meldrum, Sorenson himself described the reason for the diversity of opinion in Book of Mormon geography:

At least eighty versions of a Book of Mormon map have been produced. *Most start with the writer confidently identifying some American area as the center where the Nephites lived and then distributing cities, lands, or other features named in the text to more or less agree with the original “solution.”* Ideas have ranged from identifying the promised land as the entire hemisphere to limiting the scene to a small portion of, say, Costa Rica or New York. Few of these writers have been knowledgeable about the range of elements that would go into a comprehensive and critical statement of the geography (such as language distributions, ecological zones, or archaeological finds). The result has been tremendous confusion and a plethora of notions that holds no promise of producing a consensus.¹¹⁴

Contrast this to Meldrum’s claim, quoted earlier, that all these different views were created using “the same method,” i.e., Sorenson’s “internal map” method. Sorenson echoed this same point in his most recent tome:

Heretofore the study of Book of Mormon geography has mainly consisted of making more or less random guesses as to one modern location or another where events portrayed in the Book of Mormon supposedly took place. For the most part, such unsystematic studies have been undertaken after examining only *some* of the 600 references to geography found in the text. That is, a typical investigator peruses a map of the Americas, finds what he or she intuitively to be a

114 Sorenson, *Mormon’s Map*, 5, emphasis added.

correlation, then proceeds to select from the Book of Mormon statements thought to support his correlation of choice.¹¹⁵

Sorenson's and Roper's diagnosis is much closer than Meldrum's to my own observations, as I have looked at the methods of several theorists.

Adding to such observations, I have noticed that the use of any of several different, independently generated internal maps (with varying degrees of detail) to try to identify Book of Mormon lands would consistently lead to Mesoamerica.¹¹⁶ Hence, Meldrum overstates the issue when he says that such maps "are often highly inconsistent with each other in their conclusions."¹¹⁷ All major theorists using geographic priority methods have converged on Mesoamerica as the *only* location that fits the criteria in the text, though most do *not* form an independent "internal map."

This is all important because the premise upon which Meldrum proposes his "new" prophetic priority method is that the "old" geographic priority (and specifically the internal map) method has failed to produce consistent results. "If the system is working," Meldrum insists, "one should expect to see the same result, each time a substantiated premise is repeated. This should continue to hold true when exposed to all relevant evidence and witnesses."¹¹⁸ He concludes his critique by saying,

115 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 17.

116 To view several such maps, see Sorenson, *The Geography of Book of Mormon Events*, 54–55, 80, 103, 104, 121, 123, 125, 148, 173, 179, 190, 202–203; Stephen L. Carr, "A Summary of Several theories of Book of Mormon Lands in Mesoamerica," at http://www.bmaf.org/conference/2008/stephen_carr (accessed June 27, 2014). I invite interested and dedicated readers to try and situate any one of these internal maps somewhere in the real world and see if they can plausibly find a location that meets the criteria better than Mesoamerica. Then repeat the exercise with all the others.

117 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 6.

118 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 4.

“An effective method of discovery should tend to limit the number of possible solutions to a problem, not encourage more of them.”¹¹⁹ By this standard, geographic priority methods *have* been successful in limiting results exclusively to Mesoamerica.

Conclusion

I have ranged, at times, far from the specific content of Lund’s book. This has been done because his book is part of a larger conversation on Book of Mormon geography, particularly on Joseph Smith’s views and their evidentiary value, and the evidence and methods to be applied to such an endeavor. Rather than narrowly engage Lund’s book alone, I have sought to examine the broader discussion of these highly relevant issues. While this obviously does not delve into all the different issues and different perspectives available, this broader engagement has now prepared us to reach some conclusions on the value of Lund’s book.

On the matter of what Joseph Smith’s views were in relation to Book of Mormon geography, Lund makes an important contribution. Specifically, he helps us assess a historical conundrum regarding the authorship of certain *Times and Seasons* editorials from 1842. His thorough documentation of Joseph Smith’s whereabouts settles, definitively, whether Joseph Smith was around Nauvoo to write the editorials or not. He was, and there is evidence to confirm he was involved with the editing and printing of the paper during that period. Added historical analysis by Matt Roper further strengthens this point. Therefore, Meldrum and others simply *cannot* continue to claim Joseph was in hiding at the time and thus could not have written or would not have been aware of the editorials. This, by itself, has major implications, because it means, minimally, that Joseph was aware of what was being published

119 Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 12.

and never corrected it—a problematic fact for anyone insisting that Joseph “knew” it was in the United States “heartland.”

Lund’s statistical word study, though problematic in a number of respects, does give us some data that suggests (but does not definitively prove—Lund overstates his evidence here) that Joseph Smith was the author of the editorials in question. When used in conjunction with the more rigorous wordprint studies of Roper et al., it becomes virtually certain that Joseph was the primary author of these editorials. The *onus probandi* (burden of proof) is now on Meldrum and others who wish to continue to maintain that Joseph Smith was not the author of the editorials, as Lund correctly points out (pp. 40, 103). In light of present evidence, it seems impossible to insist that Joseph Smith had any revelatory knowledge that limited the lands of the Book of Mormon to the United States.

Such marks the useful contributions of Lund’s work to the overall battle over Joseph Smith’s words—a battle which, at present, it seems the “Mesoamericanists” are winning, at least for the time being. From there, however, it is evident that Lund engages in a methodology for finding Book of Mormon lands that is as misguided as Meldrum’s, and is susceptible to the same weaknesses. In critiquing the methods employed by both Lund and Meldrum, it becomes apparent that the battle for Joseph Smith’s words is just tangential skirmish. The crucial battlefield is over what the Book of Mormon actually says about its own geography, and the Mesoamericanists have been winning on that front all along.

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