



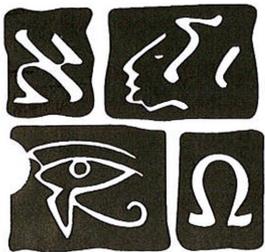
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Preliminary Comments on the Sources behind the Book of Ether

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Preliminary Comments on the Sources Behind the Book of Ether

John W. Welch

It is general knowledge that the Book of Mormon was written by Mormon and Moroni under inspiration from several sources. Many documents, including the Small Plates of Nephi and the Large Plates of Nephi, which in turn incorporated items such as the Record of Zeniff, various letters, speeches and annals, to name only a few, were brought together to form the Book of Mormon. Some of these records appear to have been quoted verbatim or with minor editorial interjections; others seem to have been abridged, edited, excerpted, paraphrased, or summarized, as they were brought together. To what extent can information be recovered from the present texts to reconstruct the form and content of these underlying sources? Sometimes there is little one can do to discover what lay behind the text as it stands today. At other points, however, certain techniques can help us to approach the task of disentanglement. In particular, one can:

- a. Carefully identify the archaic and original sources spoken of in the text itself, to note the possible materials that may have gone into the final composition of the text.¹
- b. Look for seams between blocks of text, to demarcate as clearly as possible where one source ends and another begins.²

¹ Some work has already been done along these lines. For example, S. Kent Brown recently explored the books of 1 Nephi and 2 Nephi in an effort to identify the words of Lehi behind those texts written by Nephi. See "Lehi's Personal Record: Quest for a Missing Source," BYU Studies 24 (1984), pp. 19-42 (F.A.R.M.S. Reprint BRO-84). But much more work even on that problem is still called for.

² Grant Hardy, a doctoral candidate at Yale, has begun to explore the Book of Mormon text in this way. He finds, for example, a clear seam at 2 Ne. 4:13-14 and 5:1, the latter beginning exactly where the former had left off (talking about Laman and Lemuel's anger) after the insertion into the text of the material in 2 Ne. 4:14b-35.

c. Thoughtfully consider the stages through which each source passed as it found its way into the final text, along with the inspiration, revelation, personality, perspective, point of view, character, political posture, private interests, religious position, and social concerns of each writer or abridger. Such reflection can shed light on the natural and spiritual genius behind the selection of the particular materials included in the final text, usually to the exclusion of other parts of the original sources from which they were drawn. This also allows us also to assess the way in which each writer along the way might have contributed to the text, either consciously or unconsciously, as he reported, recorded, copied, summarized, characterized, edited or abridged earlier materials.

d. Find words, phrases, qualities, or stylistic traits that are unique to individual writers, to contrast them with others within or beyond the pages of the Book of Mormon, as well as to appreciate their own personal styles. Such details will often be subtle jots and tittles, for we can be confident that the main messages of the earlier texts were faithfully preserved and sincerely represented by their transmitters (see D&C 20:9, discussed further below). Assiduous care was typically taken by ancient scribes in working with their religious texts. Thus, W. D. Davies has concluded, "The Jews' attitude to their sacred writings induced the necessity to reproduce those texts without distortion. The Hebrew texts were transmitted with meticulous and scrupulous care."³ Likewise in the Book of Mormon, the precise preservation of the Isaiah texts, along with the great attention given generally to written records, provides evidence that similar care and accuracy was exercised among the Nephite scribes.

Using such tools we can discern several layers of possible textual development in the book of Ether.⁴ Although much work

³ W. D. Davies, "Reflections about the Use of the Old Testament in the New in its Historical Context," Jewish Quarterly Review 74 (1983), p. 120; Alan R. Millard, "In Praise of Ancient Scribes," Biblical Archaeologist 45 (1982), pp. 143-53.

⁴ All scriptural references in this paper, unless otherwise (Footnote 4 Continued on Next Page)

remains to be done before one can appraise the nature and extent of textual development in the book of Ether, the clarifications that such a study might produce make it desirable to try.⁵ This paper will consider six questions with respect to the ancient development of the book of Ether.⁶

1. What records were brought together to form the book of Ether? The book of Ether as we now have it is the product of a long history including several stages of composition. First, there existed among the Jaredites general oral traditions and also certain specific archaic writings. Anciently, the basic historical information found in the book of Ether was probably handed down in

(Footnote 4 Continued from Previous Page)

indicated, are to the book of Ether. A similar study could be made of the words of Abinadi in Mosiah 12-16. Those words were first spoken by Abinadi, then were recorded from memory by Alma shortly after he narrowly escaped from the court of Noah (Mos. 17:4). They were next incorporated into the Record of Zeniff (Mos. 9-22) by Limhi some thirty years later in Zarahemla. (Limhi himself probably witnessed the trial of Abinadi.) Still later, they were apparently included in the book of Mosiah by King Mosiah II, and finally were abridged by Mormon. Mosiah II seemed particularly interested in contrasting the righteousness of his father, King Benjamin, with the wickedness of King Noah. Thus he may have edited the account of Abinadi so as to emphasize the risks of having a wicked king, thereby supporting his establishment of the chief judgeship (Mos. 29:18). Obviously the Lord worked through several prophets in producing this text, and thus the words in Mosiah 12-16 are in that sense textually complex.

5 I am grateful for extensive suggestions by John L. Sorenson.

6 I shall consider here only the ancient stages of textual development, up to Moroni's inclusion of the book of Ether on the plates of Mormon. An additional stage comes with the translation of the text by Joseph Smith, but I consider that stage to be historically distinct from the production of the ancient text itself. It seems logical for textual studies of the Book of Mormon to scrutinize the earlier stages of the text before the latter, although the translation by Joseph Smith is the window through which we see them all.

the form of a king list kept among the descendants of Jared, who were the Jaredite rulers for over one thousand years.⁷ This king list could have been either written or oral. No explicit indication is given that the Jaredite king list was written down before Ether wrote his record, but it is likely that to some extent it was. King lists similar to the one in Ether 1 appear among the earliest written records in ancient Mesopotamia,⁸ and many Mesoamerican monuments have now been shown to contain historical information about royal lines;⁹ the short accounts of each king's reign in Ether 6-11 are not dissimilar in scale. Yet some early peoples orally transmitted memorized king lists and stories about their origins.¹⁰ While it is not clear whether Ether worked in this respect from a written royal record, an oral tradition, or a combination of both, the integrity of the Jaredite king list as a separate source is underscored by its apparent insertion as a unit in the midst of Moroni's introductory materials (1:3-5, 33).¹¹

There certainly existed an ancient record written by the brother of Jared, on which he recorded the things he had seen and heard from

7 See John L. Sorenson, "The Years of the Jaredites," F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report SOR-69.

8 Thorkild Jacobsen, The Sumerian King List (Oriental Institute Assyriological Studies 11; Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1939); S. N. Kramer, The Sumerians (University of Chicago Press, 1963), pp. 328-31; A. Malamat, "King Lists of the Old Babylonian Period and Biblical Genealogies," JAOS 88 (1968), pp. 163-73.

9 Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, "Mayan Linguistics: Where are We Now?" Annual Review of Anthropology 14 (1985), p. 193.

10 M. D. Johnson, The Purpose of the Biblical Genealogies, with Special Reference to the Setting of the Genealogies of Jesus (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 101, 115, argues that such oral traditions were very common.

11 The words in these verses follow very closely the words of Mosiah II in Mos. 28:17. The king list appears in the middle of this material, with 1:33, "from the great tower," continuing where 1:5, "from the tower," left off.

the Lord in his great vision (3:21). That account, however, was written in a language that no one could read without the aid of the interpreters (3:22-24). It is unclear whether Ether ever read that account with the aid of the two stones and then included his translation or a summary of it in his own writings, or if he simply attached this esoteric record to his own book, perhaps knowing only by tradition what it contained. Since the Lord had forbidden the brother of Jared to allow his words to go forth unto the world until after He had come in the flesh (3:21, 4:1), there is reason why Ether may not have been privy to their content in detail.¹²

Also among the ancient Jaredites was a record which had been "brought across the great deep" from Mesopotamia by Jared and his people (8:9). It contained a creation account down to the time of "the great tower" (1:3) and also set forth the "secret plans" of evil men aimed at obtaining kingdoms and glory (8:9). None of this early scriptural information, however, is found in our book of Ether, for it was supposed by Moroni that it would be had among the Jews (1:3).

Another stage in the development of the book of Ether came as Ether, working with all of the foregoing materials, and probably with others as well, wrote a religious history of his people on 24 gold plates. Ether was the last in a long line of descendants of Jared. He was the son of Coriantor, the son of Moron. Moron had reigned as king among the Jaredites (Eth. 11:14), but he was overthrown by a "mighty man . . . a descendant of the brother of Jared" (11:17); consequently Moron and Coriantor spent their days in captivity. Ether was born while his father was still a political prisoner, and after his father's death Ether prophesied sharply against Coriantumr who had become the king over all the land (12:1). As a result, Ether was banished from Moron, the capitol; he hid himself in a cave where he observed the people and completed his book (13:13). Ether included with his history his own "great and

¹² Moroni, however, appears to have known from firsthand experience the impact these words had upon a reader (12:24), as discussed below.

marvelous" prophecies (12:5; 13:13). Few of these prophecies have survived. A summary by Moroni says that the exiled Ether exhorted the people to believe in God, to repent, to hope for a better world and to abound in good works. In prophecy he covered "all things from the beginning of man" down to "the place of the New Jerusalem which should come down out of heaven and the holy sanctuary of the Lord" (13:2-3). From these facts one can see that Ether was the grandson of a deposed king, remained opposed to his captors' government, and grew up in captivity. These factors are consistent with his (perhaps partly autobiographical) selection of materials included in his chapters on his people's history. For example, he frequently sees the kings or the people pitted against the prophets (7:23; 9:28) and draws particular attention to the imprisonment of deposed royalty (7:7; 8:3; 10:14; 10:30; 11:18).

Third, Limhi's exploration party discovered the 24 gold plates of Ether which were intentionally hidden "in a manner that the people of Limhi [could] find them" (15:33; cf. Mos. 8:9). The plates were eventually taken to King Mosiah who translated them (Mos. 28:17). This inspired translation rendered the record of Ether into language that the Nephites in Zarahemla could understand.

Further information about the Jaredites survived among the Mulekites and the Nephites. For example, information about the Jaredites was learned from the "large stone" which was presented to and translated by Mosiah I (Omni 20-22). That stone gave "an account of one Coriantumr and the slain of his people," including reference to the tower and confusion of tongues. One can assume that Mosiah II was aware of this information.¹³ Possibly other stories about the destruction of the Jaredites were handed down among the people of Zarahemla through Coriantumr.¹⁴ If Moroni found

¹³ Compare "at the time the Lord confounded the language of the people" in Omni 22, with the same phrase used by Mosiah in Mos. 28:17; also by Moroni in Eth. 1:33.

¹⁴ Coriantumr lived with the people of Zarahemla nine months (Omni 21). We do not know how well Coriantumr and the Mulekites communicated. Did he learn their language?

these bits of information reliable, he may have used them as supplementary sources for his account of the destruction in Ether 13-15.

The final stage came when Moroni abridged the record and wrote the account we have today in the Book of Mormon. His signature, "I Moroni," is repeated many times throughout the book of Ether (1:1, 3:17, 5:1, 6:1, 8:20, 8:26, 9:1, 12:6, 12:29, 12:38, 13:1), often indicating where Moroni was introducing his own words into the record. He uses this same signature in his book of Moroni (Moro. 1:1, 1:3, 7:1, 10:1) and in his own writings in the book of Mormon (Morm. 8:1).

2. Which parts of the book of Ether were composed by Moroni?

It seems quite clear that Moroni composed several sections of the book of Ether as his own original compositions. Such sections stand out fairly obviously from what was contained on the 24 gold plates. Here are some main passages; there may be others.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| a. 1:1-6a. | Introduction |
| b. 3:17-20 | Moroni draws a parallel between the Lord's ministry to the brother of Jared and his appearance to the Nephites. |
| c. 4:1b-6:1 | Interlude explaining that the record was kept secret by the Nephite kings until after Christ appeared and said that they should be made manifest, for God controls when the heavens are open and shut. |
| d. 8:18-26 | Comments on secret combinations and warnings to the Gentiles. |
| e. 12:6-13:1 | Homily on faith, weakness, charity, and coming to God. |

The fact that Moroni felt free to insert his own material into his abridgment of the book of Ether indicates that, in general, he was not attempting to produce a technically rigorous version of Jaredite history.

Coming immediately before and after each of these sections inserted by Moroni, the seams in the underlying text can be discerned with remarkable clarity. Eth. 3:16 leaves off with the Lord's reference to his coming "in the flesh," and 3:21 picks up with the injunction not to release this information until Christ glorifies his name "in the flesh." Eth. 4:1 is interrupted at the point where the brother of Jared is commanded to "go down out of the mount," and 6:2 resumes at the point where "the brother of Jared came down out of the mount." Eth. 8:17 breaks off after speaking of Akish and his kindred and friends, and 9:1 resumes again speaking of "Akish and his friends." Eth. 12:5 ends by saying that the people "did not believe" the "great and marvelous" prophecies of Ether; 13:2 commences again where the people "rejected all the words of Ether" and 13:13 resumes with a description of Ether's "great and marvelous" prophecies, after interspersions by Moroni on belief and on Ether's prophecies respectively. In each case, the underlying text continues after each textual insertion by Moroni precisely where it had left off.

3. Which parts of the book of Ether were paraphrased by Moroni from the record of Ether? What influenced his choice of what to include and what to exclude, or how to recount the story? These questions have no simple answers and further research will be necessary to address these points. It appears, for example, that Nephite phraseology and Moroni's vocabulary were influential in Moroni's abridgment of certain sections of the record of Ether. Thus, in Eth. 13:3-6 Moroni uses phrases such as "New Jerusalem" and "remnant," which are similarly conjoined in 3 Ne. 21:23-26. Eth. 13:10 uses the phrase "whose garments are white through the blood of the Lamb," which was long established Nephite terminology (1 Ne. 12:10; Alma 5:21; 13:11; 34:36; 3 Ne. 27:19), and Eth. 13:12 speaks of "they who were first shall be last," similar to 1 Ne. 13:42. From such linguistic connections, coupled with the overall character of Eth. 13:2-12, one can hypothesize that Moroni is presenting a summary of the prophecies of Ether in Eth. 13:2-12, rather than transmitting Ether's exact words. More work is needed

to determine the extent to which Ether or Moroni used their own words or ideas in passages in other sections of the book of Ether, and to distinguish their paraphrasing and summarizing from what has been quoted more precisely from the underlying Jaredite texts.

In suggesting which portions of this text reflect Moroni's inspiration and vantage point, the researcher may attempt to reconstruct Moroni's objectives and perspectives. His prophetic purposes and points of view surely played a role in how he told the story of the Jaredites and which of the many prophecies of Ether (13:2, 13) he was inspired to include. His approach was not to tell the story of the Jaredites as they would have told it, but to present that story through the eyes of a Nephite survivor who saw that many of the same things had happened to his people that had happened years before to them. Through this inspired and purposeful selection process, his version of Jaredite history repeats the warnings and lessons of the Nephite demise, and displays for us several parallels to Nephite experiences. These include similar features in their origins, migrations to a land of promise, internal conflicts, social and religious problems, and their final destructions.¹⁵

4. To the extent that Moroni was abridging the 24 gold plates, did he translate them himself, or did he rely on the translation of King Mosiah? At present we cannot be sure, but there are at least eight factors to consider:

a. It is clear from Mos. 28:17 that Mosiah II translated the 24 gold plates. There are readings of Mos. 21:28 and Ether 4:1 in the Printer's Manuscript of the Book of Mormon (and Ether 4:1 in the

¹⁵ Such parallels are discussed by B. H. Roberts, Studies of the Book of Mormon (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), pp. 251-63.

1830, 1837 and 1840 editions¹⁶) that seem to confuse the issue, but they can be explained.¹⁷

b. The heading to the book of Ether which is found in some editions of the Book of Mormon does not disagree that King Mosiah II was the translator of the 24 plates. It reads: "The record of the Jaredites, taken from the twenty-four plates found by the people of Limhi in the days of king Mosiah."¹⁸ This statement, however, is

16 Unfortunately, the Original Manuscript for these verses has not survived.

17 In the Printer's Manuscript, our earliest surviving reading of Mos. 21:28, Ammon states that "King Benjamin had a gift from God whereby he could interpret such engravings." This cannot, however, be understood to mean that Benjamin was the translator of the 24 plates, since Benjamin died at or around the time Ammon left Zarahemla for Nephi (Mos. 6:5, 7, and 7:1 may even be understood to say that he died three years before) and, of course, it was somewhat longer before Ammon arrived back in Zarahemla with Limhi and his group (Mos. 22:14). What can the reference to Benjamin have meant? It is possible that Ammon made the statement recorded in Mos. 21:28 at a time when he did not know for sure that the new king Mosiah II would exercise the same gift as had his father. This would explain why Ammon might have spoken to the people of Limhi only of the known powers which Benjamin had had.

Likewise, the earliest readings we have of Ether 4:1 state that Benjamin, rather than Mosiah II, held back certain matters about the premortal Christ from the people. If Moroni really meant to say "Benjamin" here, he may have inferred from Mos. 3 that Benjamin (like the brother of Jared) had also received knowledge about the premortal Christ which Benjamin had not made public. On the other hand, if Moroni meant to say "Mosiah" here, he has reference to the fact that Mosiah did not publicly disclose all portions of the book of Ether. One way or the other, the text is acceptable and does not contradict the fact that Mosiah II was the translator of the 24 gold plates. See also Sidney B. Sperry, Problems of the Book of Mormon (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1964), p. 203 = Answers to Book of Mormon Questions (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967); Hugh Nibley, Since Cumorah (Salt Lake City: Deseret, 1967), p. 7.

18 This language appears to have been introduced by James E. Talmage first in 1920.

still ambiguous; it does not say whether Moroni took his information directly from the 24 gold plates, or from the translation which had been "taken" from the plates "in the days of Mosiah." It can be read either way, since we cannot be sure whether "in the days of king Mosiah" speaks of when the plates were found or when the translation was made from them.¹⁹ Moreover, since this heading was not in the Printer's Manuscript nor in any 19th century edition, likely it was not on the Plates of Mormon. Thus it does not provide us with any information on whether or not Moroni translated the plates anew.

c. In Ether 1:2 Moroni says, "I take mine account from" the 24 gold plates. This might mean that he was retranslating the plates. Yet he does not mention using the interpreters. Furthermore, it is unlikely (but not impossible) that a prophet would retranslate a record which had already been translated. The expression "to take an account from" seems vague enough to allow either that Moroni was working from Mosiah's translation or his own.

d. Did Moroni have the ability to read the plates without the aid of divine gifts? Limhi (who spoke the Nephite language) could not read them, and neither could Ammon (a Mulekite). Ether 3:22-24 indicates that Moroni could not read them without divine aid either.

e. In Ether 5:1 Moroni says that he was writing "according to my memory," implying that he was not taking the account literally either from the plates or from Mosiah's translation.

f. Jesus commanded that the things written by the brother of Jared and kept by Mosiah now be "made manifest" (4:2). It seems unlikely that Moroni would alter or rework materials if they had been approved by Jesus.

g. In Ether 12:24 Moroni comments that the Lord had not made the Nephites mighty in writing "like unto the brother of Jared, for thou madest him that the things which he wrote were mighty even as thou art, unto the overpowering of man to read them." This seems to

¹⁹ It is unclear precisely when the 24 gold plates were found; Mos. 8:7 does not say when in Limhi's reign he sent his 43 explorers out to find Zarahemla, but it appears that they made their trip before Benjamin's death.

say that Moroni had read the writings of the brother of Jared in their original language and found them to be overpowering. On the other hand, Moroni may also be saying that he found Mosiah's translation of those writings to be powerful.

h. Finally, Mormon's statement in Mos. 28:18-19 is perhaps most instructive. After explaining that Mosiah II had translated the plates of Ether, Mormon says that "this account shall be written hereafter." Mormon appears here to refer to Mosiah's translation, for he speaks of "this account" which was made public to the people of Zarahemla, and surely Mormon would have had high regard for Mosiah's translation. Nevertheless, even this is not completely unambiguous, for it is possible (although not probable) that the phrase "this account" may refer not to Mosiah's translation but to the content of the 24 plates as described in Mos. 28:17. Still, Mormon planned at the time when he was abridging the book of Mosiah to include the record of Ether in his collection.²⁰ It would appear that Mormon would have worked from Mosiah's translation in the same manner in which he abridged other Nephite records. One may assume that Moroni would have done likewise, especially since his introductory words (1:1-5, 33) are so similar to Mosiah II's statement in Mos. 28:17.

Thus it is not completely clear whether Moroni read the record of Ether in its original language or in Mosiah's translation. It seems most likely to me that Moroni worked predominantly from Mosiah's translation and from his memory of that story (5:1), although one cannot say absolutely that Moroni did not retranslate any Jaredite records, especially the words of the brother of Jared of which he has personal knowledge.

5. How literal was the inspired translation rendered by Mosiah II? We have virtually no way of knowing anything about the

²⁰ Mormon's knowledge of the Jaredite experience with secret combinations, for example, accords with his account of Nephite history, especially from Hel. 2 to 3 Ne. 7, and in 4 Ne. 1:42, where he emphasizes considerably the role of secret coalitions and combinations in Nephite history.

nature of Mosiah's translation of the 24 gold plates, except that it was an inspired translation. What he wrote, he received under revelation. What he brought forth, he did by the gift and power of God. What he translated was true. Moroni verifies that this translation (assuming that he worked with Mosiah's translation) allowed him to relate "the very things which the brother of Jared saw" (4:4).

In rendering this translation, of course, Mosiah functioned within the constraints of his own language (whatever language the Nephites were then using), its symbol system, its vocabulary, its syntax and its idiomatic usages. Since there is not always a precise one-to-one correspondence between words in two languages (so that one cannot translate one into the other without some loss of precision), the letter of a translation is sometimes less important than its spirit. Some translations are very literal, going mechanically, expression by expression; others strive to recreate in the second language what the original writing meant to its original writer, even though some expressions used may not have direct linguistic equivalents. Both kinds of translations are "true" translations, but each needs to be understood a little differently.²¹ Unfortunately, there is no way to tell which kind of translation King Mosiah made from the 24 gold plates.²² Still there are a few details remotely relevant to this question. While Mosiah did not make his full translation public,²³ this does not imply that it was only a summary translation. He and later Nephite leaders tried to

²¹ See generally E. H. Glassman, The Translation Debate: What Makes a Biblical Translation Good? (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1981).

²² Somewhat the same may be observed with respect to Joseph Smith's translation, about which he disclosed very little. See Stephen D. Ricks, "Joseph Smith's Means and Methods of Translating the Book of Mormon," F.A.R.M.S. Preliminary Report RIC-84. See also footnote 7 above.

²³ He only told his people that the 24 gold plates were a record of a destroyed people. Mos. 28:17-18. See also Ether 4:1.

keep silent about the oaths, covenants, agreements, signs, and wonders found on these plates, so that Nephites would not "fall into darkness also and be destroyed" (Alma 37:27). Such concerns suggest that his translation was quite detailed.

The proper names found in the book of Ether may give some indication of the extent to which Mosiah's transliterations were literal, but even here the evidence is ambiguous. A few of the Jaredite names are biblical in spelling. They include Aaron, Ephraim, Levi, Noah, Seth and Jared. The names Seth, Noah and Jared come from the early Patriarchal period, predating the "great tower," but Ephraim and Levi are from the time of Israel's sojourn in Egypt, and Aaron is from the time of Moses, all of them coming after the time of Jared in the book of Ether.²⁴ Were these precise forms of these names known among the Jaredites, or did Mosiah render the Jaredite names into Hebrew forms adequately equivalent to the Jaredite names?²⁵ If the Jaredites used a language related to the Semitic family, that could explain basic similarities between their names and these biblical names.²⁶ On the other hand, several Jaredite names appear among the Nephites around the time of Mosiah. For example, Shiblón, Morianton and Aaron are names that occur in the book of Alma and also on the Jaredite king list. Korihor and Corihor are very similar. Moroni is an adjectival form of Moron. Nehor was both the name of an opponent of Alma and also of a Jaredite city and land. Nephite Kishkumen may be related to Jaredite Kish. Coriantumr in Helaman 1 has the same name as two

²⁴ See discussion in John A. Tvedtnes, "A Phonemic Analysis of Nephite and Jaredite Proper Names," SEHA Newsletter 141 (December 1977), pp. 1-8; F.A.R.M.S. Reprint TVE-77.

²⁵ The same kind of thing is done in translating Greek names into English: "Ioannes" is translated as "John;" "Iakobos" becomes "James."

²⁶ That the Jaredites may have been Semites is indicated by their origin in Mesopotamia; Hugh Nibley, Lehi in the Desert and the World of the Jaredites (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1951), pp. 156-60, 175.

Jaredites. If there was a connection between these Nephite and Jaredite names, which way did the influence go? Did Mosiah draw on names already known and popular in his day and age, as he rendered the Jaredite names into his language? Or did the Nephites begin to use Jaredite names after hearing the story of Ether? Or had the Mulekites had enough contact with the Jaredites through Coriantumr, who spent nine moons with them (Omni 21), that they knew and used Jaredite names from that source or some similar source? There is little basis upon which to answer these questions. The use of such names among the Nephites, however, seems to predate and to be independent of Mosiah's translation of the book of Ether.²⁷ Thus, it could be that these names were already in use among the Nephites before Mosiah's translation, and that he drew upon them in representing the Jaredite names in language the Nephites would understand. This, however, still says little about the precise nature or substance of the rest of his translation. Perhaps further studies will shed some light on these questions.

6. Does the examination of the book of Ether in this manner weaken the authority of the text? In my opinion, the examination of the texts of the Book of Mormon in this manner is natural and not unresponsive of the authoritativeness of the text.

Source criticism of the Bible has been thought by some people to weaken the authoritativeness of the Bible,²⁸ and the historical

²⁷ If Alma chose Jaredite names for his sons in remembrance of certain Jaredite kings, why did he choose such unpropitious names as Corianton and Shiblon, when the days of the first Coriantumr were short (Eth. 9:22), those of the second Coriantumr, as well as one Coriantor (Eth. 11:23), were spent in captivity, and the Jaredite Shiblon's time was one of pestilence (Eth. 11:4-7)? Likewise, Nehor (who was executed in 91 B.C.; Alma 1:15) was born and named before the 24 plates were translated (which appears to have occurred shortly before Mosiah conferred the kingdom upon Alma, about 92 B.C.; Mos. 28:20).

²⁸ For example, questions have been raised whether Paul wrote all of the letters traditionally attributed to him, and whether the New Testament is completely accurate in reporting the words attributed to Jesus and his contemporaries. The book of
(Footnote 28 Continued on Next Page)

process of selecting the books that were finally included in the Bible has seemed arbitrary to some.²⁹ Does source criticism leave believers in the Book of Mormon in the same uneasy position? I think it does not; for, not only have the biblical problems been exaggerated,³⁰ but the texts of the Book of Mormon are in a different position from those of the Bible in certain ways.

First, the Book of Mormon itself states that it was made up from multiple ancient sources. On many occasions, its writers and abridgers are forthright and explicit about the sources they are relying upon, giving the modern reader a clear general indication that multiple levels of textual history stand behind the final text. It does not detract from the authority of this text to recognize the existence of such levels.³¹

(Footnote 28 Continued from Previous Page)

Jeremiah is clearly a collection of writings done at different times in the prophet's life and compiled later by the two brothers who served as his scribes, and the single authorship of the other books has been doubted, raising questions about editorial influence which may have colored or altered the final version of these texts as we have them. On the unity of the Pentateuch, however, see Yehuda Radday and H. Shore, Genesis: An Authorship Study in Computer-Assisted Statistical Linguistics, Analecta Biblica 103:20 (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1985), and subsequent volumes in the series.

29 Discussed briefly in Thomas A. Hoffman, "Inspiration, Normativeness, Canonicity, and the Unique Sacred Character of the Bible," Catholic Biblical Quarterly 44 (1982), 462-63. See generally, James Barr, Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983).

30 For a wise assessment, see Victor Ludlow, "Are There Things we are Learning or Can Learn from Contemporary Biblical Criticism?" Ensign (April 1985), p. 37.

31 In the case of the Bible, authoritative use and honor given to earlier tradition by the prophets has been recognized by such scholars as James A. Sanders, Canon and Community (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), p. 27.

Second, the process of selecting, abridging, paraphrasing or editing the texts of the Book of Mormon always went through the hands and control of identifiable prophets, not nameless "redactors." From Nephi, Alma, or Ether, to Mormon or Moroni, these men are known figures. They were reliable and inspired sources. Their written work, therefore, comes to us with the authoritativeness of inspired work.

Third, demonstrating multiple authorship in the Book of Mormon strengthens the overall historicity of the text. The fact that different vantage points, various personalities, and distinctive styles exist within the Book of Mormon is consistent with the fact that Joseph Smith was not the author of these collected records. Acknowledging individual differences between these prophets and allowing room for such things as their personal traits, experiences and vocabulary to have influenced to some extent their written accounts may to some people detract from the scripture as the word of God. But it should be remembered that the Lord speaks to people in terms of their own language (2 Ne. 31:3; D&C 1:24-28) and through the medium of his agents, the prophets.

Fourth, one might also object to the suggestion that human factors played any role in selecting or shaping the ancient texts of the Book of Mormon. The writers of those records, however, were quick to confess their own weaknesses in writing and their susceptibility to error; several times the reader is told not to reject the work because of the faults or weaknesses of men (Title Page; 2 Ne. 33:12; Morm. 8:17; Eth. 12:25-26). Thus some human element was allowed for. We are fortunate to know that any such errors, idiosyncracies, stylistic inelegancies, or personal peculiarities (while leaving fingerprints of ancient handling) do not detract from the fundamental message of the book. The certification of the Lord that the Book of Mormon contains the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 20:9) places unqualified approval upon the doctrines in the record as it eventually came forth.

Conclusion. These comments are merely preliminary. Until serious effort is made, it will remain unclear to what degree better answers to the questions I have raised can be developed. Future research may, however, if attentive to the multiple sources behind the modern text of the Book of Mormon, yet yield important hints, clues or evidences shedding light on those underlying sources. In the meantime, it should be apparent that stating comprehensively who wrote the book of Ether is no simple matter.

(c) November 29, 1986