

# The Christian Arsenal

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## Archaeology Versus the Book of Mormon

by Jeffrey E. Ramey M.R.E.

Since the writing of the paper in 1982, there have been several great books written on Mormonism and the subject of Archaeology. There have also been many discoveries in North, Central, and South America. None of these have changed the outcome that this paper arrived at nearly two decades ago. Some of the references are dated but the end result is still the same. It is always the same. There is no solid evidence to support the claims of the Book of Mormon.

The Mormon Church has launched an offensive on the world. They are sending missionaries door to door to spread the Mormon message. They are now presenting themselves as a Christian mainline denomination. The missionaries make fantastic claims about proof of the events depicted in the *Book of Mormon*. They contend that these events have been historically and archaeologically verified, and that, since they are in the *Book of Mormon*, the Mormon Church is the only true church.<sup>1</sup> This is one of their stronger selling points. These claims come from various sources. The most evident source is Mormon writers. For example, Milton R. Hunter, a typical Mormon apologetic writer, has written books and pamphlets on the subject of the archaeology of the *Book of Mormon*. However, Mr. Hunter and his fellow writers are not qualified to write on the subject of archaeology. Their writings and claims show a marked ignorance of several facts.<sup>2</sup> In spite of this, Mormons still write, publish, and teach these opinions because they are convinced that they are true.

A standard reference work for Mormons is the *Articles of Faith* by James Talmage. Mr. Talmage treats the subject of the archaeology of the *Book of Mormon* as if it were a long-standing, established fact. Mr. Talmage assures his readers there is ample proof. Mr. Talmage states, "The Egyptian is not the only language to be represented in the relics of American antiquities; the Hebrew occurs in this connection with at least equal significance."<sup>3</sup> Here Mr. Talmage tells his readers that the civilization that was here used Egyptian and Hebrew writing. This would be a key point in proving the Book of Mormon to be true.

From the very beginning, Mormon leaders have told their people of adequate proof for the *Book of Mormon*. Mormon Apostle Orson Pratt said, "This generation have (sic) more than one thousand times the amount of evidence to demonstrate and forever establish the divine authority of the *Book of Mormon* than they have in favor of the *Bible*."<sup>4</sup> Bold claims such as these have inspired Mormons for generations. But this brings a curious point to light. The *Articles of Faith* has gone through forty-two editions with the latest one printed in 1975. The most recent date in the documentation in the section concerning archaeological proofs is 1923. The average date is around 1870.<sup>5</sup> This would seem to reflect that there is little concern for modern scholarship or discoveries. It was not until 1938 that the first Mormon earned his doctorate in archaeology.<sup>6</sup> This leaves a fifteen year gap between latest documentation in the *Articles of Faith* and the first Mormon who earned a doctorate in archaeology.

To better understand the points of controversy on the subject, a description of the Americas will be given according to the *Book of Mormon*. The civilization under question was alleged to be made up of Jews and extant from 600 B.C. to 421 A.D.<sup>7</sup> The people spread from north to south and from sea to sea (Helaman 3:8, Mormon 1:17). As the people covered the entire land, they built great fortified cities with many temples and synagogues (Helaman 3:8-9). The people were industrious and warlike (Ether 15:2). They had the use of iron, copper, and brass. They had machinery and manufactured tools, spears, swords, armor, and other things (Jarom 1:8, 2 Nephi 5:15, Alma 43:18-19). A monetary and an extensive trade and shipping system had been developed (Helaman 3:7-12, Alma 11:5-20).

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The natural surroundings are depicted in detail in a few areas. Elephants were a common animal used as a beast of burden (Ether 9:19). There were horses and cattle in abundance (Ether 9:19) as well as cureloms and cumons that were even more useful than elephants (Ether 9:19). There was every kind of fruit growing in the land (Ether 9:17). Farmers grew wheat, barley, and other types of grain as well as kept sheep, goats, and pigs for food (Ether 9:17-18, Mosiah 9:9). This is the way the *Book of Mormon* presents life in the Americas at this time.

Drawing from the *Book of Mormon*, the following should depict accurately a day in the life of one of the inhabitants, a Nephite Jew. In the morning you would wake up to a breakfast of ham, fruits and bread made from wheat flour (Mosiah 9:9, Ether 9:18). After finishing your morning meal, you get dressed for work. You dress in silk and fine linen because they are plentiful materials (Alma 4:6, Ether 10:24). You bid your wife and children farewell, and you mount your trusty curelom and you ride off to work (Ether 9:19).

As you ride through the great fortified city you live in, you admire the many beautiful buildings and temples with their fine workmanship (Jerom 1:8, Helaman 3:9). Leaving the city, you pass by busy shops where spears, swords and other weapons of warfare are made, and you hear the noises of hammers on anvils and machinery (Jerom 1:8). You stop in and pick up and order for a dozen iron axes for your company. Your hurry to leave so you can meet your crew. Soon these sounds fade behind you as you pass the many fields of barley and wheat in the countryside (Mosiah 9:9). Just before you arrive at work you pass a military patrol of chariots (3 Nephi 3:22).

When you arrive at work, you find that you have a busy day ahead of you. You supervise a crew of lumberjacks, and there is a severe shortage of lumber in the northern part of the country (Helaman 3:10-11). Your crew puts in a hard day's work. They cut down a record number of trees with their new iron axes. The trees you cut down are removed by elephants (Ether 9:19) and then taken to a central shipping warehouse and are shipped north to areas where trees are scarce. (Helaman 3:7-11). Before you leave for home, your boss pays you and your crew in cold hard cash. You get a bonus senine of gold and all your men get seven ezroms of silver (Alma 11:5-20). After this, you leave for home.

As you approach the city passing the fields of grain and the factories, you decide to stop by the temple to see if any of the prophets are speaking (Alma 16:13). You may want to stop by the archives and read up on the history of your people that has been written in your native language, Reformed Egyptian (Helaman 3:15, Mormon 9:32). You then return home to your wife and children. This concludes an average day in the life of a Nephite as per the *Book of Mormon*.

There are several problems with the preceding description. Many of the items mentioned present severe problems when put in the light of archaeological research and findings. Most of the statements are far beyond reconciliation to the facts.

The food and dress mentioned in the *Book of Mormon* pose a problem. The grains such as wheat and barley were not known in the pre-Columbian America. They were brought over in the early 1500's by the Spaniards and other explorers.<sup>8</sup> The linens and silks mentioned were not in existence on this side of the world. England tried to introduce silk production into the Colonies in the 1600's and 1700's and failed. The *Book of Mormon* fails to mention the types of cloth that have been found. Cotton was woven into an exceptionally fine cloth. There were clothes made of bark fibers, rabbit hair, and even woven bird feathers. There is no mention of any of these in the *Book of Mormon*.<sup>9</sup>

The working animals and livestock present similar difficulties. Elephants were not native nor are

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they native to the Americas. They are here today because of circus business and zoos. Cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs were not native to pre-Columbian America. All of these animals were introduced to the New World by the Spaniards in the early 1500's. No proof of these animals being here has ever been found for the time period in question.<sup>10</sup> The cureloms and cumons must remain a mystery. This writer could find no information on them in books concerning animals now living or extinct.

The fortified cities, temples, and the materials used, present still another gigantic problem. There are thirty-eight major cities mentioned in the *Book of Mormon*. Not one of these cities has been found. There is no evidence to support the claim that there was a great civilization here. No temples or synagogues of Jewish nature have been found. There was no use of concrete here during this time. No machinery has been found. Nothing has been found to substantiate the claims of metal workings in iron.<sup>11</sup> This is perhaps the most difficult area for Mormon archaeologists to try to explain.

The people here are represented as being very warlike in nature. They were concerned with war, the manufacture of war articles and the use of chariots. Again, the facts will not support this. The technology to produce many of the weapons like the steel sword was not available. Since there were no horses, chariots would not be very useful. They were never used over here. The life philosophy of the inhabitants of the Americas during this time seems to have been a peaceful one. All indications from archaeological evidence points to a peaceful people.<sup>12</sup> Mormons are quick to point out that the American Indians were warlike; however, this was only after they were cheated out of their lands and treaties had been broken.

The *Book of Mormon* lists several types of gold and silver coins. Mormons claim that the Mayans had a lot of gold. This is true, but they used it for decorative and ornamental purposes. There was never any type of coin system in pre-Columbian America. From records found, the method of trade was the barter system. Feathers, flint, cotton cloth, gold ornaments and cacao beans were the items used in trade. The cacao bean seems to have been the closest thing to a monetary standard in the Mayan world. None of these alleged coins has ever been found.<sup>13</sup> Mayan tax records show the use of this type of barter system to pay all taxes.<sup>14</sup>

Writing in the pre-Columbian Americas as portrayed in the *Book of Mormon* presents a few problems. The Technology to make the engraved metal plates as described in the *Book of Mormon* did not exist at that time. There was never a universal language in the New World as portrayed. The earliest signs of literacy appear with the Mayans in 328 A.D., and there is no resemblance between Mayan writing and the alleged Reformed Egyptian.<sup>15</sup> The Reformed Egyptian writing brings to light still other problems. There have been no instances of Egyptian or Hebrew writing found in the artifacts of pre-Columbian America. The Smithsonian Institution<sup>16</sup> and National Geographic Society<sup>17</sup> are just two of many who substantiate this. A copy of some of the characters were shown to Dr. Charles Anthon of Columbia University in 1828 shortly after their discovery. Dr. Anthon stated, "The whole story about pronouncing the Mormon inscription to be reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics is perfectly false."<sup>18</sup> From the very start, the language in question has presented enormous problems. Besides, why would Jewish people write in Egyptian?

The New World, as described in the *Book of Mormon*, seems to be vastly different than what archaeologists and historians describe. There are many anti-Mormon works that attack this point of conflict. There are nearly as many defending the claims of the *Book of Mormon*. One of the best ways to settle a conflict of opinions, in many cases, is to bring in an objective third party.

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The Smithsonian Institution has received thousands of letters concerning the historical value of the *Book of Mormon*. This led to the development of an official statement concerning this book. Part of the statement reads, "The Smithsonian Institution has never used the *Book of Mormon* in any way... archaeologists see no connection between the archaeology of the New World and the subject matter of the *Book of Mormon*."<sup>19</sup> The National Geographic Society has received similar questions. They admit to having used the *Book of Mormon* as a guide for a few excavations, but they have had no recognizable results. In speaking of the overall claims of the *Book of Mormon*, they said, "...your quotations do not agree with the archaeological data of the New World."<sup>20</sup> The Museum of Natural History also finds no connection between archaeological findings and the *Book of Mormon*.

This writer, not satisfied with the available data, wrote the Mormon Church concerning these apparent discrepancies. The letters were never answered. The Grolier Research Service was contacted, Grolier is the company that publishes the *Encyclopedia Americana* and other reference works, and requested to find out if there was any archaeological evidence and if so to furnish some documentation. In their reply Grolier stated that they had contacted the Communications Office of the Mormon Church, the official public relations agency for the church. They admitted that there was no proof to date.<sup>21</sup> Grolier also contacted a writer on the staff of *Archaeology Magazine* that had been working in Mexico for several years. The writer said that he was aware of Mormon excavations in the area for the past several years and that they had never contacted him concerning any discoveries.<sup>22</sup>

With the weight of evidence against them, many honest Mormon scholars and leaders have a difficult time explaining these contradictions. Dr. Marvin Cowan wrote a very pointed and direct letter on this subject to President Joseph Fielding Smith, then leader of the Mormon Church. Dr. Cowan asked for answers. President Smith responded by evading the issue. The content of the letter to Dr. Cowan contained statements like, "I bear my testimony that I know that this record is true history of these people-- (sic) the fathers of the "Indians" (sic) on this hemisphere." The only statement relating to Dr. Cowan's questions that President Smith made was that he did not know of any cities that had been discovered using the *Book of Mormon* as a guide.<sup>23</sup>

Since 1938 the Mormon Church has had an archaeologist with a doctorate. In 1946 Brigham Young University added a department of archaeology.<sup>24</sup> The following is an example of what honest Mormon scholars have brought to light. Dee Green stated, "The first myth we need to eliminate is that the *Book of Mormon* archaeology exists." He also stated that the present Mormon works were full of half-truths.<sup>25</sup> He also made the statement, "I do not see that the archaeology myths so common in our proselytizing program enhances the process of true conversion."<sup>26</sup> Dee Green here admits that the Mormon Church publishes books with half-truths, and that the missionaries use myths as part of their witnessing tactics.

Ross T. Christensen, Mormon scholar, urges, "...the spirit of caution... for the reason that there are a number of points where correspondences should have been found but to this date have not been."<sup>27</sup> Mr. Christensen's concern is expressed as a compliant by fellow Mormon dissident, Dr. J.L. Sorrenson. Concerning existing Mormon works on the subject of archaeology he states, "Some are clearly on the oddball fringe; others have credible qualifications." He goes on to say that the most prolific writers in this area are not qualified to write on the subject.<sup>28</sup> Dr. Hugh Nibley, one of the more qualified Mormons in this area, would like to see the whole matter of both side dropped.<sup>29</sup> For all the time, work, and money, this is all the Mormon Church can produce from its most honest and qualified people.

Professor Dee Jay Nelson was the most qualified Egyptologist in the Mormon Church. After examining a papyrus fragment and doing some translation work on it, he found some of the long standing claims of the Mormon Church to be false. The Mormon Church would not even hear of

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any contradictory evidence, and they dismissed it. Professor Nelson then resigned from the Mormon Church.<sup>30</sup>

In an effort to hold their ground, many Mormons claim that they have not been given enough time to find all of these things.<sup>31</sup> They have had a Department of Archaeology at Brigham Young University for the past thirty-five years. There have been many opportunities during this time to find something. In the past thirty-five years there have been enough artifacts discovered to establish the credibility of the *Bible*. Coins, war artifacts, cities, and writings have been found.<sup>32</sup> Archaeologists have failed to produce one coin, one chariot, or one sword in proof of the *Book of Mormon*.

To say that Mormons have come up with no archaeological findings would not be true. They have been finding artifacts for many years. One such find has come to be known as the Kinderhook Plates. These were six bell-shaped plates that were supposedly excavated from a mound outside of Kinderhook, Illinois in 1843. The founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith, examined these plates and pronounced them to be authentic and written in Reformed Egyptian. He began to translate these plates. Before Joseph Smith finished his translation, an important fact came to the public's attention. The fact was that this was a well-planned prank devised to be played on Joseph Smith. A couple of the local residents of Kinderhook admitted to the whole thing. The letters on the plates were poor reproductions from the lid of a Chinese tea can.<sup>33</sup>

In 1885 a relic, known as the Batcreek Stone, was brought to the attention of the Mormon Church. It was claimed to be part of an inscription found on Jewish coins minted in and around Israel from about 70 A.D. until 135 A.D. Many years later a non-Mormon archaeologist, Dr. Gordon, confirmed this. This was seen as a revelation from God for the Mormons. Mormons upheld the Batcreek Stone and Dr. Gordon as positive proof. This left them open for a great amount of criticism. First, how would a people that arrived here in 600 B.C. know a slogan on a coin minted on the other side of the world in 70 A.D.? Second, the Batcreek Stone was supposed to be Hebrew. The *Book of Mormon* claims the official written language to be Reformed Egyptian. Third, some of the artifacts of jewelry found with this stone were found to be of eighteenth or nineteenth century origin. Fourth, Dr. Gordon was found to be a man of less than honest academic reputation. His fellow archaeologists had a low opinion of his work. Some of his work had been proved to be wrong. Fifth, the Batcreek Stone was finally dismissed as a recent forgery.<sup>34</sup>

In the early 1950's the Smithsonian Institution unearthed a stone in Mexico which came to be known as Stelah 5. The stone was supposed to represent a vision that a man named Lehi had (1 Nephi 8:2-30). The names of three of the characters in this vision are supposed to appear on this stone. However, this claim was made by Dr. Jakeman, a Mormon that used a questionable means to arrive at such a statement. Dr. Jakeman stated that the names were symbolically interpreted from characters on the carving. The most professionally qualified person in the Mormon Church opposed this interpretation, as did other top Mormon scientists. Dee Jay Nelson stated, "I found nothing which translated into the three names." He continued in further writings to state that Dr. Nibley and Dr. Sorrenson also agreed with Dee Green on this point.<sup>35</sup>

The *Book of Mormon* has been evaluated by archaeology in this paper. To be fair in material presentation, the *Bible* will briefly be evaluated in a similar manner for the purpose of comparison.

The *Bible* mentions several cities. Every major city of the *Bible* has been found. For example, Shechem was excavated in 1903,<sup>36</sup> and Ur was excavated in 1854.<sup>37</sup> There have been thousands of examples of identifiable and translatable writings found.<sup>38</sup> These have been

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verified by reputable scholars of many nations and many faiths. Every coin and monetary amount mentioned in the *Bible* has been found.<sup>39</sup> The weapons of war and even the war records of some biblical events have been found. Sennacherib's chronicles have been found and translated. Concerning the incident of his conquest of Jerusalem when Hezekiah was king his records read, "As for Hezekiah, the Judean, I shut him up as a bird in a cage."<sup>40</sup> This coincides with the biblical narrative. The *Bible* has been confirmed by archaeology.

From the evidence presented, this writer can draw no other conclusion than the *Book of Mormon* is a lie. The evidence given by archaeology supports the *Bible*, but it speaks of a definite rejection of the claims made by the *Book of Mormon*. The Mormon Church encourages and published lies according to its own people. They admit their missionaries use these lies in their evangelism. This writer has nothing but sympathy for the many people the Mormon Church has deceived with its lies. I close this paper with a question to all Mormons: *Why would God leave so much evidence for the Old Testament and the New Testament and not leave so much as one coin as evidence for what you consider the most important book, the Book of Mormon?*

1	Marvin Cowan, <b><i>Mormon Claims Answered</i></b> (Salt Lake City: Marvin Cowan, 1975) pp. 48-
2	Harry L. Ropp, <b><i>The Mormon Papers</i></b> (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1977) p. 51
3	James E. Talmage, <b><i>Articles of Faith</i></b> (Salt Lake City: Desert Press, 42nd edition, 1975), p.
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7	Joseph Smith Jr., trans., <b><i>Book of Mormon</i></b> , (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of
8	Jerry Bodine, <b><i>Whom Can You Trust?</i></b> (Santa Ana, California: Christ for the Cults, 1979),
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10	Walter Martin, <b><i>Kingdom of the Cults</i></b> (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship Press, 1977), p.
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19	Jerald and Sandra Tanner, <b><i>Mormonism - Shadow or Reality?</i></b> (Salt Lake City: Modern Microfilm Co., 1972), p. 97 <a href="#">Back to text</a>
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37	<b><i>"UR," The Biblical World.</i></b> <a href="#">Back to text</a>
38	<b><i>"Writing," "Nag Hammadi Gnostic Texts," "Dead Sea Scrolls"</i></b> <a href="#">Back to text</a>
39	<b><i>"Coins," Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia</i></b> , 1975 <a href="#">Back to text</a>
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