

# Joseph Smith and the Question of Book of Mormon Geography

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In an address given at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. in commemoration of the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Joseph Smith. Mesoamerican archaeologist John Clark, a Latter-day Saint, suggested that, “both friends and foes have diminished Joseph and the Book of Mormon in the same way—by exaggerating his abilities.”

Critics see Joseph Smith as author of a romantic fiction, the Book of Mormon, and in so doing they distort both the man and the book beyond belief. They see the book as a logical product of its 1820s intellectual environment, combined with Joseph Smith’s native intelligence and deceitful propensities. Most Mormons fall into a more subtle error that also inflates Joseph’s talents; they confuse translation with 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.

One thing all readers share with Joseph is a partial understanding of the books’ complexities. Indeed, many things about the book were simply unknowable in 1830. . . . Consequently, *what Joseph Smith knew and understood about the book ought to be research questions rather than presumptions*. Thanks in large part to his critics, it is becoming clear that Joseph Smith did not fully understand the geography, scope, historical scale, literary form, or cultural content of the book.<sup>1</sup>

It is of course possible that the Lord revealed the details of Book of Mormon geography to Joseph Smith, but this is, as Clark reminds us a research question, not a given. In this presentation I will address several facets of this issue. First, terminology? Do terms used by the Joseph Smith in his descriptions of the Book of Mormon such as “this land,” “this continent,” or “this country” indicate, as some have suggested, any specific American setting for Book of Mormon events. Do they support a limited North American setting for the Book of Mormon? Do they make a view, which includes other portions of the Americas inconceivable? Second, did Joseph Smith’s revelations include details about the geography of the Book of Mormon? Third, I will discuss early Latter-day Saint interest in Central American discoveries as reflected in a handful of articles on the Book of Mormon which were published under the editorship of Joseph

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<sup>1</sup> John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” *BYU Studies* 44/4 (2005): 84-85. This was a presentation delivered for “The Worlds of Joseph Smith” held on May 5-6, 2005 at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. Emphasis added.

Smith. Did Joseph Smith write these articles or were they written by others? If written by others, do they reflect a view which is inconsistent with earlier revelations of the Prophet? I will review Joseph Smith's involvement as editor of the *Times & Seasons*. Finally, I will discuss what recent wordprinting studies may suggest in connection with the question of authorship. The implications of these findings for the broader question of Joseph Smith and Book of Mormon geography will be noted.

### **I. Terminology: "This Land"**

How are we to understand terms used by Joseph Smith such as "this land" "this continent" and "this country."? Earlier this year, the Maxwell Institute in association with the Harold B. Lee Library at BYU made an important collection of publications available to researchers.<sup>2</sup> This collection, *Nineteenth Century Publications about the Book of Mormon (1829-1844)* can be a useful resource in seeing how the Book of Mormon was understood, attacked and defended in the publications of that time as well as how terms such as "this land" "this continent" or "this country" were understood and used by early Latter-day Saints. In June 1842, while the Prophet was serving as editor, the *Times and Seasons* included an article comparing Aztec traditions of the confounding of languages and compared them with the Book of Mormon. The editor then observed

The tradition and hieroglyphics of the Zaltecs, the Colhuacans, and the Azteca nations, in regard to the confusion of languages and their travels to *this land*, is so like that contained in the Book of Mormon, that the striking analogy must be seen by every superficial observer . . . . These accounts, then, precisely agree, *one of which was found in Ontario county, N.Y., and the other in Mexico.*<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, the editor considered both New York and Mexico to be part of "this land."

### **Terminology: "This Continent"**

In his account of the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, now included within the Pearl of Great Price, the Prophet Joseph Smith wrote that the angel Moroni explained that the Book of Mormon gave an account of the "former inhabitants of *this continent*" (JSH 1:34). Some claim that these words mean that the Prophet only had reference to the United States or North America. This interpretation ignores how the words were used by Joseph Smith and his contemporaries. The historical evidence suggests that the earliest Latter-day Saints including Joseph Smith thought of events in the Book of Mormon as having occurred throughout North and South America. It is in this context of a hemispheric view inclusive of all the Americas that Latter-day

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<sup>2</sup> Matthew Roper, "Early Publications on the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18/2 (2009): 38-51.

<sup>3</sup> Ed., "Traits of Mosaic History" *Times & Seasons* (June 15, 1842): 820.

Saint usage of the word continent is best understood.

Noah Webster's 1828 *American Dictionary of the English Language* defined "continent" as, "a great extent of land, not disjointed or interrupted by a sea; a connected tract of land of great extent; *as the Eastern, and Western Continent*. It differs from an isle only in extent." Here, we have the idea of two main continents, a new, western or American Continent and an old or Eastern one. "*Formerly two continents were reckoned, the Old and the New; the former comprising Europe, Asia, and Africa, which form one continuous mass of land; the latter, North and South America, forming another.*"<sup>4</sup> Variants of this two-continent conception which conceives of the entire western land, both North and South America as one continent were common as the following examples show:

The Holy Bible professes to be a history of the peopling of the *old continent*—the Golden Bible of the *new continent*.<sup>5</sup>

If Moses and the prophets, Christ and his apostles, were the real authors of the bible, chiefly revealed and written on *the continent of Asia*, was not the book of Mormon also written by men who were divinely inspired by the Holy Spirit, on *the continent of America*? And did not Jesus Christ as truly appear on *the continent of America*, after his resurrection, and choose twelve apostles to preach his gospel; and did he not deliver his holy doctrine, and teach the same to numerous multitudes on *this American continent*?<sup>6</sup>

A history of the inhabitants who peopled *this continent, previous to its being discovered to Europeans by Columbus*, must be interesting to every man<sup>7</sup>

My last letter was mainly confined to the book of Mormon, which rarely fails to bring to my mind something about *the Indians*, whose history and doings, upon *this western continent*, it unfolds as plainly, as the bible does those of the *Israelites on the eastern continent*.--Having such a view before me, I have concluded to add a second part to my

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<sup>4</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* emphasis added.

<sup>5</sup> Wm. Owen, "A Comparison between the Book of Mormon and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, or The Golden Bible vs. The Holy Bible," *Free Enquirer*, New York, 10 September, 1831, emphasis added.

<sup>6</sup> Eli Gilbert to Oliver Cowdery, 24 September, 1834, *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1/1 (October 1834): 10.

<sup>7</sup> Oliver Cowdery to W. W. Phelps, "Letter VII," *Latter-day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* 1/10 (July 1835): 157.

last letter, and give a few ideas concerning the Indians and Israelites.<sup>8</sup>

The Bible was written by a people upon the *Eastern continent*, but the Book of Mormon by a people upon *this continent*.<sup>9</sup>

A nation whose “bones are dried” and whose ruined temples and monuments have reposed for ages in silent, solemn, and awful grandeur, has now spoken from the dust and revealed to the world their history, and with it their prophecies and their testimony of Jesus as the risen Messiah and the Saviour of the world, not of *Asia* only, but of *America* also.<sup>10</sup>

[Speaking of the destruction mentioned in 3 Nephi] The Lord of heaven could not allow sin on *this continent* in the character of the people, no more than he could on the *Eastern continent*.<sup>11</sup>

The days are but few, thank the most high, before the Book of Mormon will be ranked with the Bible, as one of the best of heaven’s blessings: one the ecclesiastical history of the *eastern* and the other of the *western continent*.<sup>12</sup>

Joseph Smith, speaking of the Prophecies of Ether relating to New Jerusalem taught:

Now many will be disposed to say, that this New Jerusalem spoken of, is the Jerusalem that was built by the Jews on *the eastern continent*: But you will see from Revelations, 21:2, there was a New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven, adorned as a bride for her husband. that after this the Revelator was caught away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and saw the great and holy city descending out of heaven from God. Now there are two cities spoken of here, and as every thing cannot be had in so narrow a compass as a letter, I shall say with brevity, that there is a New Jerusalem to be

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<sup>8</sup> W. W. Phelps to Oliver Cowdery, “Letter No. 11,” *Latter-day Saints’ Messenger and Advocate* 2/1 (October 1835): 193.

<sup>9</sup> E. Snow and Benjamin Winchester, “An Address to the Citizens of Salem (Mass.) And Vicinity,” *Times & Seasons* 3/1 (15 November, 1841): 582.

<sup>10</sup> Parley P. Pratt, “A Letter to the Queen of England,” *Times & Seasons* 3/2 (15 November, 1841): 594.

<sup>11</sup> John E. Page, “To A Disciple,” *Morning Chronicle*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1 July, 1842.

<sup>12</sup> John E. Page, “To A Disciple,” *Morning Chronicle*, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1 July, 1842.

established on *this continent*.--And also the Jerusalem shall be rebuilt *on the eastern continent*.

Clearly we are to understand “*this continent*” where the New Jerusalem is to be established in the same way that we understand the “*eastern continent*” where the old Jerusalem was built. The Prophet employs similar usage in the 1842 Wentworth Letter.

This book also tells us that our Savior made his appearance upon *this continent* after his resurrection, that he planted the gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing; that they had apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers and evangelists; the same order, the same priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessing, as was enjoyed *on the eastern continent*.

Clearly, the most reasonable interpretation of the evidence is that the Prophet referred to all the Americas when he spoke of “this continent” and not the United States or North America only.

Additionally, when we survey how Latter-day Saint writers in Joseph Smith’s day used the term it becomes clear that they had reference to Central and South America as well as North America as the following examples show:

The Book of Mormon informs us that Christ visited *this continent* after the resurrection, and we believe it, because it is in perfect accordance with the glorious attributes of Jehovah. He would never leave *one half of the world* in darkness on the subject of revelation, and then punish his creatures eternally for not believing what they never heard. Let orthodox preachers and believers in that doctrine make the most they can from this statement.<sup>13</sup>

As to the original inhabitants of *the continent of America*, the Book of Mormon backs up the description of immense “ruins” in *Central America*, dispels all doubt.<sup>14</sup>

For this reason we copy the foregoing eulogy on General Joseph Smith, one of the greatest men that ever lived on the earth; emphatically proved so, by being inspired by God to bring forth the Book of Mormon, which gives a true history of the natives of *this continent*; their ancient glory and cities:--which cities have been discovered by Mr. Stevens in *Central America*, exactly where the Book of Mormon left them.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> G. J. Adams, *A Lecture on the Authenticity & Scriptural Character of the Book of Mormon* (Boston: J. E. Farwell, 1844), 22.

<sup>14</sup> “Ancient Ruins,” *Times & Seasons* (December 15, 1844): 744-47.

<sup>15</sup> *Times and Seasons* (April 1, 1845): 855.

During the Prophet's tenure as editor writers for the *Times & Seasons* used similar language to describe the evidence for the Book of Mormon found throughout the Americas.

Babylon, Ninevah, nor any of the ruins of the Levant could boast of more perfect sculpture, better architectural designs, and more imperishable ruins, than what are found on *this continent*. *Stephens and Catherwood's* researches in *Central America* abundantly testify of this thing. The stupendous ruins, the elegant sculpture, and the magnificence of the ruins of *Guatamala*, and other cities, corroborate this statement, and show that a great and mighty people--men of great minds, clear intellect, bright genius, and comprehensive designs inhabited this continent. Their ruins speak of their greatness; the Book of Mormon unfolds their history.<sup>16</sup>

### Terminology: "This Country"

In his 1842 letter to John Wentworth, the Prophet Joseph Smith gave an account of Moroni's visit in which the angel informed him about the existence and location of the plates of the Book of Mormon. In this account, the prophet wrote that Moroni informed him that, "The remnant are the Indians that now inhabit *this country*. This book also tells us that the Savior made His appearance upon *this continent* after His Resurrection; that he planted the gospel here in all its fulness, and richness, and power, and blessing; that they had apostles, prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists--the same order, the same priesthood, the same ordinances, gifts, powers, and blessings, as were enjoyed on the eastern continent."<sup>17</sup>

While the word "country" can sometimes refer to a nation such as the United States it could also refer to "any tract of land, or inhabited land; any region, as distinguished from other regions."<sup>18</sup> "This country" can be read in a broad and generic sense, contrasting the land or region of the Americas from the eastern land or region of Europe or the land or region of Asia.<sup>19</sup> That this is Joseph Smith's meaning can be shown from the Prophet's writings and those of his close associates. In an article published in 1841 Parley P. Pratt, who was one of the earliest missionaries to the Lamanites, described the American Indians of North, Central and South America as "Lamanites" inhabiting, "a *country* of more than seven thousand miles long, and two

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<sup>16</sup> Ed., "American Antiquities," *Times & Seasons* 3/18 (15 July, 1842): 860.

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Smith, "Church History," *Times and Seasons* 3 (1 March, 1842): 706-10, in Dean Jesse, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 243.

<sup>18</sup> Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language* (1828).

<sup>19</sup> The Prophet speaks of those native Americans who *now* inhabit this country. The word "now" suggests that they may have previously lived elsewhere, so the statement about "this country" does not necessarily tell us where in the land they may have lived before or during Book of Mormon times.

thousand broad, extending from the frozen and scarcely explored regions of Hudson's Bay on the north, to the extremity of Cape Horn, or the southern end of South America, and from the Atlantic to the Pacific, east and west.<sup>20</sup> In July 1842, while he served as editor of the *Times & Seasons*, the terms “this continent” and “this country” were used to include Central America.

If men, in their researches into the history of *this country*, in noticing the mounds, fortifications, statues, architecture, implements of war, of husbandry, and ornaments of silver, brass, &c.--were to examine the Book of Mormon, their conjectures would be removed, and their opinions altered; uncertainty and doubt would be changed into certainty and facts; and they would find that those things that they are anxiously prying into were matters of history, unfolded in that book. They would find their conjectures were more than realized--that a great and a mighty people had *inhabited this continent*--that the arts sciences and religion, had prevailed to a very great extent, and that there was as great and mighty cities on *this continent* as on *the continent of Asia*. Babylon, Ninevah, nor any of the ruins of the Levant could boast of more perfect sculpture, better architectural designs, and more imperishable ruins, than what are found on *this continent*. *Stephens and Catherwood's* researches in *Central America* abundantly testify of this thing. The stupendous ruins, the elegant sculpture, and the magnificence of the ruins of *Guatamala*, and other cities, corroborate this statement, and show that a great and mighty people--men of great minds, clear intellect, bright genius, and comprehensive designs inhabited *this continent*. Their ruins speak of their greatness; the Book of Mormon unfolds their history.<sup>21</sup>

In a letter written on November 16, 1841, thanking John Bernhisel for sending him a copy of Stephens and Catherwood's work, *Incidents of Travels in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, the Prophet said, “that of all the histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of *this country* it is the most luminous & comprehensive.”<sup>22</sup> Here again, the use of “this country” to include Central America in connection with the Book of Mormon is unmistakable. This was just months before the Prophet wrote his letter to John Wentworth. So when he speaks of “the aboriginal inhabitants of *this country*” and the Indians “that now inhabit *this country*” there can be little doubt that he and others were thinking in terms of all the Americas and not only the United States.

Summarize: Usage shows that the words this land, this continent and this country were used in reference to all the Americas and not a limited location.

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<sup>20</sup> “Present Condition and prospects of the American Indians, or Lamanites,” *Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star* 2/3 (2 July, 1841): 40-42.

<sup>21</sup> Ed., “American Antiquities,” *Times & Seasons* 3/18 (15 July, 1842): 860.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, 16 November, 1841.

## II. Geography by Revelation? The Wentworth Letter

Some claim that Joseph Smith's 1842 letter to John Wentworth shows that the Prophet claimed revelation on Book of Mormon geography. In this letter Joseph Smith tells of the visitation of the angel Moroni who revealed the location of the plates from which the Book of Mormon would be translated.

*"I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country [America] and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people, was [also] made known unto me."*<sup>23</sup>

Joseph states that the angel gave him "a brief sketch" of these matters not a long and detailed one that would give him an intimate knowledge of the intricacies of the Book of Mormon or its geography. In fact, all the things mentioned by the prophet are discussed in more detail in the record itself of which Moroni spoke. The Book of Mormon speaks of their Israelite heritage of pre-Columbian peoples and tells where Lehi and his family came from, their journey from Jerusalem to America and details elements of their growth, progress, civilization, laws and governments under their kings and judges, their fall from righteousness as well as the future destiny of their descendant peoples. Significantly, of all the things that the Prophet said that Moroni revealed to him, the geography of the Book of Mormon narrative was not one of them.

## Geography by Revelation? Lucy Mack Smith

Some claim that in a late recollection, Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith claimed that the Prophet received revelation on Book of Mormon geography. In a recollection first recorded in 1845, , the Prophet's mother described some of the activities of the family between the time Moroni first appeared in 1823 and the time when Joseph obtained the plates.

During our evening conversations, Joseph would occasionally give us some of the most amusing recitals that could be imagined. He would describe the ancient inhabitants of this continent, their dress, mode of traveling, and the animals upon which they rode; their cities, their buildings, with every particular; their mode of warfare; and also their religious worship. This he would do with as much ease, seemingly, as if he had spent his whole life among them.<sup>24</sup>

Mother Smith recalled Joseph discussing the ancient inhabitants of the Americas, how some of them dressed, traveled, their animals, their cities, their buildings, their mode of warfare and their

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<sup>23</sup> Joseph Smith, "Church History," Times and Seasons 3 (1 March, 1842): 706-10, in Dean Jesse, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 243.

<sup>24</sup> \*Lucy Mack Smith reference\*



religious worship. If these recollection are accurate, they suggest that the Lord revealed many things to the Prophet Joseph Smith and that Joseph shared some of these things with his family, but since the Prophet did not share with us what he shared with them on these occasions, we can only guess at what he knew and what he shared. Lucy's recollection provides no evidence that the information revealed. As with the Wentworth letter, there is significantly, no mention of geography in Lucy's description. This would lead one to conclude that of those things revealed to the Prophet, geography was not one of them.

## **Zarahemla**

In March 1841 in a revelation now known as section 125 of the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord counseled the Saints in Iowa to gather at several appointed locations.

What is the will of the Lord concerning the saints in the Territory of Iowa? Verily, thus saith the Lord, I say unto you, if those who call themselves by my name and are essaying to be my saints, if they will do my will and keep my commandments concerning them, let them gather themselves together unto the places which I shall appoint unto them by my servant Joseph, and build up cities unto my name, that they may be prepared for that which is in store for a time to come. Let them build up a city unto my name upon the land opposite the city of Nauvoo, and let the name of Zarahemla be named upon it. And let all those who come from the east, and the west, and the north, and the south, that have desires to dwell therein, take up their inheritance in the same, as well as in the city of Nashville, or in the city of Nauvoo, and in all the stakes which I have appointed, saith the Lord (D&C 125:1-4).

Some claim that this revelation indicates that the Book of Mormon city once stood upon the site of this Iowa settlement. According to two recent writers,

The Lord gave no indication that it was not the location of the ancient Zarahemla. The Lord named this new city Zarahemla for a reason. There is no indication that He named it for any other purpose than to establish an understanding of where the ancient city may have stood.<sup>25</sup>

This claim rests upon the assumption that it was the Lord who first designated the Iowa gathering site as Zarahemla. This, however, is not the case. On July 2, 1839, Joseph Smith and other Church leaders visited the site in question. The entry as published in the *History of the Church* reads:

Spent the forenoon of this day on the Iowa side of the river. Went in company with Elders Sidney Rigdon, Hyrum Smith, and Bishops Whitney and Knight, and others, to visit a purchase lately made by Bishop Knight as a location for a town, and advised that a town

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<sup>25</sup> Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 111.

be built there, *and called Zarahemla.*<sup>26</sup>

The last three words of this entry, “and called Zarahemla” were not written by Joseph Smith, but were recorded in the Manuscript History by Willard Richards, sometime after the Prophet’s death in 1844.<sup>27</sup> Other historical sources show that the Saints already called the settlement Zarahemla before the March 1841 revelation. Brigham Young, who began keeping a regular journal in early 1839 recorded on July 2, 1839, “Brothers Joseph, Hyrum and others came over the river to Montrose, and went out on the prairies and looked out the sight [sic] for a city for the Saints, *which was called Zarahemla.*”<sup>28</sup> Elias Smith, a cousin of the Prophet’s in his journal for June 24, 1839 records, “Moved from Commerce to Lee County, Iowa Territory, and went on the farm bought of F.P. Blevins.”<sup>29</sup> In his journal for August 16, 1840 he recorded the death of the Prophet’s brother Don Carlos Smith and also said that there was a “Conference at *Zarahemla.*” on that day.<sup>30</sup> These early references to the name of the settlement previous to March 1841 indicate that the Saints already referred to that Iowa gathering place as Zarahemla long before the revelation in question. There is no indication in these early sources that this earlier designation was based upon revelation or that the name was even Joseph Smith’s idea. It is more that the Lord in 1841 was merely referencing a location already known among the Saints by that name such as Nashville. The Saints were doing what they would often do, naming places they lived after places mentioned in the Bible and the Book of Mormon. There is no reason to associate the Iowa settlement with ancient Zarahemla.

## **Manti**

Some claim that Joseph Smith taught that the ancient Book of Mormon city of Manti was in Randolph County Missouri. Proponents of this claim reference two documents in support of this view. The first is an entry from the journal of Samuel D. Tyler, an early member of the Church who traveled with the Kirtland Camp to Missouri in 1838.<sup>31</sup> The second is a passage

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<sup>26</sup> History of the Church 3:382. Emphasis added.

<sup>27</sup> Manuscript History of Joseph Smith, 2 July, 1839. See also *History of the Church* 3:382. Emphasis added.; Dean C. Jesse, “The Writing of Joseph Smith’s History,” *BYU Studies* 11/4 (Summer 1971): 439-73; Howard C. Searle, “Willard Richards as Historian,” *BYU Studies* 31/2 (Spring 1991): 41-62.

<sup>28</sup> Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 2 July, 1839. Emphasis added.

<sup>29</sup> Elias Smith Journal, 24 June, 1839.

<sup>30</sup> Elias Smith Journal, 16 August, 1840. Emphasis added.

<sup>31</sup> The Kirtland Camp refers to a group of Kirtland Saints who traveled to Missouri in 1838 and should not be confused with the 1834 Zion’s Camp.

from the Manuscript History of the Church. The Tyler Journal for September 25, 1838 reads as follows:

We passed through Huntsville, Co. Seat of Randolph Co. Pop. 450, and three miles further we bought 32 bu. of corn off one of the brethren who resides in this place. There are several of the brethren round about here and *this is the ancient site of the City of Manti, which is spoken of in the Book of Mormon* and this is appointed one of the Stakes of Zion, and it is in Randolph County, Missouri, three miles west of the county seat.<sup>32</sup>

According to two recent writers,

The prophet Joseph, according to these diary accounts, revealed where the Book of Mormon city of Manti was located (*Prophecies and Promises*, 110).

The Prophet Joseph also declared that the Book of Mormon city of Manti was not far from this area (*Prophecies and Promises*, 109).

Contrary to this claim, there is no historical evidence that Tyler was reporting something he heard Joseph Smith say to the Kirtland Camp. In fact, the Prophet was not even present at the time. He did not travel with the Kirtland Camp from Ohio to Missouri, but was already living in Far West several counties away.<sup>33</sup> Tyler never explains where he heard this information, nor does he attribute the ideas about the city Manti to Joseph Smith or even a revelation on Book of Mormon geography. What was the source of this local hearsay? Was it based upon something Joseph Smith said or does it reflect speculation among the local brethren? How accurately was it reported? The Tyler journal does not provide an answer these questions.

The second source cited as evidence that ancient Manti was in Missouri is the Manuscript History of the Church. The relevant entry for September 25, 1838 reads as follows:

The camp passed through Huntsville in Randolph County which has been appointed as one of the stakes of Zion, and is the ancient site of the City of Manti and pitched tents at Dark Creek, Salt Licks, seventeen miles. It was reported to the camp that one hundred and ten men had volunteered from Randolph a gone to Far West to settle difficulties.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Journal of Samuel D. Tyler, 25 September, 1838, MS 1761, Church Historians Department, Salt Lake City, emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Smith Journal, 25 September, 1838, in Dean C. Jesse, Mark Ashurst-McGee, Richard Jensen, eds., *Joseph Smith Papers: Journals Volume 1: 1832-1839* (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2008), 329.

<sup>34</sup> Manuscript History of Joseph Smith, 25 September, 1838, page 829.

This second source, however, is not a contemporary journal written by the Prophet or by anyone else in the Kirtland Camp in 1838, but was actually written by Willard Richards after the Prophet's death. Comparative evidence suggests that Richards entry was essentially based upon the Tyler journal entry. When this portion of the history was first published in the *Millennial Star* in 1854 the entry read essentially the same as it did in Richards' handwritten manuscript.<sup>35</sup> When, however, Church Historian Andrew Jensen published it in the *Historical Record* in 1888, he incorrectly assumed that the Prophet Joseph Smith was the source of this information and inserted the words "which the Prophet said" immediately before the part of the sentence about Manti, making it read "which the Prophet said was the ancient site of the city of Manti" although this was not in the original manuscript<sup>36</sup>

Fortunately, there was another contemporary source, which sheds light upon the question. Elias Smith, a cousin to Joseph Smith also kept a contemporary journal of the travels and activities of the Kirtland Camp. On this same day, he recorded:

We came through Huntsville the county seat of Randolph where we were told before we arrived there we should be stopped but saw nothing of the kind when we came through the town and heard no threats whatever, but all appeared friendly. 1 ½ miles west of Huntsville we crossed the east branch of Chariton and 1 ½ miles west of the river we found Ira Ames and some other brethren near the place *where the city of Manti is to built* and encamped for the night on Dark creek 6 miles from Huntsville.<sup>37</sup>

Elias Smith did not equate the land near Huntsville Missouri with the *ancient* location of Manti, but indicated that this was the place where a *future* settlement named after the ancient one was "to be built." In light of the above, it would appear that the Missouri Saints in 1838 initially anticipated the establishment of a future settlement and stake of Zion in the region, much as they did later with the Zarahemla settlement in Iowa. Neither the Samuel Tyler nor Elias Smith journals, however, attribute these plans to any prophetic revelation on ancient Book of Mormon geography.

When Church Historian B. H. Roberts prepared the *History of the Church* for publication he reviewed original sources upon which the "Manuscript History" was based and revised parts of the narrative accordingly. Although apparently, unavailable to earlier historians who wrote the Manuscript History, Roberts utilized the Elias Smith account instead of the portion of the

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<sup>35</sup> "History of Joseph Smith," *Millennial Star* 16/19 (13 May, 1854): 296. This is the source cited by Joseph Fielding Smith.

<sup>36</sup> "Kirtland Camp," *The Historical Record* 7/7 (July 1888): 601.

<sup>37</sup> Elias Smith, "Journal of the camp of the Seventies during their journey from Kirtland to Far West" 25 September, 1838, MS 4952, folder 2, LDS Church Historical Department, Salt Lake City. Emphasis added.

Manuscript History which had been based upon the Tyler journal. The entry for September 25, 1838 as first published in 1905 and all subsequent editions of the *History of the Church* says that the village of Huntsville, Missouri was “near the place where the city of Manti *is to be built*.”<sup>38</sup> Any attribution to the Prophet Joseph Smith as well as Huntsville being the location of the ancient site was removed. Church leaders apparently felt that the words “the place where the city of Manti is to be built” more accurately reflected what was said, rather than “the ancient site of the city of Manti.”<sup>39</sup> In any case, since none of these sources equate the ancient site of Manti with the Prophet Joseph Smith or to any revelation of Book of Mormon geography, there is no authoritative link between Huntsville Missouri with any ancient location mentioned in the Book of Mormon.

## Zelph

In the published *History of the Church*, there is a tantalizing account of an episode which took place during the Zion’s Camp journey in 1834. This account tells of the discovery of a skeleton near the top of a mound near the bank of the Illinois River. The prophet Joseph Smith, according to this account had a vision in which he gained information about the identity of the individual, whose bones they had encountered. This passage reads as follows:

The visions of the past being opened to my understanding by the Spirit of the Almighty, I discovered that the person whose skeleton was before us was a white Lamanite, a large, thick-set man, and a man of God. His name was Zelph. He was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus, who was known from the hill Cumorah *or* eastern sea to the Rocky mountains. The curse was taken from Zelph, or at least in part—one of his thigh bones was broken by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle, years before his death. He was killed in battle by the arrow found among his ribs, during the last great struggle with the Lamanites and Nephites.<sup>40</sup>

Some claim that during the Zelph episode the Lord revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith important facts that pertain to the geographical setting of the Book of Mormon. For example

The Lord through Joseph, could not have been any clearer that this very mound was within the boundaries of Book of Mormon lands . . . . The rejection of Joseph Smith’s statements about Zelph is required by Mesoamerican proponents to maintain a belief in their geographical inclinations. . . . They must discard the statements of Joseph Smith for

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<sup>38</sup> History of the Church 3:144.

<sup>39</sup> Lamar C. Berrett, ed., *Sacred Places: A Comprehensive Guide to Early LDS Sites: Missouri* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2004), 521.

<sup>40</sup> *History of the Church* Second Revised Edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 2:79-80.

the acceptance of their proposed theories.<sup>41</sup>

The evidence upon which these conclusions are based is highly problematic. The wording in the current edition of the *History of the Church* cited above, varies significantly from that of the first edition published in 1904 which originally read as follows:

The visions of the past being opened to my understanding by the Spirit of the Almighty, I discovered that the person whose skeleton we had seen was a white Lamanite, a large thick-set man, and a man of God. His name was Zelph. He was a warrior and chieftain under the great prophet Onandagus, who was known from the eastern sea to the rocky mountains. The curse was taken from Zelph, or, at least, in part—one of his thigh bones was broken by a stone flung from a sling, while in battle, years before his death. He was killed in battle by the arrow found among his ribs, during a great struggle with the Lamanites.<sup>42</sup>

In the 1950s Fletcher Hammond noted the variation between the 1904 edition and the second edition in published in 1948. In an attempt to determine the original reading, Hammond sought and obtained permission to examine the original manuscript history of the Church.

Preston Nibley, assistant Church historian, and I on August 29, 1957, carefully examined a microfilm copy of the original pen-and-ink entry of the Zelph incident in the Prophet's journal, and Brother Nibley has authorized me to say that the 1904 edition of the Documentary History of the Church, Vol. II at pages 79 and 80 correctly reports the Zelph incident; and that part of the 1934 [1948] edition of the same history which differs from it is erroneous. That is to say that the Prophet Joseph did not say: 'Onandagus who was known from the *hill Cumorah, or, eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains*;' but he did say: 'Onandagus, who was known from *the eastern sea to the Rocky Mountains*'; he did not say Zelph was killed 'during the last great struggle of the Lamanites and the Nephites'; but he did say Zelph was killed in battle . . . during a great struggle with the Lamanites.'"<sup>43</sup>

How did the additional wording get into the published *History of the Church*? In order to answer this question it helps to know something about the primary sources upon which Manuscript History was based.

The primary study of the Zelph episode was published in *Brigham Young University*

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<sup>41</sup> Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, 107.

<sup>42</sup> History of the Church (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1904), 79-80.

<sup>43</sup> Hammond, 102-3. This was actually the Manuscript History not the Prophet's journal.

*Studies* by Latter-day Saint historian Ken Godfrey in 1989.<sup>44</sup> Godfrey collected and reprinted each of the six primary sources on Zelph as well as Joseph Smith's 1834 letter to Emma mentioning the "plains of the Nephites." He then analyzed each account of the episode as well as the background behind the entry in the published History of the Church. Godfrey stated

These records are generally consistent with one another, but leave a number of details in doubt. Who was Zelph? Was he a Nephite or a Lamanite? When did he die? What army was he in? . . . . The answers to these questions cannot be given with certainty from the complex historical sources that resulted from this event. While this means that Book of Mormon scholars must remain tentative in drawing implications from this notable incident, *it does not diminish the fact that Joseph was moved by the spirit of revelation to speak about Zelph and his noble past in connection with Book of Mormon peoples or their descendants.*<sup>45</sup>

Godfrey showed that the Prophet Joseph himself did not record the incident himself and so we are dependent upon the accounts of six other members of Zion's Camp who were present during or near the time of the event. When these accounts are analyzed it appears that the Prophet received revelation about an individual named Zelph, but it is unclear what, if any, relationship Zelph and his activities may have had to the events and the geography of the Book of Mormon narrative.

In 1834 Wilford Woodruff was a recent convert who traveled with the Camp. Woodruff kept an extremely valuable journal beginning in 1834 and he recorded information about Zelph. Woodruff apparently did not write down his account of the event until several weeks later, perhaps after the Camp's arrival in Missouri. He recorded

While on our travels we visited many of the mounds which were flung up by the ancient inhabitants of this continent probably by the Nephites & Lamanites. We visited one of those Mounds and several of the brethren dug into it and took from it the bones of a man.... Brother Joseph had a vision respecting the person he said was a white Lamanite, the curse was taken from him or at least in part, he was killed in battle with an arrow. The arrow was found among his ribs. One of his thigh bones was broken. This was done by a stone flung from a sling in battle years before his death. His name was Zelph. Some of his bones were brought into the camp and the thigh bone which was broken was put into my waggon and I carried it to Missouri. Zelph was a large thick-set man and a man of God. He was a warrior under the great prophet /Onandagus/ that was known from the hill Camorah /or east sea/ to the Rocky mountains. The above knowledge Joseph received in a

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<sup>44</sup> Kenneth W. Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," *BYU Studies* 29/2 (1989): 31-56; See also Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What is the Significance of Zelph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 70-79.

<sup>45</sup> Godfrey, "The Zelph Story," 33. Emphasis added.

vision.<sup>46</sup>

In Woodruff's journal entry the word "Onandagus" is written above the line between the word "prophet" and the word "that." The words "or east sea" are also written above the line between the word "Cumorah" and the words "to the Rocky Mountains." Woodruff's account is one of six primary ones. When examined against the other five accounts about Zeph raises questions in relation to the issue what may have been revealed at the time about Book of Mormon geography. William Hamblin observes:

Woodruff's statement about Joseph mentioning Cumorah in the Zeph incident is unique among the six near-contemporary accounts, indicating that Joseph himself probably did not use the term, which was, rather, an interpolation of Woodruff. The question thus becomes, did Joseph himself originally use the word Cumorah as recorded by Woodruff's "known from the hill Camorah [sic] to the Rocky Mountains," or did he say "known from the Atlantic to the Rocky Mountains," as recorded by McBride? None of the other accounts mentions either the Hill Cumorah or the Atlantic Ocean. Woodruff himself shows ambiguity on this point by inserting the phrase "or east sea" in his text. If Joseph had used the word Cumorah, we would expect it to appear in more of the early accounts of the incident.<sup>47</sup>

The word "Cumorah" is not found in any of the other early accounts of the Zeph Story, which suggests that the word may have been Woodruff's interpretation of what Joseph said rather than Joseph's actual word. When we compare the entry from the Woodruff journal with the entry in the Manuscript History of the Church we can see that the journal was a very important source for Willard Richards when he wrote down the Zeph Story. Interestingly, this comparison also shows that the portions that are left out are those where there appears to have been uncertainty on the part of Woodruff, including those references which could be specifically tied to anything in the Book of Mormon text. This lends further support for the view that the Prophet's revelation about Zeph may not have included information about Book of Mormon geography. Some Church leaders have advised caution about drawing unwarranted conclusions from the Zeph account. John A. Widtsoe was familiar with the Zeph story, but cautioned, "This is not of much value in Book of Mormon studies, since Zeph probably dated from a later time when Nephites and Lamanites had been somewhat dispersed and had wandered over the country."<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, May 1834.

<sup>47</sup> Hamblin, "An Apologist for the Critics," 477-78.

<sup>48</sup> John A. Widtsoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" *Improvement Era* 53/7 (July 1950): 547.



## Plains of the Nephites

In June 1834, the Prophet dictated a letter to Emma Smith in which he mentioned some of his experiences of his journey from Ohio to Missouri with Zion's Camp. He spoke of, "wandering over the plains of the Nephites, recounting occasionally the history of the Book of Mormon, roving over the mounds of that once beloved people of the Lord, picking up their skulls & their bones, as proof of its divine authenticity (Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 4 June, 1834, in Jesse, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 345-46). I think it likely that the Joseph Smith alluded to the Zelph episode in this letter, although he did not mention the warrior by name, his vision or the details of what he may have learned through revelation. It is clear that he associated the mounds and bones which they encountered with the remains of Nephites. It is unclear, however, what if any geographical information, this might convey about Mormon's narrative, since "plains of the Nephites" is not a geographical designation in the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon indicates that many Nephites and Lamanites migrated from the land with which the Book of Mormon is concerned to other regions (Alma 63:4-9; Helaman 3:3-16). Even those who migrated northward were eventually "hunted, and driven forth" and "scattered upon the face of the earth" (Helaman 3:16). We are left to wonder if Zelph died in battle defending Mormon's people in the late fourth century A.D. or if he perished defending a group of people who had previously migrated to parts of North America during or after Book of Mormon times? All of the Americas in North, Central and South America were a part of the land of promise to Lehi's seed, consequently, Joseph Smith's reference to the mounds, plains or bones of the Nephites do not explain to us where in the Americas those events described by Mormon took place.

### ***III. Incidents of Travel in Central America and the Book of Mormon***

The year 1841 saw the publication of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* by John Lloyd Stephens with illustrations by Frederick Catherwood.<sup>49</sup> This work, not only recounted the authors' travels to the region, but described for the first time, many of the ruins found in what is now known as Mesoamerica. It was an instant success and was widely praised in the national press. A survey of literature written on the Book of Mormon during the Nauvoo period suggests that Latter-day Saints were also interested in these Central American discoveries and were quick to compare these discoveries with the claims of the Book of Mormon. Recently, some advocates of a limited North American geography for the Book of Mormon have claimed that these associations between ancient Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon were inconsistent with the teachings and revelations of Joseph Smith and that Joseph Smith was unfamiliar with or was not responsible for these views. For example, two recent advocates of the so-called "Heartland" model state:

The Prophet was clear and concise in his statements about Book of Mormon geography, yet doubtless, the allure and enticement of the majestic Mesoamerican ruins, and a

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<sup>49</sup> John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1841).

burning desire for tangible proof seems to have infused the hearts and minds of at least a few of the early Church leaders including members of the Twelve who were very close to the Prophet Joseph.<sup>50</sup>

This statement implies that the early Church leaders, including future Presidents of the Church such as John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, were led astray by the desire for physical proof to discard previous inspired teachings of Joseph Smith. Is such a position consistent with the historical evidence?

Latter-day Saint readers in Nauvoo, first became aware of Stephens and Catherwood's discoveries in an article published in the June 15, 1841 issue of the *Times and Seasons* under the editorship of the Prophet's brother Don Carlos Smith and Robert B. Thompson. These two noted the significance of the explorers' discoveries for Latter-day Saints in an article entitled, "American Antiquities—More Proofs of the Book of Mormon."<sup>51</sup> Several months later, John Bernhisel, a recent convert serving as Bishop over the Saints in New York City, purchased a copy of the two volume work and on September 8, wrote to Joseph Smith informing him that he was sending him a copy of the set "as a token of my regard for you as a Prophet of the Lord."<sup>52</sup> Bernhisel asked Wilford Woodruff, who was returning home from his apostolic mission in Great Britain, to carry the set back to the Prophet in Nauvoo, which he did.<sup>53</sup>

On the way home Woodruff spent part of his time reading the work and was enthusiastic about its contents. On September 13 he recorded in his journal:

I spent the day in reading the 1<sup>st</sup> vol of INCIDENTS OF TRAVELS IN Central America Chiapas AND Yucatan BY JOHN L STEPHEN'S . . . . I felt truly interested in this work for it brought to light a flood of testimony in proof of the book of mormon in the discovery & survey of the city Copan in Central America A correct drawing of the monuments, pyramids, portraits, & Hieroglyphics as executed by Mr. Catherwood is now presented before the publick & is truly a wonder to the world. Their whole travels were

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<sup>50</sup> (Porter and Meldrum, *Prophecies and Promises*, December 2009, 107.

<sup>51</sup> "American Antiquities—More Proofs of the Book of Mormon," *Times and Seasons* 2/16 (15 June, 1841): 440-42.

<sup>52</sup> John Bernhisel to Joseph Smith, 8 September, 1841, MS, 1 page, LDS Church Archives, cited in Jesse, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, revised edition (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002, 533.

<sup>53</sup> "I recieved \$40 dollars of Dr John M. Bernhisel for President Joseph Smith also Stephens travels in central America in 2 volums also one letter" Wilford Woodruff Journal, 9 September 1841.

truly interesting.<sup>54</sup>

On September 16 he recorded, “I perused the 2d Vol of Stephens travels In Central America Chiapas of Yucatan & the ruins of Palenque & Copan. It is truly one of the most interesting histories I have read.”<sup>55</sup> Happy to be home, Woodruff arrived in Nauvoo on October 6.<sup>56</sup>

On November 16, 1842 Joseph Smith dictated a letter to John Bernhisel thanking him for the gift.

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 the histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprehensive.<sup>57</sup>

This letter shows unequivocally that Joseph Smith shared the excitement about these discoveries. generated among his associates. It also, in effect, signaled his approval of such interests in connection with the Book of Mormon, an interest that can be seen in subsequent Latter-day Saint literature. Of particular interest to us today are five articles which appeared in the *Times & Seasons* in 1842 when Joseph Smith served as editor. These articles, two signed “editor” and three unsigned editorials promoted the work of Stephens and Catherwood among Latter-day Saints. Time today does not permit a detailed examination of these articles. Suffice to say that they highlight Latter-day Saint interest in the travelers’ discoveries and the feeling that they were consistent with and supportive of the claims of the Book of Mormon. At the same time, the literature shows that a variety of interpretations of this data were entertained by Latter-day Saint writers and their leaders. Here I will focus on the question of Joseph Smith’s involvement and authorship of five *Times & Seasons* articles which were published under his tenure as editor. After reviewing Joseph Smith’s role as editor of the Times and Seasons, I will discuss what wordprint analysis may suggest about the question.

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<sup>54</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 13 September, 1841.

<sup>55</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 16 September, 1841.

<sup>56</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 6 October, 1841.

<sup>57</sup> Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, 16 November, 1841, in Jesse, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 533. The letter was in the hand of John Taylor.

## Joseph Smith's Concern over the *Times and Seasons* and His Role as Editor

Between 1839 and 1841 the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles fulfilled an important mission to Great Britain, resulting in the conversion of several thousand British Saints.<sup>58</sup> This mission proved to be a tremendous blessing to the Church as well as the Quorum itself, but it was sometimes difficult for the Prophet to be separated from some of his closest and most diligent associates. This is reflected in some of the challenges associated with Church newspaper the *Times & Seasons*. In the Spring of 1839, Elias Smith, Hiram Clark and others traveled to Far West Missouri where they dug up and retrieved the printing press the type which had been used to print the short-lived *Elder's Journal* in the summer of 1838.<sup>59</sup> These were brought back to Nauvoo and the first issue of the *Times & Seasons* was printed in November 1839 under the editorship of Ebenezer Robinson and the Prophet's younger brother Don Carlos Smith.<sup>60</sup> On December 1, 1840, this partnership was dissolved and Don Carlos became the sole editor of the paper. Some time afterward the Prophet's scribe and friend Robert B. Thompson joined Don Carlos as editor. When the Prophet's brother died in August 1841, Ebenezer Robinson again joined Thompson. When Thompson died just twenty days later, Robinson again became the editor and was joined by Gustavus Hills. Both would serve as editors until early 1842.

In the Fall of 1841 the Prophet began to express 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 became increasingly anxious to place someone else in charge of the paper whom he could trust. This concern was also shared by the Twelve. On November 20, Brigham Young recorded, "I met with six others of the Twelve in council, at my house, on the subject of the *Times and Seasons*, the Quorum not being satisfied with the manner Gustavus Hill had conducted the editorial department."<sup>61</sup> On November 30

It was voted that Ebenezer Robinson be solicited to give up the department of printing the *Times and Seasons* to Elder Willard Richards.

Voted, that if Brother Robinson does not comply with this solicitation, Elder Richards be

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<sup>58</sup> For a superb treatment of the subject see James B. Allen, Ronald K. Esplin and David Whittaker, *Men With A Mission: The Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the British Isles, 1837-1841* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992).

<sup>59</sup> *History of the Church*, 4:398; Kyle R. Walker, "'As Fire Shut Up in My Bones': Ebenezer Robinson, Don Carlos Smith, and the 1840 Edition of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of Mormon History* 36/1 9 (Winter 2010): 6-9.

<sup>60</sup> *Times and Seasons* 1/1 (November 1839): 1-2, 16.

<sup>61</sup> Journal of Brigham Young, 20 November, 1841, in Elden J. Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1801-1844* (1968), 112; Compare *History of the Church* 4:454.

instructed to procure a press and type, and publish a paper for the Church.

Moved by Elder Young, and seconded by Elder Woodruff, that Lyman Wight and John Taylor present these resolutions to Brother Robinson.<sup>62</sup>

On January 17, 1842, Brigham Young wrote, “I met in council with the Twelve at Joseph’s office. We consulted in relation to the printing and publishing, the council being unanimously opposed to E. Robinson publishing the Book of Mormon and other standard works of the Church, without being counseled so to do by the First Presidency.”<sup>63</sup> On January 28 the Prophet received a revelation which said,

Verily thus saith the Lord unto you my servant Joseph, go and say unto the Twelve, that it is my will to have them take in hand the editorial department of the *Times and Seasons*, according to that manifestation which shall be given unto them by the power of my Holy Spirit in the midst of their counsel, saith the Lord. Amen.<sup>64</sup>

On this same day Brigham Young wrote, “The Lord having revealed, through Joseph, that the Twelve should take in hand the editorial department of the *Times and Seasons*, I bought the printing establishment, for and in behalf of the Church, from Ebenezer Robinson, at a very exorbitant price. The reason I paid such a price was, because the Prophet directed the Twelve to pay him whatever he asked. One item of his bill was \$800, for the privilege of publishing the *Times and Seasons*, or good will of the office.”<sup>65</sup> On February 3, Wilford Woodruff recorded, “After consulting upon the subject *the quorum appointed Elders J. Taylor & W Woodruff of the Twelve to Edit the Times & Seasons & take charge of the whole esestablishment under the direction of Joseph the Seer*. Accordingly I left my station at the Nauvoo provision store & commenced this day to labour for the church in the printing esestablishment. Elder Taylor & myself spent the afternoon in taking an invoice of the printing esestablishment & met in council in the evening at Joseph’s store.”<sup>66</sup>

On February 19, Woodruff wrote, “Joseph the Seer is now Editor of that paper & Elder Taylor assists him in writing while it has fallen to my lot to take charge of the Business part of

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<sup>62</sup> *History of the Church*, 4:463.

<sup>63</sup> Journal of Brigham Young, 17 January, 1842, in Watson, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1801-1844*, 113; Compare *History of the Church* 4:494-95.

<sup>64</sup> *History of the Church* 4:503.

<sup>65</sup> Journal of Brigham Young, 28 January, 1842, in Watson, *Manuscript History of Brigham Young 1801-1844*, 114.

<sup>66</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal 3 February, 1842. The Price was 6,600 dollars Wilford Woodruff Journal, 4 February, 1842. Emphasis added.

the establishment.”<sup>67</sup> Woodruff’s record indicates that the Prophet took overall responsibility for the paper itself and that he was assisted in writing by Taylor, although he does not specify what that assistance entailed. In the March 1, 1842 issue, the Prophet published a formal announcement that he was taking over as editor of the Church paper. “This paper commences my editorial career, *I alone stand for it, and shall do for all papers having my signature henceforward*. I am not responsible for the publication, or arrangement of the former paper; the matter did not come under my supervision. JOSEPH SMITH.”<sup>68</sup> In context, it seems clear that this statement is disavowing Joseph's sanction for some of the recent previous editions of the T&S, the "former paper." (As we have seen, neither Joseph or the Twelve were happy with how Hills and Robinson had been handling things.) Joseph also describes himself as willing to endorse "all papers having my signature henceforward." This seems more than an endorsement of individual articles, but rather newspaper(s) for which he is listed as the editor. The term "papers" does not mean "documents" in this context, it means newspapers published with Joseph as editor. This issue of the paper also bore the note, "The Times and Seasons IS EDITED BY Joseph Smith."<sup>69</sup> The Prophet continued to serve as editor until mid-November, 1842.

What are we to make of Joseph’s role as Editor? Evidence suggests that this was more than just an empty title. In addition to his known contributions, sources indicate that he read page proofs and sometimes collected and supplied content material to be used for the paper, including poetry and other newspapers. For most of his tenure he was in or near Nauvoo and frequently visited and worked at the printing office and counseled with fellow apostles including John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff. The Prophet was still in hiding from his enemies during September 1842, but actually stayed in and about Nauvoo during this time where he could continue to work quietly and address Church business as opportunity allowed. Sometimes he was able to stay at home, where he even managed to pose for a portrait for several days. Significantly, both Woodruff and Taylor were seriously ill during this time. Wilford Woodruff records on September 19, “I commenced work this day 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 September 19. On September 21 the Prophet also recorded that he 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 on the 23<sup>rd</sup>. We do not know how long Taylor had been sick, but the fact that the two had been seriously ill suggests that the Prophet may have had to bear additional editorial burdens at that time. In any case, the fact that he met with Taylor several times while he was still in hiding suggests that Joseph was still concerned and involved in editorial matters even when in hiding. Regardless of who actually wrote *Times & Seasons* articles associating the Book of Mormon with Central America, Joseph Smith could not have been

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<sup>67</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 19 February, 1842.

<sup>68</sup> *Times & Seasons*, 15 March, 1842.: 710. Emphasis added.

<sup>69</sup> *Times & Seasons*, 15 March, 1842.: 718.

unaware of what was being written. To state this another way, even if these articles were written by John Taylor or Wilford Woodruff, clearly Joseph knew what was being written.

During Joseph Smith's tenure as editor, between March and November 1842 the *Times and Seasons* published numerous articles of doctrinal and historical significance to the Church. This included the publication of the Prophet's translations of the Book of Abraham, the Wentworth letter, early installments of the History of Joseph Smith and two important letters from the Prophet to the Church giving instructions relating to baptism for the dead. When we examine the content of the Times and Seasons during this period we find that the prophet rarely if ever signs his name "Joseph Smith" unless he is reproducing a letter or a document written for a venue besides his own paper. Excluding items written and attributed to other contributors to the paper, there were editorial items. These were of two kinds: Items signed "Ed" or editor and unsigned editorial articles and commentary. Material signed editor included articles on doctrinal subjects such as baptism, baptism for the dead, the Holy Ghost, the manner of detecting the influence of evil and false spirits and manifestations in order to avoid deception, revealed knowledge and the government of God. In addition to such doctrinal content, as noted already, there were also several article relating to the Book of Mormon. Unsigned editorial material included articles and commentary on the subject of persecution, the city of Nauvoo, the temple, apostasy and commentary on local events in addition to the three above mentioned editorials on Central American ruins. According to Woodruff, the Prophet, "wished us to take the responsibility of the printing Office upon ourselves & liberate him from it."<sup>70</sup> John Taylor formally took over as editor in the November 15, 1842 issue. In that issue the Prophet wrote:

I beg leave to inform the subscribers of the Times and Seasons that it is impossible for me to fulfill the arduous duties of the editorial department any longer. The multiplicity of other business that daily devolves upon me renders it impossible for me to do justice to a paper so widely circulated as the Times and Seasons. I have appointed Elder John Taylor, who is less encumbered and fully competent to assume the responsibilities of that office, and I doubt not that he will give satisfaction to the patrons of the paper. As this number commences a new volume, it also commences his editorial career.

JOSEPH SMITH.

John Taylor wrote immediately thereafter:

The patrons of the Times and Seasons will unquestionably be painfully disappointed on reading the above announcement.

We know of no one so competent as President Joseph Smith to fill the editorial chair, of which the papers that have been issued since he has been editor are sufficient evidence.

We do not profess to be able to tread in the steps, nor to meet the expectation of the subscribers of this paper so fully as our able, learned and talented prophet, who is now retiring from the field; but as he has promised to us the privilege of referring to his

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<sup>70</sup> Wilford Woodruff Journal, 7-12 November, 1842.

writings, books, &c., together with his valuable counsel, when needed, and also to contribute to its columns with his pen when at leisure, we are in hopes that with his assistance, and other resources that we have at our command, that the Times and Seasons will continue to be a valuable periodical, and interesting to its numerous readers.

JOHN TAYLOR.<sup>71</sup>

To summarize the historical data:

1) Joseph Smith was well aware of the discoveries in Central America by Stephens and Catherwood

2) *He was, as were his close associates, very interested in the Central American discoveries and felt that they were important and should be known and they in his view corresponded with and supported the claims of the Book of Mormon*

3) *Joseph Smith was the editor of the Times & Seasons from about February 15 to October 15, 1842.*

4) *Between March and October 1842, the only men said to be working in the printing office are Joseph Smith, John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff.*

5) *Five articles on the Book of Mormon were published while Joseph Smith was editor endorsing the work of Stephens and Catherwood to the Saints.*

6) *While acting as editor Joseph Smith received assistance in writing from John Taylor.*

#### **IV. Wordprint Analysis and the Question of Authorship**

I have recently had the privilege to work with Professor Paul Fields, a statistician and several of his associates on several projects of interest relating to the Book of Mormon, the Spalding/Rigdon Theory and related issues, some of which will see publication in the near future. These projects relate to the question of authorship attribution for a number of texts of interest to Latter-day Saint and historians. *Authorship attribution* attempts to identify the author of a text based on the style of the writing used in the text. Using quantitative measures to describe an author's writing style is known formally as *stylometry*, but is sometimes more commonly referred to as *wordprint analysis*, alluding to fingerprint analysis to identify an unknown person based on fingerprint patterns left at the 'scene of the crime.' The basic assertion in these studies is that an author has a unique style of writing and that by determining the characteristics of an author's style, his or her written work could be identified if his or her stylistic 'fingerprint' is displayed in a document. One area of our interest has to do with the authorship of the 1842 articles on the

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<sup>71</sup> *Times & Seasons*, 15 November, 1842, 8.



Book of Mormon. It has been my assumption, aware of the many pressures that Joseph Smith was under during 1842, that the unsigned articles published on September 15 and October 1, 1842 were written by John Taylor.<sup>72</sup> When I discussed the issue with Professor Fields, he was enthusiastic about applying these tools to this question of authorship attribution. We are preparing a detailed treatment on the question which will be published by the Maxwell Institute. Today we can report some of these findings which may be of interest.

One mathematical tool used in a stylometric investigation is *discriminant analysis*. This technique finds a linear combination of features that will ‘discriminate’ among items in known classes as in categorizes plant or animals into species based on distinguishing features. The discriminant function provides a formula that will quantifiably characterize items in known groups so that a new item of unknown group membership can be properly classified into the same groups based on its features.

In authorship attribution, non-contextual words are the features used to describe writing style. Non-contextual words do not convey the author’s message, but they are the function words an author uses to construct his or her message. Examples of non-contextual words are: and, but, however, on, the, upon, etc. Interestingly, the frequency with which an author uses such words distinctively characterizes his or her writing style and can reveal the author’s identify in comparison to other authors.

### *Methods*

In order to investigate the probable authorship of the three small unsigned editorials in the *Times & Seasons* that referred to “Zarahemla”, we composited them into one 1000-word block so that there was sufficient data to measure the word frequencies.

Next we took texts from Joseph Smith’s signed editorials, the editorials signed “Editor(s)” and the unsigned editorials appearing in the *Times and Seasons* during the time period April through October 1842. These were segmented into 36 1000-words blocks to correspond in size with the “Zarahemla” text.

We also took writing samples from John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff who were the only two other possible contributors to the editorials. We selected texts that were as close to the editorial genre as were available and encompassed the 1842 time frame. For example, we did not use texts from Wilford Woodruff diaries as his style of writing in his personal records differed from more public exposition. We compiled 30 1000-word blocks for Taylor and 24 1000-word blocks for Woodruff. Thus we had a total of 90 texts we could use to build the discriminant function to test the probable authorship of the “Zarahemla” text. Next we identified 70 non-contextual words that best distinguished the writing styles of Smith, Taylor and Woodruff. Using these words as

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<sup>72</sup> Matthew Roper, “Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations,” *FARMS Review* 16/2 (2004): 245-48.

the distinctive literary features for the candidate authors and based on the 90 writing sample blocks, we developed the discriminant function that would classify each writing sample into a group corresponding with the correct author 100% of the time. Although this is a 70-dimensional problem, we can project the relative relationships between the five groups -- Smith, Taylor, Woodruff, Editor and Unsigned – onto a two-dimensional plot.

### *Results*

We can see in the plot that the writing styles of Smith, Taylor and Woodruff are clearly distinguishable. However, Smith, Editor and Unsigned are not distinctively different. This is evidence that the editorials signed “Editor” and the unsigned editorials likely were written by Joseph Smith.

Also shown on the plot is the composited “Zarahemla” editorial. It is clearly closest to the Smith-Editor-Unsigned grouping, providing evidence that Joseph Smith is the most likely author.

*Cluster analysis* is another tool for data exploration that is useful in authorship attribution. A cluster analysis groups items into pairs that are the closest to each other based on the literary features, but without using the information about known group membership. This provided additional evidence that the “Zarahemla” editorial fits best with the “Editor” and “Unsigned” groups. In fact, we could see some evidence that the work in the editorial office in 1842 could have been highly collaborative since the writing samples of the three authors were spread throughout the clusters. Further, we could see that John Taylor might have worked closely with Joseph in writing some of the editorials as his style seemed to be partially manifested in some of the “Editor” and “Unsigned” texts. In addition, some of the pairings indicated some evidence that Wilford Woodruff influenced some of Joseph’s writing as well.

### *Summarize Wordprint data*

## **Conclusion**

In 1843 Joseph Smith was interviewed by a reporter from the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. He acknowledged in that interview that he was indeed a prophet and that the Lord did reveal himself to him, but also explained that he did not always get revelation when he asked for it. “Speaking of revelations, he stated that when he was in a `quandary,’ he asked the Lord for a revelation, and when he could not get it, he `followed the dictates of his own judgment, which were as good a as revelation to him; but he never gave anything to his people as revelation, unless it was revelation.”<sup>73</sup> 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 where Joseph Smith, as time allowed him to give it

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<sup>73</sup> “The Prairies, Nauvoo, Joe Smith, the Temple, the Mormons, etc.,” *Pittsburgh Weekly Gazette*, 15 September, 1843.

attention, followed the dictates of his own judgement” and expressed his own thinking. When Joseph Smith used terms such as “this land,” “this continent,” or “this country” he seems to have adopted the wording of fellow Latter-day Saints who thought of the Book of Mormon in broad terms inclusive of all the Americas. The claim that these terms were intended to exclude any portion of the Americas or its peoples from the promises and prophecies in that book is unfounded. The evidence does suggest that Joseph shared the interest of his fellow Latter-Day Saints in any discoveries which might shed light on the authenticity and historicity of the Book of Mormon, wherever they came from, including those from Central America, but he never seems to have given any indication that these interests were based upon more than a certain knowledge that the Book of Mormon was true and that one day the Lord would make all things clear. There is likewise no indication that he ever sought to set forth a detailed geographical model for the Saints. While serving as editor, between March and October 1842, he oversaw the publication of five articles on these discoveries. Authorship attribution analysis through Wordprints lend no support for the claim that these articles were ghostwritten by others. This analysis together with historical evidence suggest that Joseph Smith was editor in name only. They support the view that he was very much involved in the oversight, the writing, and preparation of these articles on the Book of Mormon and that John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff may have provided input as well.