

Objective Evidences for the Book of Mormon

San Diego Single Adult
Fireside Chat

Sunday, 15 May 2005
Vincent Broman



Introduction – We discuss:

- ♦ The need for objective evidence in evaluating the Book of Mormon
- ♦ Outline of an argument for the Book's genuineness
- ♦ Highlights of evidence now available
- ♦ Some straw men used as counter-arguments



Outline

- Why this subject
- Properties of the Book of Mormon text itself
- The golden plates as a real, ancient artifact
- The Book of Mormon's claims about Arabia
- Claims about Meso-America



What does objective mean?

- ♦ “Just the facts, Ma'am.” -- Joe Friday
- ♦ “Objective” means publicly observable and verifiable, not based on personal feelings and attitudes.
- ♦ “Everyone is entitled to their own opinion, but not their own facts.” -- Senator Moynihan
- ♦ We can agree on objective facts, even if we disagree on what they mean to us.



What is Evidence?

- ♦ Evidence is information that helps us decide important issues.
- ♦ What issues or questions might we be concerned about?
 - ♦ Is the Book of Mormon a revelation from God to Man?
 - ♦ Will living by this book lead me toward eternal life?
 - ♦ Will the prophecies and warnings in this book be fulfilled?
- ♦ Only -- these are very hard questions to deal with objectively at the start.



More Tractable Questions about the Book of Mormon

- ♦ Did Smith have gold plates?
- ♦ Was the Book of Mormon written by ancient Americans or by 1820's New Englanders?
 - ♦ How many parallels make the book credible as an ancient artifact?
 - ♦ Are testable claims made in the book possibly or probably true?
 - ♦ How much did the book's authors know that Smith could not know?
 - ♦ Does the book seem to be composed in English by one author?
 - ♦ Who was capable of writing it?



If spiritual conviction is the goal, why bother with objective evidence?

- ♦ Elder Maxwell quoted Austin Farrar's appreciation of C. S. Lewis:
 - ♦ Though argument does not create conviction, lack of it destroys belief. What seems to be proved may not be embraced; but what no one shows the ability to defend is quickly abandoned. Rational argument does not create belief, but it maintains a climate in which belief may flourish.
- ♦ Studying things out in our minds is an important preparation for effective prayer. Work, then Pray.



What seems ancient?

- ♦ Decide whether the following verse could have been translated from Sumerian clay tablets.
 - There was once a young lady named Bright,
 - Who could travel much faster than light.
 - She went out one day,
 - In a relative way,
 - And returned on the previous night!
- ♦ Does it have ancient ideas? language? verse form? names?



Compare to a Qasida or Sajc in Arabic

- ♦ A short couplet of two matched, parallel verses,
- ♦ inspired by running water,
- ♦ addressed to one or two traveling companions, extemporaneously,
- ♦ praising the scene's excellence,
- ♦ urging the hearers to be like the objects admired.



Lehi in 1 Nephi 2:9-10

- ♦ And when my father saw that the waters of the river emptied into the fountain of the Red Sea, he spake unto Laman, saying:
 - ♦ O that thou mightest be like unto this river, continually running into the fountain of all righteousness!
- ♦ And he also spake unto Lemuel:
 - ♦ O that thou mightest be like unto this valley, firm and steadfast, and immovable in keeping the commandments of the Lord!



Outline of a sustained argument for the Book

- ♦ Witnesses to the Gold Plates
- ♦ Precedents for sacred books written on metal in reformed Egyptian, hidden to come forth in the future
- ♦ How Smith translated, with what resources for research
- ♦ The text appears to be a literal translation from a Semitic language
- ♦ Stylometry distinguishes multiple authors in the book, different from Smith and associates.



more outline

- ♦ Non-biblical names from ANE
- ♦ Many cultural features fit ancient Arabian or Meso-American context, not from a modern author.
- ♦ A consistent geography is implied by the text, which fits Arabia very well, Meso-America fairly well.
- ♦ Voyages to America happened.
- ♦ Book's authors knew more than Smith, e.g. ancient civilizations, olive culture, volcanism, guerilla warfare, lineage histories, etc.



Chiasmus, or Inverted Parallelism in Poetry

- ◆ Arise,
 - ◆ Shine,
 - For thy light is come,
 - And the glory
 - Of the LORD
 - Is risen upon thee.
 - Dimness shall cover the earth
 - And gross darkness the people.
 - But upon thee shall arise
 - The LORD,
 - And his glory shall be seen upon thee,
 - And the Gentiles shall come to thy light,
 - ◆ And kings to the brightness
 - ◆ Of thy rising.
 - Isaiah 60: 1-3



Larsen and Rencher

Stylometry

- ♦ “Wordprints” are the relative frequencies of occurrence of noncontextual words in texts.
- ♦ These vary little for one author, but vary more between authors.
- ♦ Wordprints are unconscious choices and are hard to fake.
- ♦ Putative authors in the BOM are consistent and distinct, as well as very distinct from other suggested authors of the BOM.



Translated from a Semitic Language

- ♦ It came to pass....
- ♦ Plates of Brass or Brass Plates
- ♦ I have dreamed a dream
- ♦ If – then or If – and
- ♦ Choice above all other
- ♦ The judgements and the statutes and the commandments
- ♦ Your murders and your priestcrafts and your envyings
- ♦ Compound prepositions: from before, to behind



Nephi knew Arabia

- Travel 3 days along the Red Sea coast to the Valley of Lemuel.
- Further south their bows lose tension, a steel bow breaks, near of source of good bow wood.
- The trail running south turns east near Nahom, where Ishmael was buried.
- The route eastward from Nahom is harsh and desolate, ending at Bountiful on the sea shore.



Facts on Bountiful

- ◆ Nearly east from Nahom
- ◆ On coast, reasonably accessible from inland
- ◆ Suitable for shore camping and launching a ship into favorable winds and currents going east
- ◆ Very fertile, fruit, wild honey
- ◆ Ship building timber, flint and ore to make tools
- ◆ Long-term source of water
- ◆ Nearby mountain to pray upon
- ◆ Cliffs for throwing Nephi off of



Horses and Elephants

- ♦ Horse bones found in a number of sites in the Yucatan.
 - ♦ One find was six feet deep in a context that could not be Spanish.
- ♦ Proto-Yunan language has pre-Columbian word for horse.
- ♦ Artwork shows people riding on deer.
- ♦ Mastodons ca. 5000 BC Florida, ca. 4000 BC Great Lakes, ca. 1 BC butchered in Ecuador
- ♦ Horse, mammoth, and mastodon remains in Florida ca. 100 BC



Metal Use before 900

- ♦ Copper sheathing on altar at Cuicuilco, I BC, a dozen other finds before 900
- ♦ Proto-languages have words for metal before 1000 BC
- ♦ Smelted iron in ANE around 5000 BC, Ras Shamra steel 1300 BC
- ♦ Aztecs used meteoric iron
- ♦ Tezozomoc said Tarascans had steel helmets



Caveats

- ♦ American Archeology has not proven the Book of Mormon true.
- ♦ Quetzalcoatl has little connection with Christ's visit in the Americas.
- ♦ Izapa Stela 5 has little connection with Lehi's Dream.
- ♦ Most of the temples and cities you see pictures of are from non-BOM times or non-BOM places.



No Excuses Needed

- Overseas migration to America
- Ancient Democrats
- Jesus born in the land of Jerusalem
- Man named Alma
- Warfare and Fortifications
- Hebrews building a temple outside of Jerusalem



Wine, Silk, and Linen

- ♦ Muriel found grape plants in Chiapas from the Nephite period
- ♦ Europeans called drinks made from agave, bananas, pineapples, and other plant parts “wine”.
- ♦ Europeans called several fabrics “silk” or like silk: made from cocoons, kapok, or rabbit hair.
- ♦ Bernal Diaz called henequen, made from pounded maguey leaves, “like linen”.



Incredible Origin of the Book of Mormon

- ♦ Engraved on plates of gold
- ♦ Written in reformed Egyptian
- ♦ Hidden in the earth to avoid destruction and to await rediscovery in a later day



Oldest fragment of Biblical text: priestly blessing scrolls of VII-VI BC

- ♦ Two small silver scrolls found in a Jerusalem tomb
- ♦ Engraved with Numbers 6:24-26 in Hebrew, the priests' blessing
- ♦ Many precedents for metal books:
 - ♦ Orphic gold plates in Etruscan ca. 600 BC
 - ♦ Darius' gold and silver plates placed in stone boxes, found in Persepolis and Hamadan
 - ♦ Qumran copper scroll treasure map



*Second oldest fragment of
Biblical text: Papyrus
Amherst 63 of IV BC*

- ♦ Aramaic version of Psalm 20: 2-6
- ♦ Written with Egyptian Demotic characters, not Aramaic letters
- ♦ Many earlier examples have Hebrew written in Hieratic
- ♦ Could reasonably be described as Jewish learning written in a reformed Egyptian script



*Third oldest manuscript
with biblical text: 4Q17
Exodus, III cent. BC*

- ♦ Found near Qumran, by the Dead Sea in the Judean desert
- ♦ Hidden with many other books inside pots in caves, before the Roman occupation arrived
- ♦ Similarly hidden: Nag Hamadi scrolls in V century AD
- ♦ Dozens of cases documented in Tvednes: “The Book of Mormon and Other Hidden Books”



Witnesses of the Plates

- 3 witnesses, Cowdery, Harris, and Whitmer together, saw the angel, the plates, and the other relics.
- 8 witnesses (all the males present on the day of the showing) saw and handled the plates in broad daylight.
- Their testimonies of this are printed in every Book of Mormon.
- 200 or more reports of direct contacts with these witnesses establishes that they reaffirmed these testimonies for the rest of their lives, never renouncing them.



What makes a witness credible?

- ♦ Intelligent and observant
- ♦ Sober and sane
- ♦ Consistent descriptions
- ♦ No change of story
- ♦ No financial interest
- ♦ Resists intimidation, threats, and bribes
- ♦ Known character of honesty and plain dealing

