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## An Important Addition to the Library

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# INTERPRETER



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Kevin Christensen

Review of Grant Hardy, *The Annotated Book of Mormon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023). 912 pages; \$37.95 (hardcover).

**Abstract:** *Oxford University Press has published an annotated edition of the Book of Mormon. This represents a significant event and provides a useful study resource. At the same time, the author's determination to follow the conclusions of mainstream biblical scholars inevitably generates tensions on issues where the Book of Mormon conflicts with those conclusions. The author also assures readers that the commentary follows "the plain meaning of the text," which ought to acknowledge Joseph Smith's foundational observation that different teachers of religion may understand the same passages very differently, depending on their framing context. In this review, I introduce the content and contributions of the volume, and in a future review I'll address the possibilities for resolving conflicts.*

The appearance of *The Annotated Book of Mormon* is a significant event, coming both from Oxford University Press and from Grant Hardy, whose earlier *Understanding the Book of Mormon* has been treated as a watershed event by many scholars.<sup>1</sup> His earlier efforts of close reading and formatting<sup>2</sup> bear fruit here in the clear and telling structure that he uses to introduce and present the Book of Mormon to a scholarly

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1. See Grant Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader's Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010). See a range of reviews in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 25 (2016), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol25/iss1/>. Also, the assessment of significance in Daniel Becerra, Amy Easton-Flake, Nickolas J. Frederick, Joseph M. Spencer, eds., *Book of Mormon Studies: An Introduction and Guide* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2022), 43–44.

2. Grant Hardy, *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2005).

audience. For instance, rather than just providing a chapter listing, he provides a clear presentation of sources, structure, and primary authorship, dividing his book into four major sections:

- The Small Plates of Nephi (1 Nephi–Omni)
- Mormon’s Explanatory Comments (The Words of Mormon)
- Mormon’s Abridgement of the Large Plates of Nephi (Mosiah to Mormon 7)
- Moroni’s Additions to His Father’s Record (Mormon 8–Moroni 10)

The big-picture clarity this provides is very helpful, used as a conspicuous organizing principle rather than concealed in an essay. He provides useful book and chapter introductions to establish context and prepare the reader for what follows. Hardy also formats that text to enhance the reader’s experience. Though he uses a double column format, his paragraphing follows literary divisions to enhance readability, rather than just scriptural numbering and versification for ease of reference. He judiciously formats poetic passages, such as Nephi’s Psalm and the Isaiah quotations. He occasionally annotates and adds sidebars for particular chiasmic passages but does not format Book of Mormon parallelistic structures to the extent that Donald Parry has done. Besides poetic formatting for Isaiah quotations and the Sermon at the Temple, Hardy uses bolding to highlight variations from the King James Version. He breaks out poetic passages by Book of Mormon authors at times, such as Lehi’s famous likening of Laman and Lemuel to valley and fountain as poetry. In later annotations for the people of Ammon (p. 574n14), Hardy’s annotations point readers back to Lehi’s hopes for Laman to become “steadfast and immovable” to show that Lehi’s frustrated hopes for his older sons could be fulfilled by later generations. This is nicely done, very much the kind of thing an annotated edition can and ought to do well. He also very effectively sets out Helaman 12 as poetry, as “The Song of Mormon” (pp. 540), which I find enhances my appreciation of the intense emotional weight. In a similar way, for 3 Nephi 9 (p. 580), he sets out as poetry the Lord’s lament over the destruction, and in 3 Nephi 10 (p. 584), invitations for survivors to be gathered. This is also strikingly effective. The book overall is beautifully done.

Hardy not only provides his annotations on each page of the Book of Mormon, but the 900+ pages includes maps of the Arabian journey (p. 839) and Sorenson’s version of Mormon’s internal map (pp. 840–41), a chart of the translation history (pp. 849–50), Hardy’s exhaustive

listing of Bible textual quotations and parallels (pp. 867–81), and the testimonies of the three and eight witnesses, Emma Smith, and Joseph Smith (pp. 739–44). Besides his own editorial introduction and apt chapter introductions throughout, he provides a dozen significant essays (pp. 745–829) that give overviews of important issues and debates on a range of crucial topics:

- The Origins of the Text
- The Transmission and Language of the Text
- The Book of Mormon and the Bible
- Book of Mormon Theology
- Lived Religion in the Book of Mormon
- The Book of Mormon and the Latter-day Saints
- The Book of Mormon in American History
- The Book of Mormon as Literature
- Reading the Book of Mormon as Ancient History
- Reading the Book of Mormon as Fiction
- Reading the Book of Mormon as Revealed Scripture
- Reading the Book of Mormon as World Scripture

For each of these topical essays, Hardy includes follow-up sections with his recommendations for *Further Reading* from both believing and skeptical perspectives (pp. 830–38). Though Hardy discusses briefly various geographic theories, noting the initial assumptions of hemispheric geography, with Panama as the narrow neck, and the traditions for the New York hill as Cumorah, he does not use any geographic contextualization for the annotations for the New World setting. He gives his reasons for doing this as the lack of consensus and of unambiguous and coercive evidence requested by eminent unbelievers, and his determination to focus on the text (p. viii).

Rather, my primary argument is that the Book of Mormon is not nonsense; that it is still worth reading attentively nearly two hundred years after its initial publication, whether one approaches it as an intriguing cultural artifact, an unusual literary work, or a new scripture. Indeed, I believe there is good evidence for it being a thoughtfully crafted, rich, evocative text, fully deserving of its place in the library of world scripture. It is like those classics of literature or music that become more impressive the more intently one studies them. Throughout this volume, in chapter after chapter, I highlight the book's constituent parts and how they fit together, along

with its rhetorical devices, allusions both internal and biblical, clever turns of phrase, subtle plot implications, theological innovations, and characterizations that are communicated not just through speech and action but also in the writings and editorial decisions attributed to Nephite figures. (p. x)

Hardy clearly intends to convey objectivity and balance for the book, as is appropriate for publishing in this venue, while stating his own devotional convictions up front (p. xi). This attempt to both promote objectivity and to convey the grounds for one's faith in turn generates several unresolved tensions. This does not mean that the book is not valuable as it stands, but being aware of the issue is the second step in navigating it. The first step, Jesus asserts, is being aware of the beams in our own eyes, being first self-aware and self-critical. "Then shalt thou see clearly" (Matthew 7:5). Objectivity is an ideal, but, as Peter Novick eloquently explained to a Latter-day Saint audience, the problem was this:

I will only report that to an ever-increasing number of historians in recent decades it [objectivity] has not just seemed unapproachable, but an incoherent ideal; not impossible, in the sense of unachievable (that would not make it a less worthy goal than many other goals that we reasonably pursue), but meaningless. This is not because of human frailty on the part of the historian (that, after all, we can struggle against), not because of irresistible outside pressures (these too we can resist with some success, if not complete success). No, the principal problem is different, and it is laughably simple. It is the problem of selecting from among the zillions and zillions of bits of historical data out there the handful that we can fit in even the largest book, and the associated problem of how we arrange those bits that we choose. The criterion of selection and the way we arrange the bits we choose are not given out there in the historical record. Neutrality, value-freedom, and absence of preconceptions on the part of the historian would not result in a neutral account, it would result in no account at all, because any historian, precisely to the extent that she was neutral, without values, free of preconceptions, would be paralyzed, would not have the foggiest notion of how to go

about choosing from the vast, unbelievably messy chaos of stuff out there.<sup>3</sup>

While the ideal is unattainable, a notable outcome of a lawsuit between a holocaust denier and a journalist does provide a set of principles for legal objectivity.

1. Treat all sources with appropriate reservations.
2. Don't dismiss counter-evidence without scholarly consideration.
3. Be even-handed in treatment of evidence.
4. Identify speculation when suggesting conclusions.
5. Correctly transcribe or translate documents.
6. Weigh the authenticity of all accounts.
7. Consider the motives of historical actors.<sup>4</sup>

Notice that even this helpful list includes unavoidable value judgements and does not cancel any of Novick's reservations about the attainability of objectivity. What this kind of consideration does do, however, is provide some ways of evaluating how good and deserving of consideration and respect an account happens to be. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* notes that paradigm choice is always value-based rather than rule-based,<sup>5</sup> and the important thing is that the values applied should not be completely paradigm dependent.<sup>6</sup> That is, a paradigm choice should involve a comparison that asks "Why us, compared to that?" rather than just a self-referential dismissal of "Not us!" Hardy also forthrightly declares in his introduction that there is no escape from his or anyone else's personal value judgements, which simply means that discussion must always continue. Hardy explains himself this way:

All commentaries have biases of some kind or another. This work is an experiment in reading the Book of Mormon as

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3. Peter Novick, "Why the Old Mormon Historians Are More Objective Than the New," paper presented at the Sunstone Symposium, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, 26 August 1989. MS in my possession.

4. As cited by Meg Stout, "Denial," *Millennial Star*, (website), March 29, 2016, <https://www.millennialstar.org/denial/>.

5. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970), 186.

6. "There are no rules for choice between paradigms but there are criteria independent of particular paradigms." Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models, and Paradigms: A Comparative Study in Science and Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 130, <https://www.religion-online.org/book-chapter/chapter-7-paradigms-in-religion/>.



scripture, a genre that is somewhat distinct from both history and fiction. On the one hand, I take its ostensible historical context seriously, trying to imagine how it might be read as an example of exilic literature informed by Hebrew culture and augmented by new revelations received by Lehi and his descendants. At the same time, I accept the generally agreed upon findings of modern biblical scholars and historians, so along with ancient echoes and literary devices I also note incongruities in the narrative, including anachronisms and nineteenth-century parallels. These are all part of what makes the Book of Mormon what it is. As scripture, the primary value of the text is theological rather than historical, even for believers who assume it is based on an authentic ancient record. Faith can often accommodate some degree of historical inaccuracy or even implausibility in a sacred text. (p. viii)

I can understand and sympathize with Hardy's approach, but personally do not agree that the primary value of the Book of Mormon is theological. One of my reasons is that Alma 32:35, in assessing the fruitful results of an experiment upon the word, does not say, "Is this not theological?" but rather, "Is not this real?" Terryl Givens has observed,

[The Book of Mormon] has exerted influence within the church and reaction outside the church not primarily by virtue of its substance, but rather its manner of appearing, not on the merits of what it *says*, but what it *enacts*. Put slightly differently, the history of the Book of Mormon's place in Mormonism and American religion generally has always been more connected to its status as *signifier* than *signified*, or its role as a sacred sign rather than its function as persuasive theology.<sup>7</sup>

In his exchange with King Lamoni, Ammon does not spend a lot of time splitting theological hairs. In that context, Ammon affirms that if you can conceive of the Great Spirit and think of that as God, and God as at least possibly real, that is good enough to start with. Perfect knowledge cannot be obtained so easily or without going through a long process. But we can experiment upon the word, Alma states, and from the outcomes of our experiments gain an expansion of the mind and enlargement of the soul, and ongoing fruitfulness and future promise

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7. Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 64.

as grounds for faith, and though lacking perfect knowledge, we can still live with confidence that we are wrestling with something real.

As a very young child, at the edges of my memories, my father drove us over barely defined dirt roads (calling them “unimproved” would be a gross understatement) to the Cleveland-Lloyd dinosaur quarry in central Utah, which at that time was just a quarry with no buildings, no parking lot, and no visitors center, just a few paleontologists out in a remote rocky area exposing the fossil bones in the desert rock. While my knowledge was far from perfect, even as a small child, I learned something that has stayed with me — the bones were *real*. Hardy himself refers to Givens’ *By the Hand of Mormon* (pp. 781n29, 821n54, 831, 833), which shows that the early Latter-day Saints treated the Book of Mormon as a sign that Joseph Smith was a real prophet, rather than as a “Big Book of What to Think.”

I acknowledge that Joseph Smith in his King Follet Discourse commented, “If men do not compreh[e]nd the character of God they do not comprehe[n]d themselves.”<sup>8</sup> And yes, there is much of theological interest in the Book of Mormon, far beyond what Ammon and Lamoni initially discuss, but that leads to another reason I disagree with Hardy on theology as the book’s primary value — scholars can extract very different theologies from the Book of Mormon depending how they contextualize the same passages. Those who think the Book of Mormon is real contextualize differently than those who contextualize against Joseph Smith’s nineteenth-century environment and/or whatever contemporary framework occupies that reader’s mind.<sup>9</sup>

For example, here is Hardy’s annotation for the angel’s argument supporting the command to slay Laban.

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8. Discourse, 7 April 1844, as reported by Willard Richards, p. 67, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-7-april-1844-as-reported-by-willard-richards/1>.

9. Hugh Nibley’s “The Grab Bag” in *The Prophetic Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1989) remains relevant, showing how a range of conceptual frameworks applied lead to a range of assessments of the Book of Mormon. That also compares to similar observations about how different scholars contextualize in different ways made by Professor John McDade in his survey “Life of Jesus Research.” John McDade, “Jesus in Recent Research,” *The Month* (December 1998): 498, [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_month\\_1998-12\\_31\\_11/page/498/mode/2up?view=theater](https://archive.org/details/sim_month_1998-12_31_11/page/498/mode/2up?view=theater). See also Richard L. Bushman, “Joseph Smith’s Many Histories,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 4, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol44/iss4/3/>.

13: It may be true that *the Lord slayeth the wicked*, as in the story of Nabal at 1 Sam 25.36–39, but in this case Nephi is being asked to kill on God’s behalf, which is a more problematic situation (though the book of Deuteronomy, which had been rediscovered within Lehi’s lifetime, introduces the idea of *herem*, or divinely mandated destruction). The Spirit counters Nephi’s hesitation with an argument reminiscent of that given by Caiaphas, the high priest who argued for Jesus’s execution, at Jn 11.50. (p. 22n13)

Back in 1999, John Welch and Heidi Harkness Parker published research on a near-contemporary precedent for Nephi’s encounter that was preserved in Jewish oral tradition:

Another Old Testament case, preserved more fully in the Jewish oral tradition, involved Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, who rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuchadnezzar went to Antioch and demanded that the great Jewish council surrender Jehoiakim or the nation would be destroyed. Jehoiakim protested, “Can ye sacrifice one life for another?” Unmoved, the council replied, “Thus did your ancestors do to Sheba the son of Birchri.” Jehoiakim was released to Nebuchadnezzar, who took him to Babylon (see 2 Chronicles 36:6), where presumably he was executed. Because Zedekiah became king less than four months later (see verses 9–10), at the time the Book of Mormon account begins (see 1 Nephi 1:4), Nephi was probably keenly aware of how the “one for many” principle was used to justify Jehoiakim’s death.<sup>10</sup>

Different contextualization leads to rather different theologies and different takes on whether the Book of Mormon is real, whether the story contains discrediting and telling anachronisms, or aptly reports ancient topicality translated “after the manner of [our] language, that [we] might come to understanding” (D&C 1:24). Still, the same experiment upon the word that Alma recommends includes his declaration that the experiment can start with even “a portion of my words” (Alma 32:27), and if Hardy and I favor different portions of the word for some of the experiments, and as individuals we sometimes conduct very different

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10. John W. Welch and Melvin J. Thorne, *Pressing Forward with the Book of Mormon: The FARMS Updates of the 1990s* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1999), 17–18, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=5&article=1062&context=mi&type=additional>.

experiments upon the same words, that does not rule out potentially fruitful experiments here. Those who agree that the Book of Mormon is real are more likely to tolerate some theological differences because of that shared conviction. Hardy explains:

The headings, introductions, and annotations identify themes and major ideas, highlight narrative structures and literary patterns, delineate arguments, draw attention to internal parallels and allusions, and trace intertextuality with the Bible. The Book of Mormon has often been defined more by its colorful backstory than its actual contents; this annotated edition offers an alternative approach that is consistently focused on the plain meaning of the text. (p. viii)

The notion of following “the plain meaning of the text” is very human and understandably attractive — Hardy cites Nephi’s appeal (p. 43n29) that way — but again, I deeply appreciate the young Joseph Smith’s concern that “the same passages of scripture” (Joseph Smith — History 12) can be understood very differently, as well as Jesus’s key observation that the same words, planted in different soils, can produce vastly different harvests: “Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know all parables?” (Mark 4:13).

What seems to one person as “the plain meaning of the text” may mean something different to another. Consider Jesus’s plain meaning when talking about “other sheep,” or “destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up again,” or “this is my body,” or “my Father and I are one.” Finally, I have seen often what happens to potential for further expansion and enlightenment for the minds that discard the need for further inquiry and stop at what seems to them the indisputable and final “plain meaning of the text” in light of the perspective of the moment. I recall Jesus in 3 Nephi 15:17–23 discussing what happened to other disciples who “supposed” (verse 22) they understood him on the topic of “other sheep” but in fact did not, and in consequence did not ask for or receive further light and knowledge. Joseph Smith stated that the problem with creeds was not their content (“all of them have some truth”<sup>11</sup> and “it don’t prove that a man is not a good man because

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11. History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], p. 1754, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/126?highlight=creeds%20of%20the%20different%20denominations>.

he believes false doctrine”<sup>12</sup>), but their function in declaring “hitherto shalt thou come, and no further,”<sup>13</sup> which places adherents beyond both enlightenment and repentance.

In annotating Nephi’s comments on delighting in plainness in 2 Nephi 25, Hardy says this:

1–8: The contrast between Isaiah’s multivalent prophecies and Nephi’s plainly articulated predictions of the last days is, quite literally, the difference between poetry and prose. Nephi begins with a brief narrator’s comment, for his future readers, and then addresses his people directly beginning in v. 4. He regards the Jews at Jerusalem negatively (*works of darkness*), perhaps understandably given the persecution of his family, yet he acknowledges their unparalleled expertise in interpreting scripture (v. 5); see 29.4n. 4: The *spirit of prophecy* appears eighteen times in the BoM and once in the Bible at Rev. 19.10, where “the spirit [or essence] of prophecy” is equated with “the testimony of Jesus”; see Alma 4.20n. 5: *My soul delighteth in the words of Isaiah*, this phrase completes an inclusio that began at 11.2; similarly, “my soul delights in plainness” in v. 4 above begins an overlapping inclusio that ends at 31.3. (p. 145)

Hardy’s annotations generally contextualize the plain meaning of the text relative to literary features, the nineteenth-century context, including the Old and New Testaments, and conclusions of mainstream contemporary secular scholarship. He does refer in some annotations and essays to correlations with locations and details for the Arabian journey and Nahom and provides a map for reference (p. 839).<sup>14</sup> When it comes to the New World portions of the book, he describes some of the history of the debates and includes a version of Sorenson’s internal map (p. 841), but he does not annotate to any New World correlation or context. In Hardy’s essay on “Reading the Book of Mormon as Ancient History,” he comments:

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12. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center Monograph, Brigham Young University, 1980), 183–84.

13. History, 1838–1856, volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], p. 1755, The Joseph Smith Papers, <https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/127>.

14. Though Warren Aston points out in personal correspondence that the 2002 map Hardy provides has since been superseded by better maps.



Others have been troubled by the lack of direct historical evidence in the Americas. There are no authenticated reports of pre-Columbian New World sites that show any evidence of Old World influence in the form of pottery, tools, weapons, inscriptions, or agricultural products.<sup>15</sup> Finding these sorts of items in an excavation would not prove the Book of Mormon true, but they would make it more historically plausible and indicate potential locations for further research. (Many Latter-day Saints assume that confirming evidences will someday be unearthed.)<sup>16</sup> When challenged to produce a single, credible Nephite artifact, apologists tend to point toward broader patterns of geographical consistency and Mesoamerican cultural parallels such as cities, fortifications, warfare, and roads. Or they look to secondary confirmations from ancient Near Eastern parallels, literary features, and witness statements. (p. 806)

Though I respect Hardy clearly and honestly striving for at least a fair balance, given his faith convictions, his audience, Oxford Press editorship, and his purpose in his commentary, as a believer in historicity, this strikes me as lukewarm with respect to Book of Mormon evidence that has emerged in my lifetime, and ironic in comparison to a notable lack of direct historical evidence for several key Bible scholarship issues, such as the late first-century date and Matthean composition of the Sermon

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15. Compare the authority claimed by that sentence with the content of these two John Sorenson essays, “Scientific Evidence for Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Voyages to and from the Americas,” John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, *Sino-Platonic Papers* 133 (April 2004), [https://sino-platonic.org/abstracts/sppl133\\_precolumbian.html](https://sino-platonic.org/abstracts/sppl133_precolumbian.html), and “A Complex of Ritual and Ideology Shared by Mesoamerica and the Ancient Near East” *Sino-Platonic Papers* 195 (December 2009), [https://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp195\\_mesoamerica.pdf](https://sino-platonic.org/complete/spp195_mesoamerica.pdf).

16. Personally, I would annotate this statement to John Clark’s discussion of a conspicuous historical trend towards resolution of questions. See John E. Clark, “Archeological Trends and the Book of Mormon Origins,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005), <https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/archaeological-trends-and-the-book-of-mormon-origins/> and John E. Clark, “Archaeology, Relics, and Book of Mormon Belief,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 2 (2005), <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/jbms/vol14/iss2/6>. And I would follow his 2005 essays to a discussion of the implications of the even more recent LiDAR surveys, which were revolutionary in their implications for Mesoamerica, and invitingly relevant to the Book of Mormon. See Jeff Lindsay, “New Light on Mesoamerica from LiDAR, Something Book of Mormon Fans are Likely to Like,” *Arise from the Dust*, (blog), February 10, 2018, <https://www.arisefromthedust.com/new-light-on-mesoamerica-from-lidar/>.

on the Mount that Hardy endorses without elaboration as based on the conclusions of unnamed “biblical scholars” in unnamed works based on arguments and evidence that he does not explore here (p. 590).<sup>17</sup> There is a difference between calling for proofs that might somehow coerce a resistant person’s unwilling submission and seriously considering what Alma calls “cause to believe” (Alma 32:18) that invites all and persuades some who don’t sit passively but who accept or reject personal invitations to experiment upon the word. A person who is holding out for God to produce direct evidence via skeptical human authority that will coerce their unwilling submission has arranged for themselves the only kind of God that they will recognize, and that if and when it occurs, it will not be pleasant, but shattering rather than enlightening.<sup>18</sup> Personally, I prefer persuasion based on invitation and imperfect and ongoing “cause to believe” rather than instant and final irresistible proof. Indeed, Hardy aptly annotates the Alma 32 discussion of this point (p. 406).

In discussing Mulek, Hardy makes several notable observations concerning Mulek as a son of Zedekiah, and therefore gives a meaningful Davidic line in support of the claims of the various Mulekite Kingmen (p. 211n18–19) in later political conflicts in the Book of Mormon. In his close reading, he suggests that Mormon, as editor, tends to downplay the Mulekite claims of Davidic kingly lineage for political reasons (p. 229). In the Index of Names, the entry for Mulek has this:

Mulek [or Muloch (P)]: son of King Zedekiah<sub>1</sub> of Judah (c. 590 BCE) (not in Bible); Mos 25.2. (p. 889)

Perhaps I am being picky here, but back in 1992, observations by Robert Smith were published:

Jeremiah 38:6 speaks of a “dungeon of Malchiah the son of Hammelech ... in the court of the prison.” But the Hebrew name here, *MalkiYahu ben-hamMelek*, should be translated “MalkiYahu, son of the king,” the Hebrew word *melek* meaning “king.”<sup>19</sup>

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17. Note, as well, annotations to 3 Nephi 12–14.

18. At the International Association of Near Death Studies (IANDS) Conference held in Salt Lake City in 1999, I heard an experiencer report that her first thought after a traffic accident, on finding herself out of her physical body and aware of an undeniable spirit continuance that she had not believed was possible was “I HATE being wrong!”

19. Robert F. Smith, “New Information about Mulek, Son of the King,” in *Reexploring the Book of Mormon: A Decade of New Research*, ed. John W. Welch (Salt

In 2003, Jeffrey Chadwick produced a detailed article on the implications of a Judean stamp seal with the Hebrew form of the Biblical name.<sup>20</sup> Mulek may indeed be in both the Bible and archeology. So, for me, that is a quibble with Hardy's glossary entry. In this case, though, it is a potentially instructive quibble concerning the effect one's preconceptions can have regarding what would constitute evidence, where a person looks, to whom a person listens, and the harvest from an assumed "plain meaning."

Despite my personal quibbles on some of Hardy's interpretive and contextual points such as these, I recommend the Oxford *Annotated Book of Mormon* as valuable addition to any library. It is a big book (over 900 pages) and touches on a great many topics and offers much to interested readers from a variety of perspectives. It is not and does not attempt to be a one-volume substitute for a good library, nor as the last word on every topic. As produced by Oxford as a resource for scholars of many different faiths, the book is intended to provide an entry point towards informed discussions of the Book of Mormon in a scholarly setting. Oxford has previously done a similar volume titled *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, done with a similar intent to engender further discussion.<sup>21</sup>

Hardy is a careful, observant, conscientious, and tactful scholar, and he makes a careful effort to respect and present varying points of view, as befits this kind of book from this publisher as one entry in a series. There is nothing wrong with producing this kind of book to do well the kinds of things that this kind of book is designed to do. In the essays, Hardy often highlights opposing points of view, citing different approaches to questions of composition/translation, racism, anachronism, historicity, and geography and pointing readers to a variety of readings. He actively directs readers to other books from a suitable range of skeptical, believing, and interpretive perspectives.

Because Hardy's book is a tool to facilitate and encourage informed appreciation and discussion of the Book of Mormon, in a future article, I plan to enter further into that intended discussion. My personal

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Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 143, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?filename=5&article=1065&context=mi&>.

20. Jeffrey R. Chadwick, "Has the Seal of Mulek Been Found?," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12, no. 2 (2003): 72-83, 117-18, <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1327&context=jbms>.

21. Amy-Jill Levine and Mark Zvi Brettler, eds., *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).



reservations come on particular points, relative to the use I make of the Book of Mormon and what constitutes “the plain meaning of the text” given different contextualization. Those reservations, however, should not discourage anyone — Latter-day Saint or not — from purchasing and enjoying and gaining light from Hardy’s contribution. My interest in continuing with further analysis of Hardy’s work in a future article is in preparing Latter-day Saint readers for the discussions that must arise among those who explore Hardy’s impressive book.

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