
JOSEPH SMITH, CENTRAL AMERICAN RUINS, AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

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Americans in the year 1841 welcomed the publication of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, by John Lloyd Stephens, with illustrations by Frederick Catherwood.¹ The two explorers had visited the region in 1839 and 1840. This work not only recounted their travels but also described for the first time many of the pre-Columbian ruins found there. Catherwood was a skilled artist and produced accurate and detailed sketches of many of the ruins and monuments which they described in their work. The 1841 volumes were an instant success and were widely praised in the national press. The two travelers returned to Yucatan for a second expedition in 1841 and stayed until 1842. In 1843, they published a second set of volumes, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, describing their discovery of forty-four previously unknown sites in the region.² In 1844, Catherwood published

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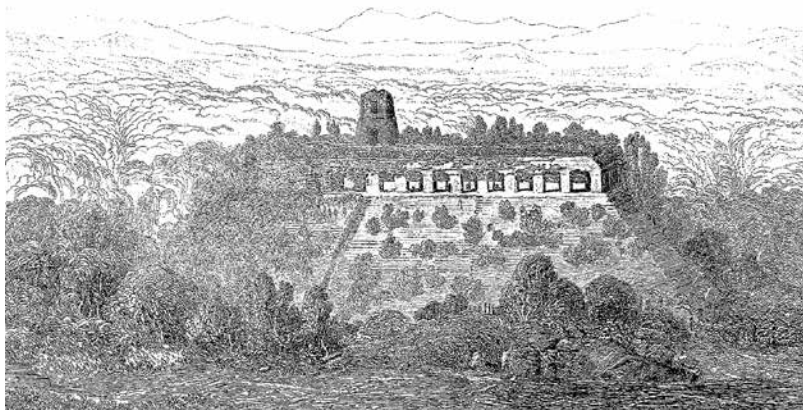
another volume, *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, which consisted of twenty-five of his own hand-colored lithographs interspersed with his commentary.³ Like the 1841 volumes, these subsequent books received wide acclaim.

Joseph Smith and other early Latter-day Saints also greeted these Central American discoveries with enthusiasm, in large part because of their potential relevance to the Book of Mormon. Joseph Smith's own interest and endorsement of the books had a significant impact on Latter-day Saint interpretations. In addition to providing new information on Central American discoveries, these volumes provided Latter-day Saints with a useful rebuttal to those who claimed that native American peoples were incapable of the kind of cultural achievement described in the Book of Mormon. Those discoveries also influenced how Latter-day Saints interpreted the cultural and historical setting of the book.

On September 8, 1841, John Bernhisel, a recent Latter-day Saint convert in New York City, wrote to Joseph Smith informing him that he had sent him a copy of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* "as a token of my regard for you as a Prophet of the Lord."⁴ On November 16, 1842, Joseph Smith responded to Bernhisel and thanked 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 histories that have been written pertaining to the antiquities of this country it is the most correct luminous & comprihensive.⁵

The letter to Bernhisel, written in the hand of John Taylor, belongs to a class of historical documents which are only extant in the



Frederick Catherwood. Palace at Palenque.

hand of scribes, but which are part of the Joseph Smith corpus.⁶ The document could suggest that Joseph Smith either dictated the letter to John Taylor, or that he directed John to write to Bernhisel on his behalf using the words he deemed proper. In either case, it would be unlikely for John Taylor to attribute views and opinions to Joseph Smith that were not his own or that were inconsistent with his teachings. As with several other letters of this kind, it is reasonable to see the content of the letter to Bernhisel as an accurate representation of Joseph Smith's intent, if not his own words: he read and enjoyed the volumes by Stephens and Catherwood, shared the excitement these discoveries generated among his friends and associates, and believed that they contained information both consistent with and supportive of the Book of Mormon.⁷

In late February 1842, Joseph Smith assumed editorial responsibility for the *Times and Seasons*, the church's bimonthly newspaper. Joseph Smith edited the paper, with the assistance of John Taylor and Wilford Woodruff, until November of that year.⁸ On February 19, Woodruff recorded, "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 the establishment."⁹ During his

tenure as editor, five articles appeared in the paper which promoted the work of Stephens and Catherwood among the Latter-day Saints and advanced the view that the travelers' discoveries should be of interest to readers of the Book of Mormon.

Some Latter-day Saint historians have attributed these articles to John Taylor.¹⁰ Other writers have argued that they were written without his knowledge or supervision, and have attempted to distance the views there expressed from those of the Mormon leader.¹¹ Recent research, however, supports the conclusion that these articles were most likely a collaborative effort between Joseph Smith, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff, and that there is no reason to assert that these editorials were the work of one writer. According to this research, historical sources and statistical analysis limits the potential contributors to three: Joseph Smith, John Taylor, and Wilford Woodruff. Of these three, Wilford Woodruff's writing style is the least evident in the articles, Joseph Smith's and John Taylor's styles are close, but Joseph Smith's stylistic influence is stronger. In 1842, Joseph was in hiding from his enemies from August through November, but he remained close to and often within Nauvoo for most of that time. The strength of Joseph Smith's style may be attributed to the fact that both Wilford Woodruff and John Taylor were seriously ill during part of this time, requiring Joseph Smith to take on more writing and editing while he was in hiding.¹² In any case, the fact that he took editorial responsibility for what was published under his name in effect signaled his approval of such interests in connection with the Book of Mormon.

The works of Stephens and Catherwood were significant in providing previously unknown information on Central American ruins. Most of these ruins were entirely unknown to American scholars. Even for the few that were known, accurate and detailed information was hard to come by. Among those that were known was the site of

Palenque in Chiapas, Mexico. David Pendergast describes the state of knowledge about the site at the time Stephens and Catherwood made their first expedition to Central America.

The site was first discovered by the Spaniards in the middle or latter part of the eighteenth century, and between 1784 and 1834 a number of brief accounts appeared, including those of Ramon de Ordonez y Aguiar, in 1784; Domingo Juarros, in 1808; Pablo Felix Cabrera, in 1822; the first to contain an extensive series of illustrations of the site; the work of Dupaix, also illustrated, published by Lord Kingsborough in 1831; and the works of Juan Galindo, 1832–34. Most of these descriptions of Palenque were largely or wholly based on brief explorations of the ruins, and none was characterized by illustrations of striking accuracy. The difficulty was not remedied by the sojourn of Comte Jean de Waldeck at Palenque in 1832 and 1833, for although he was a skilled lithographer, Waldeck allowed his imagination to run riot in illustrating the ruins, as had others before him. However, Waldeck's work, together with Lord Kingsborough's earlier publication, served more than any others to excite the imaginations of scholars and explorers.¹³

Kingsborough's nine enormous volumes were published at great cost and led to the loss of the viscount's fortune and his death in debtors' prison in 1837. Even after their publication, the books were not widely available to American readers. For example in 1839, William Prescott, Stephens and Catherwood's contemporary, who was then laboring over his history of the Conquest of Mexico, wrote to a friend, "I am daily expecting from Europe . . . the magnificent works of Lord Kingsborough. *There is not a copy, I believe in the United States.*"¹⁴ In his review of this period, another historian writes:

Despite the increased scholarly interest in ancient Mesoamerica, the works of von Humboldt, Del Rio, Dupaix, and Waldeck had remained relatively unknown to North Americans in the 1820s and 1830s. Berthould's 1822 repackaging of the Del Rio expedition, for example,

had failed to find a general audience even in London, while the enormous cost of Humboldt's, King's, Baredere's, and Waldeck's works effectively prohibited their purchase by more than a handful of wealthy European antiquarians. Produced in multi-volume editions with hand-colored lithographs, the works often commanded prices of several hundred dollars per volume—resulting not only in their limited circulation but also in some cases the financial ruin of their publishers.¹⁵

In 1840, an American reviewer of Dupaix and Castenada's work on Mitla and Palenque observed, "Here is a work, exceedingly interesting, as is evident from a mere perusal of the title page, to every American, and yet we think it possible that there are more persons in the United States, who have visited some of the monuments described in it, than there are who possess the work describing them. Only one copy, as far as we are informed, has reached this country. To us, therefore, this is a sealed book."¹⁶ Unlike previous works, which were rare and expensive, *Incidents in Travel* gave life to a picture of Central America previously unavailable to most American readers. The travelers' account of their experiences was interesting, and Stephens's prose was easy to read. The value of the work was also greatly enhanced by Catherwood's skills as a determined and observant artist. As Brian Fagan observes, "One cannot fail to be impressed by Catherwood's extraordinary artistic achievements under these terrible conditions. His drawings are vivid and accurate, dramatic and sensitive, bringing the ruins of Palenque to life in their dense setting of sprawling vegetation."¹⁷ This allowed the men to describe and explain their experiences in a way that prose alone could not do. For early readers of the Book of Mormon Catherwood's drawings provided, for the first time, a conceivable real-world picture of what Nephite cities and monuments could have looked like. This influence can be seen in examples from the earliest portrayals of Book of Mormon scenes in the nineteenth century to those of contemporary Mormons artists.¹⁸



FRONT OF STONE IDOL.

Frederick Catherwood. "His drawings are vivid and accurate, dramatic and sensitive, bringing the ruins of Palenque to life in their dense setting of sprawling vegetation."

The works of Stephens and Catherwood also provided Latter-day Saints with an effective rebuttal to a common reason for dismissing the Book of Mormon. That book tells of a people who had a sophisticated pre-Columbian culture, were literate, skilled in art (see Helaman 12:2), built temples (see 2 Nephi 5:16; Mosiah 1:18; Alma 16:13; 26:29; 3 Nephi 11:1), palaces (see Mosiah 11:9; Alma 22:2), and many large and populous cities (see Mosiah 27:6; Ether 13:5). This ran counter to one image of native American people that was common in the early nineteenth century. John Lloyd Stephens's biographer notes, "The acceptance of an 'Indian civilization' demanded, to an American living in 1839, an entire reorientation, for him an Indian was one of those barbaric, half-naked tepee-dwellers against whom wars were constantly waged. A rude, subhuman people who hunted with the stealth of animals, they were artisans of buffalo robes, arrowheads, spears, and little else. Nor did one think of calling the other indigenous inhabitants of the continent 'civilized.'"¹⁹ In opposition to this negative but popular view of the of native Americans, some writers, such as Ethan Smith, asserted that American "Indians" were remnants of the lost ten tribes of the house of Israel.²⁰ Josiah Priest suggested a dazzling variety of transoceanic influences upon historic American Indian culture and history, including "not only Asiatic nations, very soon after the flood, but . . . also, all along the different eras of time, different races of men, as Polynesians, Malays, Australasians, Phoenicians, Egyptians, Greeks, Romans, Israelites, Tartars, Scandinavians, Danes, Norwegians, Welch, and Scotch."²¹ Writers differed as to whether American Indian groups were actually descended from civilized migrants or whether cultural remains represented those of an unrelated people which had become extinct,²² but often drew support for their respective theories from the remains of past ruins which, they argued, evidenced the previous existence of a higher culture and civilization. These writings did not dispel, however, the

skepticism of many other Americans who were either unaware of such arguments or found them unpersuasive.

Spanish conquistadors such as Hernan Cortes and Bernal Diaz del Castillo expressed admiration for many Aztec achievements. Descriptions of the Spanish conquest of the Aztec and the Inca were available to those Americans who had the resources and inclination to read about them.²³ For many, however, these accounts “were either unknown or considered works of unbridled imagination.”²⁴ This skepticism was exemplified by William Robertson, an influential historian of the time. According to Robertson, the Aztecs of Mexico and the Incas of Peru were more sophisticated than the majority of American Indians, yet, in comparison with the peoples of the Old World, “neither the Mexicans nor Peruvians [were] entitled to rank with those nations which merit the term of civilized.”²⁵ In October 1840, months before *Incidents of Travel* was published, the editor of the *North American Review* expressed a similar perspective. Spanish accounts suggesting sophistication and culture were highly exaggerated, the editor wrote, and could not to be taken at face value as evidence of high civilization. More than two centuries after conquest, scant archaeological evidence could be identified that would support the idea of a complex Central American culture. Scholars had not found “any remains of Mexican art.” No ruins could be found to exist “corresponding with the extravagant descriptions given by the early historians.”²⁶ The reviewer continued:

All the Mexican constructions, existing at the period of the conquest, have long ago disappeared, with the exception of two or three ruins, which teach us nothing respecting the state of the arts at that period. Two centuries after the Spanish conquest, and perhaps a small part of this period, were found sufficient to sweep away all the works of the original inhabitants of the country. If the temples, and houses, and fortification, and walls of stone, described by the early historians, had corresponded at all to the magnificent accounts given by them, such a destruction would

have been impossible. A much longer time would be necessary in any country to cause the disappearance of even wooden structures.²⁷

The reviewer faulted the historian Clavigero for crediting the descriptions by Cortes and Diaz of great buildings and lofty towers found in the Aztec capital, which the conquistadores said far excelled similar structures in Europe, since “not one stone remains upon another, to testify the existence of one of these palaces, temples, or houses. Two short centuries have swept them away, as completely as the Indian cabins, which during their existence, were reared and occupied upon the Ohio and Mississippi.” The learned writer concluded, “It is much easier for us to believe that there is gross exaggeration in these descriptions, than that such constructions were reared by Mexican savages, and that they have all disappeared without leaving a vestige of their existence.”²⁸

Many critics of the Book of Mormon shared this perception and rejected it, at least in part, on the basis of its description of Jaredite and Lehite cultural achievements. Missionary Parley P. Pratt described an 1831 encounter in which an Illinois minister dismissed the Book of Mormon for its apparent lack of archaeological evidence. “He said there were no antiquities in America, no ruined cities, buildings, monuments, inscriptions, mounds, or fortifications, to show the existence of such a people as the Book of Mormon described.”²⁹ “According to [the Book of] Mormon,” wrote a British critic in 1839, “these native Americans could read, and write,” but “when that country first became known to Europeans, the inhabitants knew no more about letters than a four-legged animal knows the rules of logic; and not a scrap of writing was to be found.”³⁰ There was not, asserted another critic in 1840, “even so much as a shadow or proof, that the sciences of reading and writing [and other evidences of advanced culture mentioned in the Book of Mormon] were ever known here.”³¹

In later years David Whitmer remembered that the Book of Mormon, when it first came forth, conflicted with contemporary perceptions of native American culture. “When they were first commanded to testify of these things they demurred and told the Lord the people would not believe them for the book concerning which they were to bear record told of a people who were educated and refined, dwelling in large cities; whereas all that was then known of the early inhabitants of this country was the filthy, lazy, degraded and ignorant savages that were roaming over the land.”³² The discoveries of Stephens and Catherwood helped Latter-day Saints respond in some measure to such criticisms. The September 15, 1842, issue of the *Times and Seasons* printed extracts from *Incidents of Travel*. The writer then compared Nephi’s account of the construction of a temple and other buildings (see 2 Nephi 5:15–16) with the explorers’ description of the ruins of Palenque, which included an impressive palace, cement buildings, carvings of what appeared to be individuals of a royal court, and numerous “hieroglyphics, which probably give the history of these incomprehensible personages.”³³ A subsequent article for the October 1 issue discussed the account of the discovery of a large stone with engravings found by the people of king Mosiah in the land of Zarahemla (see Omni 1:20), and compared this with Stephens and Catherwood’s report of “a large round stone, with sides sculptured in hieroglyphics.” Following their description of the previously unknown site, the explorers concluded, “Of one thing there is no doubt: a large city once stood there; its name lost, its history unknown.” The editors of the *Times and Seasons* were struck by the correspondence, although they stopped short of equating the site with a Book of Mormon city. “We are not agoing [*sic*] to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua are those of Zarahemla.” Still, “It will not be a bad plan to compare Mr. Stephens’ ruined cities with those in the Book of Mormon; light cleaves to light, and facts are supported by facts. The truth injures no one.”³⁴ Missionary Erastus Snow, when

he learned of these discoveries, wrote, “Nearly all the principal papers of this country have of late published the result of the researches of Messrs. Stephens and Catherwood, in Central America,” and that they had found many examples of “monuments and statues” which were “covered with writings.”³⁵

Joseph Smith and his associates appreciated the usefulness of Stephens’s and Catherwood’s works as evidence for pre-Columbian civilization, but the discoveries were more notable because of *where* they had been found. The Book of Mormon narrative was said to take place within a region that had a “narrow neck of land” connecting a land northward with a land southward. Early readers of the text associated that region with Central America. For those who accepted the Book of Mormon as history, the evidence of numerous pre-Columbian cities in this very region seemed almost too good to be true. This, again, is reflected in the editorials published in the *Times and Seasons* during Joseph Smith’s tenure as editor. “Mr. Stephens’ great developments of antiquities are made bare to the eyes of all the people by reading the history of the Nephites in the Book of Mormon. They lived about the narrow neck of land which now embraces Central America, with all the cities that can be found. . . . Who could have dreamed that twelve years would have developed such incontrovertible testimony to the Book of Mormon? Surely the Lord worketh and none can hinder.”³⁶ Two weeks later, the writer was even more specific: “Central America, or Guatemala is situated north of the Isthmus of Darien and once embraced several hundred miles of territory from north to south.” Then quoting the Book of Mormon prophet Alma’s description of the narrow neck of land in the Book of Mormon, the writer concluded, “The city of Zarahemla, burnt at the crucifixion of the Savior, and rebuilt afterwards, stood upon this land.”³⁷ When Stephens and Catherwood published their second work, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, John Taylor, having assumed Joseph Smith’s responsibilities as editor, wrote, “This is a

work that ought to be in the hands of every Latter-day Saint; corroborating, as it does the history of the Book of Mormon.” The new publication described the travelers’ exploration of forty-four additional ruins. Taylor argued that the cities mentioned in the Book of Mormon “bear striking resemblance to those mentioned by Mr. Stephens, both in regard to magnificence and *location*.”³⁸ That view was also echoed by George Q. Cannon several years later, who found the discoveries notable in that they were made “in the country declared by the Book of Mormon to be the *principal residence* of one of the colonies that were led to this land.”³⁹

Other writers, with less caution, went even further, claiming that the ruins discussed by Stephens were identical with those mentioned in the Book of Mormon. Upon learning of the new discoveries, Parley P. Pratt wrote:

I say it is remarkable that Mr. Smith, in translating the Book of Mormon from 1827 to 1830, should mention the names and circumstances of those towns and fortifications in this very section of country, where a Mr. Stephens, ten years afterwards, penetrated a dense forest, till then unexplored by modern travelers, and actually finds the ruins of those very cities mentioned by Mormon. The nameless nation of which he speaks were the Nephites. The lost record for which he mourns is the Book of Mormon. The architects, orators, statesmen, and generals, whose works and monuments he admires, are, Alma, Moroni, Helaman, Nephi, Mormon, and their contemporaries. The very cities whose ruins are in his estimation without a name, are called in the Book of Mormon, “Teancum, Boaz, Jordan, Desolation,” &c.⁴⁰

“Let it be distinctly understood,” wrote Pratt’s fellow Apostle John E. Page, “that the Prophet Alma uttered this prophecy [Alma 7:10], not far from Guatemala or Central America, some 82 years before the birth of Christ.”⁴¹ Orson Pratt suggested that a “careful reader” of the Book of Mormon might be able to “trace the relative

bearings and distances of the many cities from each other; and, if acquainted with the present geographical features of the country, he can, by the descriptions given in that book, determine, very nearly, the precise spot of ground they once occupied.⁴² Just as all other Americans at the time, Latter-day Saints had no way of knowing the age of these Central American ruins. Today it is known that most of the cites discussed by Stephens and Catherwood date to the Late Classic Period of Mayan civilization, long after the time period in which the Book of Mormon purports to take place.⁴³

The value of Stephens and Catherwood's works to Joseph Smith and early Latter-day Saints was not limited, however, to the discovery and description of pre-Columbian ruins. As Joseph indicated in his letter to Bernhisel, these works provided interesting information on Central American history which he felt corresponded with that in the Book of Mormon. The historical material on Guatemala found in *Incidents of Travel in Central America* drew upon the work of Don Domingo Juarros, whose history was published in London as an English translation in 1823.⁴⁴ The book by Juarros was itself dependent upon the valuable *Historia de Guatemala or Recordacion Florida* by Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman.⁴⁵ The wide publication of *Incidents of Travel* made the historical information in these sources more widely known to American readers. Utilizing this new resource, the September 15, 1842, issue of the *Times and Seasons* referenced a pre-Columbian tradition from Guatemala which suggested that native inhabitants were descended from the house of Israel.

According to the manuscript of Don Juan Torres, the grandson of the last king of the Quiche's, which was in the possession of the lieutenant-general appointed by Pedro de Alvarado, and when Fuentes says he obtained by means of Father Francis Vasques, the historian of the order of San Francis, the Toltecas themselves descended from the house of

Israel, who were released by Moses from the tyranny of Pharoah, and after crossing the Red Sea, fell into idolatry. To avoid the reproofs of Moses, or from fear of his inflicting upon them some chastisement, they separated from him and his brethren, and under the guidance of Tanub, their chief, passed from one continent to the other, to a place which they called the seven caverns, a part of the kingdom of Mexico, where they founded the celebrated city of Tula. From Tanub sprang the families of the kings of Tula and Quiche, and the first monarch of the Toltecs.⁴⁶

Offering, as it did, apparent evidence of a connection between ancient Israel and Central America, Joseph Smith and others took such evidence at face value, although readers today may ponder what influence Christian and Spanish historians had upon the description and interpretation of these purported events.

Army sizes mentioned in warfare accounts cited by Stephens also compared favorably with those found in the Book of Mormon. Armies numbering in the thousands and tens of thousands (see Alma 3:26; 28:2, 10–11),⁴⁷ thirty thousand (see Mormon 1:11; 2:25),⁴⁸ forty thousand (see Mormon 2:9),⁴⁹ and 230,000 (see Mormon 6:11–15) are noteworthy.⁵⁰ Fuentes described a bloody war which was waged to avenge the abduction of the Ixconsocil and Ecselixpua, the daughter and niece of Balam Acan, the Quiche king. In Stephens's words

The rape of Helen did not produce more wars and bloodshed than the carrying off of these two young ladies with unpronounceable names. Balam Acan was a naturally mild man, but the abduction of his daughter was an affront not to be pardoned. With eighty thousand veterans, himself in the center squadron . . . he marched against Zutugilebpop, who met him with sixty thousand men, commanded by Iloacab, his chief general [and] accomplice. The most bloody battle ever fought in the country took place; the field was so deeply inundated with blood that not a blade of grass could be seen.⁵¹



Frederick Catherwood. Idol and altar at Copan.

This story recalled for some readers of the Book of Mormon the story of the priests of King Noah who kidnapped Lamanite daughters and thereby incited a deadly battle (see Mosiah 20:1–15).⁵²

In 1877 Brigham Young advised his son Fera to “read all good books you can obtain.” No great fan of novels, Brigham counseled him to read more history. “We should read the true and wise. The perusal of the rest is worse than time wasted, it is time abused. Sell your Dickens’ works and get Stephens’ & Catherwood’s *Travels in Central America*.”⁵³ Such counsel from one of Joseph Smith’s closest and most loyal associates underscores the influence Joseph’s endorsement of *Incidents of Travel* had.

It is unlikely that many who encountered the Book of Mormon in Joseph Smith’s day were persuaded by Mormon references to pre-Columbian ruins as evidence for the book. Among early Mormons, the role of Central American discoveries and other forms of secular evidence likely varied. For some, secular evidence could not displace spiritual enlightenment but still had a valuable secondary role in building upon the faith one already possessed.

When convert Orson Spencer was asked by a friend to provide reasons for his belief in the Book of Mormon, he cited the results of his prayers as primary. “Internal evidence” within the book itself, he thought, should “satisfy every honest mind,” but he did not dismiss the value of secular knowledge, tentative and changing as it often may be. What he could learn of Central American history was for him a secondary but valued influence in the confirmation of his faith: “As you enquire after the reasons that operated to change my mind to the present faith, I only remark that Stevens’ *Travels* had some influence as an external evidence of the truth of the Book of Mormon.”⁵⁴

Notes

1. John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841). Both volumes were reprinted in their entirety by Dover Publications in 1969. Two informative biographies on Stephens and Catherwood are Victor Wolfgang von Hagen,

MATTHEW ROPER

- Maya Explorer: John Lloyd Stephens and the Lost Cities of Central America and Yucatan* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1990); Victor Wolfgang von Hagen, *F. Catherwood: Architect-Explorer of Two Worlds* (Barre, MA: Barre Publishers, 1968).
2. John L. Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Yucatan*, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1843). Both volumes were reprinted in their entirety by Dover Publications in 1963.
 3. F. Catherwood, *Views of Ancient Monuments in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (New York: Barlett and Welford, 1844). For excellent color reproductions of Catherwood's lithographs, see Fabio Bourbon, *The Lost Cities of the Mayas: The Life, Art, and Discoveries of Frederick Catherwood* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999).
 4. John Bernhisel to Joseph Smith, September 8, 1841, in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 533.
 5. Joseph Smith to John Bernhisel, November 16, 1841, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 533.
 6. See for example Joseph Smith's letters to Oliver Granger, May 4, 1841, and Jennetta Richards, June 23, 1842, which were written in the hands of Robert B. Thompson and William Clayton respectively, in Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, 527–28, 551–52.
 7. There is no indication that Joseph Smith considered his ideas about Central America and the Book of Mormon to be revelatory.
 8. Joseph Smith is listed as editor of the paper beginning with the February 15, 1842, issue and ending with the October 15, 1842, issue.
 9. Wilford Woodruff, journal, February 19, 1842, in Scott G. Kenney, ed., *Wilford Woodruff's Journal, 1833–1898 Typescript* (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1983–85), 2:155.
 10. Matthew Roper, "Limited Geography and the Book of Mormon: Historical Antecedents and Early Interpretations," *FARMS Review* 16, no. 2 (2004): 245–48.
 11. Bruce H. Porter and Rod L. Meldrum, *Prophecies & Promises: The Book of Mormon and the United States of America* (New York: Digital Legend, 2009),

- 107; Rod L. Meldrum, *Exploring the Book of Mormon in America's Heartland* (New York: Digital Legend, 2011), 60.
12. Matthew Roper, Paul Fields, Atul Nepal, Joseph Smith, the *Times and Seasons*, and Central American Ruins," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 22, no. 2 (2013): 84–97.
 13. David M. Pendergast, *Palenque: The Walker-Caddy Expedition to the Ancient Maya City, 1839–1840* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 5.
 14. William H. Prescott to Manuel Najera in Mexico, April 25, 1839, cited in Von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 77n77; emphasis added.
 15. R. Tripp Evans, *Romancing the Maya: Mexican Antiquity in the American Imagination 1820–1915* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004), 45–46.
 16. *North American Review* 51, no. 109 (October 1840): 397.
 17. Brian Fagan, *Elusive Treasure: The Story of Early Archaeologists in the Americas* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1977), 176.
 18. Noel A. Carmack, "'A Picturesque and Dramatic History': George Reynolds' *Story of the Book of Mormon*," *BYU Studies* 47, no. 2 (2008): 115–41. Carmack also notes the influence of Catherwood's drawings upon Latter-day Saint artists such as George Ottinger. Evans observes that many editions of the Book of Mormon contain the art of Arnold Friberg, who "contextualizes the narrative within an architectural setting based upon well-known models of Puuc style Maya and Teotihuacano architecture." Samuel the Lamanite stands by a tower which shows "the characteristic stone latticework and centralized Chac mask of Uxmal's Nunnery complex." The temple to which Jesus ascends when he appears to the Nephites resembles the "stepped masonry platforms of Teotihuacan's Avenue of the Dead. Although these illustrations belong to the modern era rather than to the 19th century, they parallel the 19th-century Mormon's connection between specific archaeological sites and events described in the Book of Mormon" (Evans, *Romancing the Maya*, 94).
 19. Von Hagen, *Maya Explorer*, 75.
 20. Ethan Smith, *View of the Hebrews: or The Tribes of Israel in America*. Second edition (Poultney, VT: Smith and Shute, 1825). See also, James Adair, *The History of the American Indians* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly,

MATTHEW ROPER

- 1775); Elias Boudinot, *A Star in the West: A Humble Attempt to Discover the Long Lost Tribes of Israel* (Trenton, NJ: D. Fenton, S. Hutchinson, and J. Dunham, 1816); Israel Worsley, *A View of the American Indians* (London: n.p., 1828).
21. Josiah Priest, *American Antiquities, and Discoveries in the West: Being an Exhibition of the Evidence That an Ancient Population of Partially Civilized Nations, Differing Entirely from Those of the Present Indians, Peopled America, Many Centuries Before Its Discovery by Columbus*, 3rd ed. rev. (Albany, NY: Hoffman and White, 1833).
 22. Richard E. Bennett, "A Nation Now Extinct': American Indian Origin Theories as of 1820: Samuel L. Mitchill, Martin Harris, and the New York Theory," *Journal of Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20, no. 2 (2011): 30–51.
 23. Thomas Townsend, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico By the Spaniards. Done into English from the Original Spanish of Don Antonio de Solis* (London: T. Woodward, 1724); Charles Cullen, *A History of Mexico . . . By Abbe D. Francesco Saverio Clavigero*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram, 1804).
 24. Fabio Bourbon, *The Lost Cities of the Mayas: The Life, Art, and Discoveries of Frederick Catherwood* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1999), 40.
 25. William Robertson, *The History of America*, 8th ed. (London: A. Strahan, 1801), 3:2.
 26. *North American Review* 51, no. 109 (October 1840): 399–400, 402, 403.
 27. *North American Review* 51, no. 109 (October 1840): 417–18.
 28. *North American Review* 51, no. 109 (October 1840): 419.
 29. Pratt's opponent was unimpressed by reported evidence of mound builder culture. "He said further, that the fortifications and mounds of this country were nothing more than the works of nature." Parley P. Pratt, *Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985), 69.
 30. H. Stevenson, *Lecture on Mormonism* (Newcastle: J. Blackwell and Company, 1839), 12.

JOSEPH SMITH, CENTRAL AMERICAN RUINS, AND THE BOOK OF MORMON

31. A Philanthropist, *Mormonism Unmasked* (Philadelphia, PA: T. K. & P. G. Collins, 1840), 5–6.
32. David Whitmer Interview with James H. Hart, August 21, 1883, in *Deseret Evening News*, September 4, 1883, in *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness*, ed. Lyndon W. Cook (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 98. See also *Chicago Times*, August 7, 1875, in Cook, 5.
33. “Extract From Stephens’ ‘Incidents of Travel in Central America,’” *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842, 911–15.
34. “Zarahemla,” *Times and Seasons*, 1 October 1842, 927–28.
35. [Erastus Snow], *E. Snow’s Reply to the Self Styled Philanthropist, of Chester County* (Philadelphia: 1840?), 2–3.
36. “Extract From Stephens’ ‘Incidents of Travel in Central America,’” *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842, 915.
37. “Zarahemla,” *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1842, 927.
38. “Stephens’ Works on Central America,” *Times and Seasons*, October 1, 1843, 346; emphasis added.
39. George Q. Cannon, “Buried Cities of the West,” *Millennial Star*, January 10, 1857, 18; emphasis added.
40. Parley P. Pratt, “Ruins in Central America,” *Millennial Star*, March 1842, 165.
41. John E. Page, “Mormonism Concluded: To ‘A Disciple,’” *Morning Chronicle* [Pittsburgh], July 20, 1842.
42. Orson Pratt, “Was Joseph Smith Sent of God?” *Millennial Star*, October 1, 1842, 289. Pratt himself never seems to have attempted the endeavor. For several contemporary approaches to the issue by Latter-day Saint scholars see John L. Sorenson, *Mormon’s Codex: An Ancient American Book* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2013); John E. Clark, “Archaeological Trends and Book of Mormon Origins,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 4 (2005): 83–104. This was a presentation delivered for “The Words of Joseph Smith” conference held on May 5–6, 2005, at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.
43. Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, 5th ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993).

MATTHEW ROPER

44. Don Domingo Juarros, *A Statistical and Commercial History of the Kingdom of Guatemala in Spanish America*, trans. J. Bailly (London: J. F. Dove, 1823).
45. Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzman, *Historia de Guatemala, o, Recordacion Florida* (Madrid: n.p., 1882).
46. “Facts are Stubborn Things,” *Times and Seasons*, September 15, 1842, 922. The passage cited is from Stephens and Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel In Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2:171–72.
47. Stephens and Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2:173–74, 176–77.
48. Stephens and Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2:174.
49. Mormon fought a Lamanite army of forty-four thousand with an army of forty-two thousand. Stephens and Catherwood mention Guatemalan armies of 40,000 and 46,000 (2:174, 176).
50. Stephens and Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2:176.
51. Stephens and Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan*, 2:173–74.
52. John E. Page, “Collateral testimony of the truth and divinity of the Book of Mormon—No. 4,” *Gospel Herald* 3, no. 27 (September 21, 1848): 125–26.
53. Brigham Young to F. L. Young, August 23, 1877, in Dean C. Jessee, *Letters of Brigham Young to His Sons* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 314.
54. Orson Spencer to W. C., November 17, 1842, in *Times and Seasons*, January 2, 1843, 51.