

# An Open Letter to Michael Coe

John L. Sorenson — 07-30-2012

Some people see a placid stream ahead of them and think the water must be safe to cross, only to find that their perception was faulty and deep holes await them. Something like that has happened to you in regard to your podcast with Mr. Dehlin about the Book of Mormon. Before you and other readers again stumble into the difficulties you encountered, allow me to offer some corrections.

## About Archaeology

- ❖ “These things don’t disappear forever. They leave traces.” “If you had iron or steel, you would expect to find these things, even if they were all rusted ... You’d find chemical remains.”

We see your loyalty to the ideals of archaeology, but surely you know that the realities are quite different. The first place where the two collide is in sampling. Probably no more than 200 ancient Mesoamerican sites have been seriously excavated, and those excavations have rarely dug into more than a small portion of the area of those sites. It would be surprising if as much as one-ten-thousandth of the information potentially obtainable by studying the material remains has so far been obtained. Sure, much of the rest would no doubt yield data mainly duplicative of what is already known, but some things could be new and even potentially revolutionary. Furthermore a large proportion of what has already been excavated has not been studied by contemporary methods or is not accessible for study.

So ancient remains of metals may “leave traces.” But can anybody name even a single site where “chemical remains” have been widely sought by modern methods? I doubt it.

An example of the sampling problem is evident at the site of Utatlan. Fox, Wallace and Brown (1992) reported finding by chance a location, “outside the site” proper where 200 molds for the manufacture of copper on an industrial scale came to light. The facility would have been far larger than needed for the city’s requirements. What is the chance that such an isolated facility outside the central ceremonial centers where excavation usually goes on would be discovered at other places?

Then there is the problem of accessing the information that does exist. I have spent considerable time searching site reports for mentions of metal objects that have been found that apparently date before the “metal curtain” of about 900 A.D. in Mesoamerica but are conventionally ignored in discussions of the history of metallurgy. Several hundred such specimens date from ca. 400 B.C. to A.D. 900, 153 of which were excavated by professional archaeologists (see my *Metals and Metallurgy Relating to the Book of Mormon Text* {Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1992}). So why bother to seek “chemical traces” of metal when actual specimens are totally ignored? This incidence of metal objects would be very surprising were it not for the fact that terms have been reconstructed in five major Mesoamerican language families (Proto-Mayan, Proto-Mixtecan, Proto-Mixe-Zoquean, Proto-Huavean, and Proto-Otomanguean) that mean “metal” or “(metal) bell,” all those words referring to times prior to 1000 B.C.

Obviously excavational archaeology has a long way to go in reconstructing an accurate history of Mesoamerican metallurgy, including both terrestrial and meteoric

iron among over a dozen known metals and alloys. Eminent metallurgical expert Dudley Easby commented regarding the general problem, “the relative [apparent] absence of metals in the early Americas constitutes one of the most infuriatingly enigmatic subjects in the history of technology” (1966), and Gordon Willey of Harvard said much the same thing: the question of the use of metals constitutes “the [Mesoamerican] anthropologist’s sorest dilemma” (1966).

The question of the presence of the horse in civilized Mesoamerica further illustrates the problem of what is acceptable archaeological documentation. C. E. Ray’s report (1957. “Pre-Columbian horses from Yucatan,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 38: 278) of finding horse bones in deep layers of the water hole at Mayapan (Yucatan) raised anew an issue that Mercer (1896) and Hatt (1953) had earlier raised with their finds of horse bones on the surface in Yucatan caves. The matter was compounded by Peter Schmidt’s 1988 work in Loltun Cave that found horse bones scattered through a number of layers of early pottery-bearing debris; he observed, “something went on here that is still difficult to explain.” (Interestingly, he was not aware of the finds Ray reported.) There are also further evidences for pre-1500 A.D. dates of other horse bones (including three radiocarbon-dated finds from North America). This, like the metals, is an “unfinished” archaeological story, in this case defying the dictum that “there were no horses” for the last ten thousand years in America. Simultaneously it shows the limits of the data revealed by excavations about which so much is said.

Yet another possibility is that some other species was counted as a “horse,” by the Nephites, for example. The Aztecs upon seeing Spanish horses referred to them as “the deer that people ride,” and there are pre-Columbian artistic representations of riders-on-deer. So what “was” a “horse” to ancient Mesoamericans?

## About the Book of Mormon

In approaching the Book of Mormon it is vital to understand its nature as an historical document. I demonstrated at length in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (50-56) that the volume is a lineage history, comparable to lineage histories common in Mesoamerica and elsewhere around the world. As such it gives primarily an account of the Nephite tribe. Other groups were brought under their aegis but little is said of those others. For example the “Mulekites” were incorporated into the Nephite kingdom under king Mosiah I. They were said to be more numerous than the Nephites proper, yet the entire record only contains about 400 words specifically about that majority group. This, of course, is comparable to the Popol Vuh, which is about a band of intruders from central Mexico; what the text says about the majority Mayan population is only a tiny fraction of what is told about the intruder elite. The Book of Mormon is largely about the minority who constituted the Nephite elite class, the record keepers, not about the mass of the population.

When one sees the scriptural records as about a minority, the issue about population becomes clearer. The tiny numbers of immigrants from overseas could never have multiplied on a scale to account for the later populations engaged in wars and so on. Clearly, indigenous populations were incorporated as nominal “Nephites,” “Lamanites” and “Jaredites.” Little-noticed parts of the text actually confirm such situations (see my 1992 article “When Lehi’s party arrived in the land, did they find others there?” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 1: 1-34).

- ❖ The Jaredites “didn’t really survive terribly long”
- ❖ The Jaredites “go back, what, something like four, five hundred B.C.”

The Jaredites left Mesopotamia at the time of the “great tower,” presumed to have been around the time of the earliest ziggurat, perhaps a little before 2500 B.C. Their demise as a functioning society was just after 600 B.C., two millennia later.

❖ Nephites “were highly civilized people”

In origin, yes, except that their small initial party (fewer than 35 men, women and children) slogged 1200 miles through the rugged mountains of western Arabia over an eight-year period, subsisting much of the time on uncooked meat. These circumstances would take most of the “civilization” out of anyone. When they embarked from the coast of Oman for their 20,000-plus-mile voyage, they took no animals with them and little technology except what knowledge they carried in their heads. Upon landing Lehi’s crew must have been about as deculturated as a frazzled band of people could be.

- ❖ “They had cattle, they had horses, they had wheat.”
- ❖ “Maize by the way isn’t really mentioned in the Book of Mormon.”
- ❖ “Introduced crop plants would not have become extinct.”

See above regarding horses. Immediately after landing (probably in coastal Guatemala) they “did find” “beasts in the wilderness” (“cow,” “ox,” “ass,” “horse,” “goat,” “wild goat”). At length some of those creatures ended up domesticated, by means and hands not described. Clearly the animals would have consisted of native American species to which the newcomers, by a process familiar to other groups encountering exotic fauna, applied “nearest look-alike names” to the newly encountered critters. (In my book, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 1985, 288-99, I suggest candidate native American species that might have been those listed/labelled animals.)

The first mention of grain cultivation occurred nearly 400 years later—“corn” (maize), “wheat” and “barley”; corn was the grain of choice. What crop the name “wheat” was given to is never clarified, but of course it would have been some native one (eventually Mesoamericans cultivated at least 13 species of grains). Domesticated barley was discovered in archaeological sites in Arizona and midwestern states 25 years ago, and could well have grown in Mexico too.

Regarding the seeds brought by Lehi’s party, many of them may have quickly gone extinct because of the very different ecological conditions between Arabia or Palestine and the new setting on the moist tropical coast of Guatemala. Imported plants do not necessarily survive such a change; consider the case reported by Bishop Diego de Landa that in 16<sup>th</sup>-century Yucatan, “We have set them [the Indians] to raising [European] millet and it grows marvelously well and is a good kind of sustenance” (Tozzer 1941, 196). Yet 350 years later botanists with the Carnegie Institution who inventoried the plants of Yucatan failed to find any trace of millet (Tozzer 1941, footnote 1051), after less than 400 years.

- ❖ “They had the compass to navigate by.”

Not at all. What they had was a device that gave Lehi’s original party travel instructions by divine intervention, but it was said to work by “faith,” not on any mechanical (“compass”) principle.

- ❖ “There are steel swords mentioned in the Book of Mormon, or shields or helmets or whatever.” “Yes, that’s correct.”

Lehi's party carried with them on their trek a sword of steel that was preserved as a sacred relic. When Nephites and Lamanites by the thousands were armed with swords, they obviously would not have been of metal, which was considered "precious," nor is there any reason from the text to suppose that they were. At one point a large group of Lamanites fled from military service, going to "the place of arms" to defend themselves. The description of the situation makes it appear to be an obsidian outcrop (possibly El Chayal). Their swords were very probably the obsidian-edged weapons called *macuahuitl* by the Aztecs. However at one point in Jaredite history their record says that they made "swords out of steel." This is an unexplained anomaly. (However, note that the term that is read "steel" in the King James Bible is currently translated by experts as "bronze.") A large variety of shields is known to have been used by Mesoamerican warriors from Pre-Classic times onward, but "helmets" are not mentioned at all in the Book of Mormon.

❖ "Wheeled toys are known in Classic times ... in Vera Cruz."

Actually these begin, at Teotihuacan at least, immediately after the time of Christ (Müller 1978).

❖ "Lets do the coins." "... if there were coins they would be chocolate beans. Why aren't chocolate beans mentioned in the Book of Mormon?"

Years ago the word "coins" was gratuitously inserted by a Mormon editor in the heading of Alma 11 (but since removed). There is no use of the term in the text itself. "Money" was said to be used, but Nephite money, like that in the Israelite homeland (the "shekel"), was in weight-determined units of some valued substance.

Cocoa beans were in use (how early no one knows) among the Maya, but throughout Mesoamerica a variety of other materials also served as "money." The constant fallback on Maya culture is understandable in the podcast, but Nephite culture was obviously not closely congruent with Maya culture.

❖ "Silk. Nothing."

The Spaniards described at least five Mesoamerican varieties of what they termed "silk" or its equivalent; none of them used the species that prevailed in East Asia. (A treatment of this topic appeared in my *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 1985, 232).

❖ "Seven-day calendar was unknown in Mesoamerica."

H. Neuenswander (1981) agreed with Eric Thompson that there was a seven-day week feature, based on a logical division (one fourth) of a 28-day lunar month. In any case the three mentions in the Book of Mormon of "week" do not say that the period was seven days; "weeks" of other lengths are known in various cultures around the world.

❖ "Chariots? They (Mesoamericans) never had chariots."

Correct. The meaning of "chariots" mentioned in the Book of Mormon text remains unclear. They are mentioned twice, in very limited geographical areas, in connection with horses. And, by the way, no chariot has ever been excavated in Palestine, despite documentary statements implying that they were very numerous. They are of course very unlikely to be found in ceremonial centers, the areas usually excavated by archaeologists.

- ❖ “Pig. Zero. Not one pig bone has ever shown up in pre-Columbian excavations.”

Oh, come now. Peccaries were hunted, kept and even herded (see Brian Dillon 1981), and they surely are “pigs.”

It is noteworthy that another supposedly “not-found-by-archaeologists” animal, the chicken (*Gallus gallus*), was finally found at a Classic Maya site, Caracol (Teeter 2004), but the only notice of the find was an incidental listing in a table of species whose bones had been found!

- ❖ “Elephants, there’s nothing. Absolutely zero.” “The Clovis people... , about ...10,000 BC. ... killed them all... .”

This is a good instance of converting (Paul Martin’s) hypothesis into “fact” without checking the data. Mastodon (unquestionably “elephant”) remains have been dated by radiocarbon at around 5000 BC in Florida (Martin and Webb 1974, 144-145), around the Great Lakes to 4000 BC (Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research 1975, 22), in the Mississippi Valley at near 3300 BC (S. Williams 1957), and perhaps to near 100 BC near St. Petersburg, Florida. (Hester 1960, 74, noted: “low terminal [C-14] dates for the mastodon indicate . . . lingering survival in isolated areas”).

In the Book of Mormon a single mention is made, in the Jaredite account (“There were elephants”), dated in the third millennium B.C., after which the record is silent, which may be taken as indicating spot extinction?

- ❖ “The illustrations in the popular edition of the Book of Mormon, you see that’s a Maya city.”

What do popular illustrations have to do with actual history? And even then how would you know that the illustrator had in mind a “Maya” city instead of merely a Mesoamerican city? There is too much “Mayanization” going on throughout this entire discussion. The text’s “Nephites” were not Maya in all probability; the “Lamanites” may have been partly so.

The same (as about the illustrations) may be said of the vignette about the RLDS missionary who had uninformed things to say about Book of Mormon people. Why even bring this up? Would he count as a “Book of Mormon archaeologist?!”

- ❖ “There are no King Benjamin’s or anybody like that” in Mayan literature.

Fallacious thinking. Would it make sense to say, “There are no Jesus Christ’s or anybody like that in Roman monuments or literature?” (Or Greek, or Egyptian, or Syrian, or Jewish, etc.?) Mention or not has no relevance to the question of whether there was a Jesus Christ. Furthermore, “history” was often rewritten by successors—“I am more than ever convinced the codices were destroyed at intervals and history was then rewritten to suit the ruler of the day” (Nigel Davies 1984). In any case you yourself have talked about there having been “thousands” of Maya books that have been lost or destroyed. One might wonder about the variety of their contents.

- ❖ When “we start getting extensive Maya inscriptions .... they don’t mention any of these wonderful people out of the Book of Mormon. Nothing”.

See the point just above. But how do you know the Nephites are not mentioned? "Mention" of a "people" is a matter of using a name or ethnic label, but what name would "the Maya" use if they had referred to the Nephites? Surely not the English translation, "Nephites." Of course we do not know the "native" name, in any language, which the "Nephites" bore, let alone what name the Maya would have used if they had referred to them.

- ❖ No writing for the Olmec, "which is peculiar if these people came from the Middle East."

A distinct system that had been known to a limited degree for many years came into much fuller light with discovery in the 1980's in south-central Veracruz of La Mojarra Stela 1 as well as on various supplementary fragments from elsewhere in Mesoamerica. That script was dubbed "Tuxtlatec" (Méluzin 1995) or "Isthmian." Its origin was attributed by Méluzin to the La Venta area, perhaps at about 500 BC, while Prem (in Barthel and Von Winning 1991, 52) believed it originated in the Central Depression of Chiapas. Arguably it was in use in Olmec/Jaredite times.

There is now evidence that a different writing system was functioning earlier in the Olmec era, before 600 BC (Pohl et al. 2002). A still different system, ancestral to Zapotec script in the Valley of Oaxaca, is claimed by Marcus and Flannery to be represented on a monument at San José Mogote, Oaxaca, which they date to 600-500 BC (Marcus 1976). In 2006 the Cascajel stone block with its inscribed script was announced, found near San Lorenzo Tenochtitlan in the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.

Then there is the cylinder seal found at Tlatilco by Fred Peterson that was reported on by Dave Kelley (1966) and which both he and John Graham at Berkeley believed to bear writing. That seal has now been dated at Oxford by thermo-luminescence from "2000 to 3200 years ago." Coming from Tlatilco and dating so, it has to be an Olmec object. (Incidentally, it has tentatively been connected stylistically to cylinder seals in Iran of the third millennium B.C. by a Near East expert on seals who was not told of its Mexican provenience!)

These artifacts indicate that as many as five styles of writing could have been in use among the Olmec, that is, in Jaredite times.

- ❖ Population. "The Aztecs could field fairly good-sized armies, but never that size" (hundreds of thousands).

The following facts are documented: The Quiché force opposing the Spaniards numbered 232,000 despite the fact that some groups abstained from the alliance. The Aztecs mustered a force of 400,000 in a fairly routine campaign against a nearby kingdom. Etc. More problematic is Alba Ixtlilxochitl's account of central Mexican history according to which a combined Aztec army at one point consisted of 700,000 men. Of the hazier past the historian said that in the last war of the "Tultecs" a total (including women) of "5,600,000" persons were slain. Even if we skeptically and arbitrarily reduce that figure by 90 per cent, the remaining number would be of the same order of magnitude as that reported in the Book of Mormon for the final battle at Cumorah.

- ❖ "There are no Semitic words whatsoever in it (Mayan). It's got no relation whatsoever with any languages that we know of in the Old World"

No archaeologist is qualified to speak in these absolute terms on this abstruse subject. Brian Stubbs, a leading scholar on the Uto-Aztecan language family, has shown that

languages of that group show major similarities with Hebrew and Egyptian (preliminarily in “A Few Hundred Hints of Egyptian and Two Dialects of Hebrew {or Northwest Semitic} in Uto-Aztecan,” a 142-page manuscript, 2004; in revision as a book, *More on Uto-Aztecan*). He concludes that the Uto-Aztecan family developed as a creole language formed from Hebrew, Egyptian and a native ancestral language of central Mexico which then divided multiple times to form the U-A family. Some, but not all, other Mesoamerican tongues show similar characteristics.

Meanwhile a number of other Native American languages have been connected to Old World sources, few of which had been suspected before (e. g., B. Fahey, “Mayan: A Sino-Tibetan language? A comparative study.” {*Sino-Platonic Papers* No. 130}{Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, Department of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies, 2004}). M. Swadesh (1961) was among other linguists who felt that “It is perfectly possible that a group of people having arrived speaking a new language [in the New World] eventually was absorbed into an already established linguistic community.”

The phenomenon he described would be like what took place with native “Toltecs” who migrated into Guatemala, where they came to dominate local populations: “Linguistic patterns of highland Guatemala suggest that Toltec influence involved no mass migration of Nahua speakers to the highlands. Only small numbers of the Toltecs must have come in contact with a well-established indigenous population, the invaders’ tongue being absorbed within the linguistic milieu of the more numerous indigenous population” (Carmack 1970). After only about 700 elapsed years Carmack found very little linguistic or cultural, let alone archaeological, evidence for their presence there as their history in the Popol Vuh reported. Yet today Mesoamericanist scholars all consider the Popol Vuh a fundamental source on the native pre-Spanish culture. The Book of Mormon deserves to be seen in the same way.

## About Joseph Smith

- ❖ Dehlin: “Joseph Smith himself you know, would walk around and see a pile of bones and say that was the famous Nephite warrior Zelph, or whatever; he would see a city and say this was the ancient city of blah, blah, blah ...” (Not contradicted by Coe.)

This statement is vastly exaggerated in terms of Smith’s real history.  
[You really didn’t have a very helpful interviewer did you?]

- ❖ Smith “claimed that it (Book of Abraham) was in reformed Egyptian and that he could read it.”

Factually untrue. J. Smith never said the record was in “reformed Egyptian.” He said he translated the Abraham record from “Egyptian” by inspiration, not “because he could read it.”

- ❖ In re. Joseph Smith. “He sees the incredible people like the Comanche and the Sioux and Cheyenne and people like that that probably would have influenced him a lot. He had to have horses.”

Patently impossible. Nothing was known in the eastern U.S. about horse-using Plains Indians in Joseph’s day, the 1820’s. In any case the Book of Mormon never suggests that “horses” were ridden by anybody.

## About “Book of Mormon archaeology” and the NWF

- ❖ The NWF. “They really never found plates of gold or wheels, or steel swords, or anything of the sort.” “Constantly arriving there in early days, were slight screwballs out of Salt Lake and places like that, coming down with metal detectors running around trying to find plates of gold and whatnot.”

This must be based on a gossip or rumor at best. The Foundation’s history yields nothing that suggests such an objective was held by anyone, or that such weird visits ever took place, nor do surviving personnel know of anything like this.

Assertions or intimations that archaeologists of the New World Archaeological Foundation have striven to find “proof” for the Book of Mormon are completely false. Nothing could be further from the truth. Starting with the first season of the NWF (in 1953), even before it had any connection with the LDS Church, the operational guidelines were that the research be conducted according to professional standards without any reference to the Book of Mormon, although the funding was from private LDS donors. Pedro Armillas was chosen as the first year’s field director upon guidance from A.V. Kidder, Gordon Willey and Gordon Ekholm, who constituted an advisory committee for Tom Ferguson. Gareth Lowe and I were the only archaeological people aboard the first season who were LDS. Other “student staff” members included Bill Sanders and Román Piña Chan who both later became premier Mesoamericanists and who could hardly be supposed to be closet Mormons. From the beginning non-LDS NWF archaeologists have out-numbered LDS believers.

From 1955 on, after Ferguson had appealed to the Church for support funds and received a commitment for the same (having exhausted his private funding sources), the eminent J. Alden Mason, emeritus professor at the University of Pennsylvania, who had become editor of NWF publications (as well as assisting with archaeology), supported a judgment from Ed Shook (Carnegie) about the objectivity of the foundation, when Mason made a definitive statement (in the Foreword to NWF Papers 1-4, 1956) about the non-involvement of the Church authorities in planning or reporting the NWF research. That position never varied from then to the present. With such powerful professional assurances, your own assessment visit to the Chiapas operation was hardly necessary. Your current intimation that there was a hidden Church agenda behind its generous support of the Foundation is both wrong and prejudicial to any fair discussion of the roles of the NWF and of the Church authorities.

- ❖ John Robertson, “fantastically good linguist”

Perhaps of interest: after Robertson retired from the BYU faculty, he and his wife served a Church mission where, among other things, they averred the authenticity of the Book of Mormon as an ancient text.

- ❖ “Land bridge into Asia. This is something the Book of Mormon archaeologists don’t really like to talk about.”

Why this statement was made is a complete mystery, in the first place because the frequent expression “Book of Mormon archaeologists” has no actual referents. Not a single archaeologist I know or of whom I have heard would call him- or herself a “Book of Mormon archaeologist.” I know of only two who ever did so, Wells Jakeman and Ross Christenson, both of whom have been deceased for quite a while. A few pseudo-

archaeologists of a journalistic stripe lurk around the fringes of the Mormon intellectual community, but they are all pretension and no substance. Moreover there is no reason why archaeologists who are Mormon would hesitate to discuss the Bering Strait route.

“Book of Mormon archaeologist” implies someone trained to a professional level who, however, focuses inordinately on relating that book to the results of archaeology to the exclusion of following professional archaeological goals. Frankly, there are none. Certainly I am not one!

A few other Mormon archaeologists and I have followed a course concerned with establishing plausible models of relationships between the Book of Mormon text and the materials of Mesoamerican archaeology. This activity has been carried on following the normal conventions of professional archaeological research, while accepting both L. Binford’s dictum (1983) that archaeologists must “prudently weigh” possible alternative explanations and judge which is more plausible, and B. Trigger’s view (1998): “To understand better what has happened in the past, archeologists must produce scenarios that are radically different from what has previously been conceived.”

- ❖ “The whole business of Book of Mormon archaeology, to find Zarahemla, to find the plates of gold that were inscribed

This deserves to be called nonsense.

## Near Eastern Links

- ❖ “So, basically, if you are looking for Old World connections and looking at the Near East, you’re looking in the wrong place.”
- ❖ “All sorts of things that are typically American .... Nothing to do with the Middle East at all. There’s nothing in the slightest bit Middle East about the Olmec.”

You might plead ignorance of any purely Mormon efforts to demonstrate a relationship between Mesoamerica and the Near East, but how could you not be aware of my 1971 article, “The significance of an apparent relationship between the ancient Near East and Mesoamerica,” in *Man across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*, C. L. Riley et al., eds., 219-241? (Austin: University of Texas Press)? That piece is now supplemented by “A Complex of Ritual and Ideology Shared by Mesoamerica and the Ancient Near East” (*Sino-Platonic Papers* No. 195). (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Department of East Asian Language and Civilization, 2009). (PDF accessible at [sino-platonic.org](http://sino-platonic.org))

You might well not yet have seen this recent item since the outlet is relatively obscure. It contains a list, along with extensive references to the literature for each item, of 380 correspondences between cult and ideology aspects of culture between the Near East in the second and first half of the first millennium B.C. on the one hand and Mesoamerica on the other. The striking nature and number of those correspondences makes it certain that there was a direct diffusionary event that anciently linked the two areas.

- ❖ “I’ve never seen anything there that would convince me that these people have Middle Eastern DNA.”

You were wise not to get involved in further discussion of this matter, which is full of pitfalls. The DNA of ancient Israelites is unknown. Would data come from sampling the bones from tombs in Palestine? I don't think Israelis would be very happy with such messing around with the bones, but in any case how would you know they were bones of a Jew? And in America, how would you know comparison was made with the bones of a "Nephite?" The tricky and indeterminate nature of the matter is fully discussed by real experts in D. Peterson, ed. *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research* (BYU Maxwell Institute, 2008).

I choose not to pursue further my commentary on your podcast; the process has become tedious, although additional points could be made. My intention has been to inform you about misunderstandings and errors in your statements. Surely you would not wish to continue saying what isn't factual.

Finally, I have a large book in the editing process (*Mormon's Codex* {Provo: BYU Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, and Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, forthcoming) that deals with these matters in much greater depth. (Its 97-page list of references includes 21 of your own writings.) When it is in print, I will be happy to send you a copy. It features 420 correspondences between the text of the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerican cultural patterns and archaeological sequences. On that basis, I maintain there is no alternative to understanding that the Book of Mormon text ("Mormon's Codex") could only have originated from the hands of a native Mesoamerican writer, and that as a result scholars like you will do well to study it as seriously as the Popol Vuh.

John L. Sorenson