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Strangers in their own native land: Joseph Smith, Mormons, and the orientalizating of an American people

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STRANGERS IN THEIR OWN NATIVE LAND: JOSEPH SMITH, MORMONS, AND

THE ORIENTALIZATING OF AN AMERICAN PEOPLE

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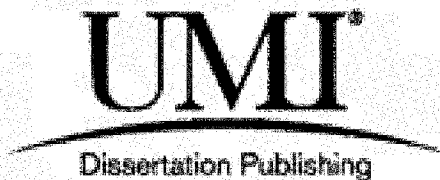
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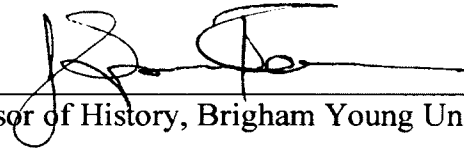
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ABSTRACT

SRANGERS IN THEIR OWN NATIVE LAND: JOSEPH SMITH, MORMONS, AND

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Emerging stronger than ever in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars, "orientalism" was more than just pictures of Turkish girls in a sultan's harem; it was a process of information sharing through art, literature, military campaigns, and politics. Joseph Smith founded the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, colloquially known as Mormonism, in the midst of this information exchange. A product of his era, he used orientalist rhetoric and imagery to connect the ideas he preached to ancient Judaism, thereby legitimizing the new religion within the context of a much older and more respected holy past. But he was not the only one incorporating perceptions of the Middle East into his writings. Non-Mormons used orientalism, specifically their perceptions of Islam, to understand a seemingly bizarre new religious movement. Through this process, both groups managed to transform otherwise ordinary Americans into strangers in their own land.

INTRODUCTION

A young man, known in the area in which he grew up as somewhat of a treasure hunter, claims to have found a set of golden or metal plates on which is written, in a Hebrew-Egyptian hybrid language, the history of a tribe of ancient Jews in North America and of the direct ministry and repercussions of Jesus Christ's time on the continent. This, to some, might sound like a completely unbelievable story, or even a set-up to a bad party joke. But to millions, it was and still is the beginning of the restoration of true Christianity in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.[1]

"The fact is," Joseph Smith himself proclaimed, "that by the power of God I translated the book of Mormon from hieroglyphics; the knowledge of which was lost to the world." And so began Mormonism, on the word of an "unlearned youth" who "stood alone...to combat the worldly wisdom and multiplied ignorance of eighteen centuries."[2]

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[1] The official name of the Mormon church is Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Practitioners of the faith are known as Latter-day Saints, or sometimes just Saints. This is often abbreviated in context as LDS, and this thesis will be employing that abbreviation. While originally wary of the term "Mormon" to describe themselves, the Latter-day Saints have more readily embraced it, particularly in recent decades, as a legitimate name. The name comes from their holy book, The Book of Mormon. For simplicity's sake and as a reflection of the majority of the sources used, this thesis will be using the term "Mormon" to describe the church, religion, and people.

[2] Joseph Smith, letter to James Arlington Bennet, November 13, 1843.

Many people responded almost immediately, joining the new church and seeking to convert others. Faced with the task of gathering new converts and establishing legitimacy for a religion still in its infancy, Mormons sought to connect themselves to a biblical past. Products of their era, which was filled with reports, stories, and art coming out of Turkey, Egypt, and the Levant, Mormons drew upon popular knowledge and perceptions of the Middle East to reaffirm their new beliefs. That is, they "orientalized" themselves, especially in three ways: through the language of their scripture, by their understanding of Native Americans to be remnants of tribes of ancient Israelites, and finally, by polygamous marriage practices not unlike those of Abraham and other biblical patriarchs.

Non-Mormons, also products of their era, used similar tactics of appropriating knowledge from "the Orient," to attack Mormons, removing them from a biblical past, and instead comparing them to what was thought of at the time as the world's most dangerous anti-Christian threat: Islam. For non-Mormons, the orientalist struggle was to deny all legitimacy that Mormons claimed for themselves. Non-Mormons used orientalist and anti-Islamic rhetoric to first draw potential followers away from the "fraud" Joseph Smith, then warn of the dangerous potential of a Native American–Mormon alliance, and finally, to force assimilation of the Mormon people through legal and political action taken in Utah against the practice of plural marriage.

This thesis aims to show that, through the process of orientalization by both Mormons and non-Mormons, a group of otherwise ordinary Americans were transformed into strangers in their own land.

Books about Mormons, their religion, and their prophet, Joseph Smith, have been published since the 1830 publication of the first edition of the Book of Mormon. During the nineteenth century, authors were primarily concerned with either defending or refuting the faith. Since foundation of the Church, Americans, Mormon or non-Mormon, have been trying to piece together the complex life and beliefs of the Church's prophet, his controversial politics, and the new religious theology he introduced. Syntheses that explore the religious history of the United States and early America have shown a general lack of consensus on how to treat Mormonism as a religion, whether or not Joseph Smith was a deliberate fraud, and the sincerity of early Mormons' beliefs and practices.

Defining Mormonism within the American religious tradition is a process that can easily fall prey to polemical arguments. For non-Mormons, it is perhaps easy to view Joseph Smith as a flawed man with an active imagination, or, more controversially, a fraud who intentionally duped thousands of people in his day and whose legacy lives on, corrupting individuals for generations. With such divisive subjects as modern prophesy, extra-biblical holy writings, polygamy, and martyrdom in the Church's complex past, it is distressingly easy for historians to allow bias and polemics to shape their arguments. Indeed, prior to the 1970s, most publications examining Mormon history focused just on these topics and nearly always contained either a defensive or offensive agenda with regards to the Mormon faith.

In recent decades, Mormon scholarship has been headed in new directions. Rather than writing to either prove or disprove Mormonism as a religion, Joseph Smith as a prophet, or plural marriage as a viable marriage system, scholars have published works aimed more at contextualizing Mormonism, the Church, and its followers within

nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first century societies. Even believing and practicing Mormon scholars have sought to write without focusing on the defense of the faith in their work. This trend has become known as "new Mormon history." According to Richard L. Bushman, noted scholar of American history and author of the Joseph Smith biography *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*, "new Mormon history was a peace mission, expressing a desire for intellectual commerce with a nation that had once seemed like a wall of enmity to Utah Mormons."[3] With the emergence of new Mormon history has come work not only on Joseph Smith and polygamy, but also on Mormon theological origins, cultural and societal reactions to the Mormon religion, and even the emergence of a distinct Mormon culture.[4]

New Mormon history continues to draw Mormonism from the fringes of American religious history toward the center. Jan Shipps, preeminent scholar of Mormon history, wrote of Mormonism being the "hole in the doughnut of Western history," and lamented the fact that historians often ignore or avoid the story of Utah and the Mormons in Western histories of the United States.[5] That hole has begun to be filled in. In recent years, Mormonism has appeared as a significant part of the American historical narrative

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[3] Richard L. Bushman, "What's New in Mormon History: A Response to Jan Shipps," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 2 (2007): 518.

[4] For a discussion of possible origins for LDS theology and Mormon origins, see Grant H. Palmer, *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002). For an exploration of anti-Mormon reactions to Mormonism throughout its history see Terryl L. Givens, *Viper on the Hearth* (New York City: Oxford University Press, 1997) and J. Spencer Fluhman, *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012). Givens and Fluhman both broach the topic of whether or not Mormons are a distinct cultural group. For further discussion of Mormon culture, see also Terryl L. Givens, *People of Paradox: A History of Mormon Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[5] Jan Shipps, "Gentiles, Mormons, and the History of the American West," in *Sojourner in the Promised Land: Forty Years Among the Mormons* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 21.

in books such as Richard Francaviglia's *Go East Young Man* and Daniel Walker Howe's *What Hath God Wrought.*[6]

The idea that Mormonism and orientalism can be paired together with regards to anti-Mormon sentiments throughout American history is not particularly new. One only has to look at the literature from the nineteenth century to recognize that the Mormon–Muslim and Joseph Smith–Muhammed comparison was a favorite of anti-Mormon writers from the beginning. Fluhman's *A Peculiar People* contains a well-thought-out argument about these comparisons with ample evidence to support his claims.[7]

Nor is orientalism as a topic in Western history new. Edward Said's influential *Orientalism* was published in 1978.[8] Said's thesis was not necessarily related to orientalism as a way of understanding how previous generations of Americans have understood their own world, but more a critique of historians' tendency to look back at history as orientalists themselves. Said's orientalism is defined as a negative and largely false set of cultural assumptions made by the "West" about the "East." These assumptions were not just present in the past, but, to Said, were prolific in contemporary scholarship as well. Said argued that this was a major inhibitor of our ability to truly understand historical relationships between cultures and peoples foreign to our own.

Francaviglia's *Go East Young Man* takes Said's thesis and twists it in a more positive direction. Orientalism to Francaviglia is dangerous when adopted by scholars,

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[6] See Francaviglia, "Chosen People, Chosen Land: Utah as the Holy Land," in *Go East, Young Man,* 87-126 and Howe, "Pursuing the Millennium," and "Westward the Star of Empire," *What Hath God Wrought,* 285-327 and 701-743.

[7] Further mention and discussion of these comparisons can be found in Givens, *Viper on the Hearth,* 130-131.

[8] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

especially scholars who claim an objective look at their studies. On the other hand, however, "orientalism is...a vehicle by which knowledge about places and peoples is transferred and applied."[9] Francaviliga argues, then, that when orientalism consists of the simple transference of knowledge, it is not inherently a bad thing. It is the use of that knowledge and the intentions of those who promote cultural assumptions who make orientalism either bad or good. "Just as orientalism may be the result of varied intentions," he explained, "it may also be well-informed or ill-informed."[10] In examining how orientalism influenced the perceptions of the American West from the nineteenth to the twenty-first centuries, Francaviglia drew specific attention to the Mormon story and Utah history. He devoted an entire chapter's worth of analysis and specific argument that Utah was seen as a "chosen land" by a "chosen people" and both promoted and understood as such by Mormons and non-Mormons alike.[11] Francaviglia's work demonstrates that there are ways in the study of orientalism in American culture can contribute to the understanding American religious outsiders.

Timothy Marr, a professor of American Studies, also challenged Said's formulative of orientalism. Instead of acknowledging possible positive aspects of orientalism, however, Marr suggested that Said's critique of orientalism, which focused on the European, rather than American, aspects of the trend, was incomplete. Marr focused exclusively on Islamic orientalism, or islamicism, to borrow his term, rather than

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[9] Richard V. Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 2011), 10.

[10] Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man*, 10.

[11] Francaviglia, "Chosen People, Chosen Land: Utah as the Holy Land," in *Go East Young Man*, 87-126.

also addressing the orientalizing of China, Japan, and India. To Marr, islamicism has been a part of American history from the earliest settlements. Religious groups, politicians, military leaders, artists, and writers all engaged in islamicism as a way of building and promoting their own arguments by otherizing Islam itself. The anti-Mormons who islamicized the Mormon people and religion did so "as a means of defining the infidelity of the Mormon example and negating its claims to a Christian genealogy."[12]

What current scholarship has neglected, however, is the orientalizing that Mormons did to themselves. As a religion that was developed and grew on American soil, and a religion that celebrates the place of America in the theological history and future of the world, Mormonism can provide insights into American society at large, especially when explored it in the context of its foundational years in the early republic. Joseph Smith's publication of the Book of Mormon, his subsequent preaching and development of the Mormon faith, and the foundation of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints all happened in the midst of the nineteenth century orientalist craze.

"Orientalism" is not just pictures of Turkish girls in a sultan's harem; it is a process of information sharing through art, literature, military campaigns, and politics. With the expansion of European and American imperial power in the Middle East and North Africa, particularly after Napoleon's Egyptian campaign and the re-discovery of the Rosetta Stone at the turn of the nineteenth century, western fascination with a romanticized east spread dramatically. Scientific tracts, missionary reports, and travel narratives were published for every audience, including even schoolchildren.

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[12] Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 186.

Contemporary art depicted places like Turkey and Egypt as exotic, and the notion of "antiquity" and a reconnection to a more noble, biblical, or classical past permeated American popular and high culture. Used by non-Mormon and anti-Mormon Americans, orientalism is a process of understanding a seemingly bizarre new religious movement; used by Mormons themselves, it was a process of legitimizing their new religion within the context of a much older and more respected holy past.

CHAPTER I

"NO ONE INTENDED BUT SMITH HIMSELF": EGYPTOMANIA AND THE TRANSLATION PROJECTS OF JOSEPH SMITH

> "Yea, I make a record in the language of my father, which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians."[1]

> "And now, behold, we have written this record according to our knowledge, in the characters which are called among us the reformed Egyptian, being handed down and altered by us, according to our manner of speech."[2]

The connection between Mormonism and orientalism was present from the new religions' earliest days. Mormonism's original claims to Hebraic origins started with language. The orientalization of language served as a way to legitimize new Mormon doctrine within a biblical timeline and tradition. The non-Mormon response drew on orientalist rhetoric just as quickly. Anti-Mormon writers carefully worked to separate Joseph Smith from his desired tradition and instead place him alongside perceived anti-Christian frauds like Muhammed.

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[1] 1 Nephi 1:2. The Book of Mormon is written and arranged much like the Bible, with books, chapters, and verses. Citations of the Book of Mormon will follow the biblical citation format, referencing first the book – here, First Nephi – then the chapter, then the verse.

[2] Mormon 9:32

The story of Joseph Smith's discovery of the golden plates, on which was written what would eventually be published as the Book of Mormon, has pervaded culture through a variety of mediums. Most people at some point in their lives have come in contact with Mormons in one way or another, through smartly dressed missionaries knocking at the door, satire in evening sitcoms, or Broadway musicals. Though not everyone is familiar with how the events unfolded, the skeletal form of the story of Smith discovering the Book of Mormon is not entirely foreign to many Americans.

The story, as told by Joseph Smith himself in the introductory pages of the current publications of the scripture, begins with an evening of prayer and "supplication to Almighty God" in the fall of 1823 in Palmyra, New York. Smith claimed that he was visited by an angel who told him, "God had a work for [him] to do." He was advised on where to find "a book deposited, written upon gold plates, giving an account of the former inhabitants of this continent," along with "seer" stones that would aid in the translation of the book.[3]

The place where this book was supposed to be deposited was a hill "convenient to the village of Manchester, Ontario County, New York." Joseph Smith made several trips to the hill to dig for the plates before he eventually found them and was permitted by the angel to remove them from the ground. Having been, as he claimed, commanded by God not to show them to anyone, he wrapped them in a tunic and kept them out of sight of his family, his friends, and his neighbors.[4]

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[3] "The testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith," The Book of Mormon.

[4] Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 83.

As recounted by historian Richard L. Bushman, Joseph Smith faced trouble from neighbors and townspeople who took their curiosity far beyond conventional nosy interest. When offers of payment to see the golden plates were denied or ignored by Smith and his family, some townspeople tried to take matters into their own hands. Joseph Smith's mother, Lucy Mack Smith, claimed that a mob of at least fifty men were planning to force Joseph to reveal the plates. Having been advised by some friendly neighbors, Joseph and his wife left town and relocated to Harmony, Pennsylvania.[5]

Once they were settled in Harmony, Joseph Smith finally set about the task of figuring out how to translate the plates he had found. The angel Moroni had, according to Smith, provided "seer stones" to aid in the translation process. The stones, as Smith described them, were fastened to a breastplate and buried with the golden plates. Recalling "ancient or former times," Smith believed that "God had prepared [the stones] for the purpose of translating the book."[6] Smith called the stones Urim and Thummim, names drawn from vague references to prophesying tools in the Old Testament.[7]

Royal Skousen, a professor of linguistics and English at Brigham Young University, has explained the translation of the scripture. According to Skousen, the process had two phases. During the first phase, which lasted from late 1827 to early 1828, "Joseph first copied some of the characters directly from the plates onto sheets of paper,

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[5] Lucy Smith, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet: and His Progenitors for Many Generations.* (Liverpool: S.W. Richards for Orson Pratt, 1853), 113; Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism,* 85.

[6] Joseph Smith, *History,* Volume 1, verse 35.

[7] For references to Urim and Thummim, see Exodus 28:30 which reads, "Put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the LORD."

from which sheets he would then translate his transcribed characters into English by means of Urim and Thummim."[8] By mid-1828, however, the process had changed. Instead of copying the characters, Joseph would place the seers stones at the bottom of a hat, into which he would then put his face, so as to block out light and distractions and facilitate the revelation of the translated words. Once they were revealed to him, he then read the translations aloud for dictation by whomever was helping him at the time, usually his wife Emma or his neighbors and friends, Martin Harris and Oliver Cowdery.[9]

The type of control that Smith had over the dictation of the Book of Mormon text varied as well. Skousen divided it into three categories: loose control, or the process in which "ideas were revealed to Joseph Smith, and he put the ideas into his own language"; tight control, or the process in which "Joseph Smith saw specific words written out in English and read them off to the scribe"; and iron-clad control, or the process in which "Joseph Smith or the interpreters [seer stones] themselves would not allow any error made by the scribe to remain (including the spelling of common words)."[10]

According to Skousen, most of the eyewitness accounts indicate that the process of iron-clad control was the most common throughout the translation and transcription process. According to Joseph Knight, a friend of the Smiths, "if [a word] was not Spelt

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[8] Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* by Noel B. Reynolds (Salt Lake City: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1997), Chapter 5.

[9] Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, Chapter 4.

[10] Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited*, Chapter 4.

rite it would not go away till it was rite, so we see it was marvelous."[11] Skousen demonstrated through the text of the original manuscript of the Book of Mormon that the presence of rearranged sentences and passages and crossed-out words or misspellings are evidence that Joseph Smith corrected his scribes based on information he gleaned from the seer stones.

Smith, and those who believed his stories and revelations, understood the golden plates to be a written account of early inhabitants of the North American continent, descendants of tribes of Israel who made their way across the Atlantic several centuries before the time of Christ. The language the book was written in, "the language of my father," according to the Mormon prophet Nephi, was a form of Egyptian with strong Hebraic influences. Joseph Smith referred to it as "reformed Egyptian."

Descriptions of the plates vary among a number of sources: the Eight Witnesses, a group of eight men from the Smith family and the Whitmer family close to the Smiths in the early days of church history, all of whom signed a statement testifying to the validity of the golden plates; Joseph Smith himself; Orson Pratt, one of the founding members of the church movement; and Charles Anthon, a secular scholar who saw transcribed versions of the text presented to him by Martin Harris who was working with Smith on translating the plates. Most of the witnesses describe the plates as being engraved with "Egyptian characters" that appeared to have been "cut into the plates with some sharp instrument."[12]

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[11] Dean C. Jessee, "Joseph Knight's Recollection of Early Mormon History," *BYU Studies* 17, number 1 (Autumn 1976): 35. Quoted in Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in Reynolds, *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited.*

[12] Kirk B. Henrichsen, "How Witnesses Described the 'Gold Plates,'" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 10, issue 1 (2001): 16-21, 78.

The context in which Joseph Smith was working during his translation project of these is important in understanding possible influences on his labors. In the 1820s, both the United States and Europe were gripped by an intense fascination with "antiquity," or ancient history, particularly the history of Egypt, the Holy Land, and the rest of the Near East. Following the 1798 invasion of Egypt led by Napoleon and his armies, the obsession with antiquities and Egyptian history had reached "a fever pitch," according scholar Richard L. Bennett.[13] The interest was helped along by the discovery of the Rosetta Stone, containing a passage written in Egyptian hieroglyphs, an Egyptian demotic script, and Ancient Greek. Interest was further solidified by the works of the French linguist Jean-Francois Champollion, who eventually translated and deciphered the hieroglyphics.

Although most of the academic work emerging from this "Egyptomania" as it came to be known, was European in origin, an American element to the craze was popular. Despite living in rural New York and Pennsylvania, Joseph Smith would have been well aware of the trends in American culture. Bennett highlighted the most likely connection that Joseph Smith had to the broader Egyptomania trend. Martin Harris, friend and former neighbor to the Smiths in Palmyra, New York, was a well-established farmer with enough money and connections to help Smith in his early endeavors both to translate and publish the Book of Mormon. Harris, in turn, was likely well-acquainted with the Bradish family, including Luther Bradish, a New York politician with extensive experience in Egypt, Turkey, and south-Eastern Europe.

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[13] Richard L. Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee': Martin Harris and the Three Wise Men of the East," *Journal of Mormon History* 36, number 1 (Winter 2010): 187.

Bennett has connected the Bradish and Harris families and provided strong evidence to support his claim. Both families moved to Palmyra in the 1790s. Martin Harris's father and Luther Bradish's father were both elected overseers on various projects in the small upstate New York village in 1796. And, by 1811, Martin Harris and Luther Bradish's brother Charles had taken over their fathers' positions.[14]

After the loss of his wife and son in childbirth in 1816, Bradish applied for diplomatic service to the American government. John Quincy Adams, at the time Secretary of State, "was particularly interested in promoting American commercial interests with the Ottoman Empire at a time when acute tensions were developing between Turkey and the Muslim countries on the one side, and Greece, Russia, and Great Britain on the other."[15] Adams accepted Bradish's application and sent him to Turkey as a "private citizen but in a secret, quasi-official capacity" with the "assigned objectives...to discover whether American interests would be furthered by a treaty of amity and commerce" with the Turkish government in Istanbul.[16]

While in the Middle East, Bradish traveled extensively on secret diplomatic trips throughout both Egypt and Turkey and was exposed to "areas few other Americans of his day even knew existed."[17] He eventually returned to New York in 1825, "unsuccessful in negotiations with Turkey, largely because of the outbreak of hostilities between Greece and Turkey and British support of the popular Greek quest for freedom from Ottoman

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[14] Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee,'" 185-186.

[15] Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee,'" 186.

[16] Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee," 187.

[17] Louis B. Gimelli, "Luther Bradish, 1783-1863," (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1964): 54, quoted in Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee,'" 187.

rule."[18] Although Bradish was unsuccessful diplomatically, he had gained valuable knowledge that made him "more conversant with contemporary American interests in the Middle East and with Egyptian archaeological excavations and the emerging field of biblical archaeology than any other American."[19] Martin Harris, no stranger to Bradish and his family, was more than likely familiar with at least some of Bradish's overseas experience.

Luther Bradish became specifically connected to Joseph Smith and the emergence of Mormonism in a peculiar story about the translation and authenticity of the plates. In 1828, Smith copied some of the characters from his plates onto paper and sent the paper and Martin Harris to New York City for possible translation and verification. According to Richard Bushman, precisely why Harris went to New York City is "unclear." According to Joseph Knight, a friend of the Smiths, Harris went in order to obtain a translation. Lucy Mack Smith corroborated Knight's version, and "implied that once Joseph had a translation of all the basic characters, he could carry on by himself."[20] Joseph Smith himself said nothing more than that he was "commanded to go," with Martin Harris giving the same vague statement.[21] A Palmyra newspaper reported that Martin Harris took the transcription because of "blind enthusiasm" for Joseph Smith and

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[18] Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee,'" 188.

[19] Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee,'" 189.

[20] Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 86.

[21] Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 87.

his discovery, despite the fact that the discovery was treated "almost invariably…as it should have been – with contempt" by others.[22]

Martin Harris's version of the story of what became known as the "Anthon Transcript" essentially proceeds as follows: after taking the transcribed pages from Joseph Smith, he traveled first to see Luther Bradish, then on to see Samuel L. Mitchill, and finally, Charles Anthon. Anthon was an up and coming academic from Columbia College in New York City who specialized in Classics. He was well-known for his expertise in the Greek and Latin languages and had contributed to and edited the 1825 edition of *A Classical Dictionary*.[23]

According to the story accepted by Mormons as told by Martin Harris, Charles Anthon verified that the transcribed characters were indeed Egyptian. The professor "stated that the translation was correct, more so than any he had before seen translated from the Egyptian." When Harris "then showed him those which were not yet translated," Anthon further confirmed, "that they were Egyptian Chaldaic, Assyriac, and Arabic; and he said they were true characters."[24] The positive response from Anthon took a turn, however, when Anthon asked where the characters had come from and if he could look at the original document. When Harris replied that "an angel of God had revealed it," Anthon became angry and ripped up the certificate of verification he had written for Harris. When Anthon told Harris that he would translate the characters himself if the

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[22] "Golden Bible" *Rochester Advertiser and Daily Telegraph*, August 31, 1829, reprinted from *Palmyra Freeman*, August 11, 1829.

[23] Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*, 87; Bennett, "'Read This I Pray Thee,'" 190-194.

[24] Martin Harris, quoted in Joseph Smith, *History of Joseph Smith, the Prophet*, vol. 1 of *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints*, edited by B.H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Desert News Press, 1902), 64.

plates were brought to him, Harris "informed him that part of the plates were sealed, and that I was forbidden to bring them." Anthon responded, "I cannot read a sealed book."[25]

The story of the Anthon Transcript as told by Martin Harris is an aspect of a process of "otherizing" that early Mormonism went through. Although Joseph Smith had not made any claims in 1828 about establishing a new denomination of Christianity, and while those who first became interested in and accepting of his revelations and stories did not yet consider themselves founding members of a new religion, the process was nonetheless already set in motion. According to Robert C. Fuller, "religious revolutionaries" such as Joseph Smith "built a viable identity by stressing the degree to which they diverged from mainstream culture." This could be a conscious or unconscious process.[26]

The specific language in which Martin Harris related his story is how this very conscious or unconscious process began to play out. In claiming that Anthon responded, "I cannot read a sealed book," Harris was turning Anthon into an active agent in an ancient prophecy from Isaiah, found in the Old Testament. The prophecy, as found in the King James Version of the Bible, the version with which Joseph Smith and Harris would have been most familiar, reads, "and the vision of all is become unto you as the words of a book that is sealed, which men deliver to one that is learned, saying, Read this, I pray thee: and he saith, I cannot; for it is sealed."[27]

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[25] Martin Harris, quoted in Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 1:64.

[26] Robert C. Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries: The Rebels Who Reshaped American Religion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 81. For an even earlier example of this argument, see Laurence Moore, "How to Become a People: The Mormon Scenario," in *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 25-47.

[27] Isaiah 29:11

The reinterpretation of the episode of the Anthon Transcript as the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy effectively sets Joseph Smith's golden plates, and the words they contain, apart from any other claims made by religious men and women at the heads of emerging religious sects and denominations. Regardless of whether or not Anthon really did use those words, or whether Harris's version of events reflects reality, his version of events has become standard in the Mormon system of beliefs and has served to offer validation for Joseph Smith's revelations. When Harris recounted the story later to a local newspaper, he claimed that, while "he went in search of some one to interpret the hieroglyphics," he instead "found that no one was intended to perform that all important task but Smith himself."[28] In other words, Harris's convictions were strengthened by his understanding of the events as a message from God that Joseph Smith alone was able to translate the "reformed Egyptian" of the holy text.

From the translated text emerged a story of the early inhabitants of the North American continent. The first book of the scripture is that of Nephi, son of Lehi, patriarch of a small band of extended family members who left Israel in a time of persecution and, under God's instructions, sailed for America. Although the history of the ancient Israelites living in America supposedly aligns more closely with traditional Hebraic history, the Egyptian connection remains through the crucial element of written language. Lehi was a descendant of Joseph, the son of Jacob who was sold into Egypt by his brothers. Upon leaving Jerusalem, Lehi and his family took with them a "record of the Jews – the writings of the Old Testament up to about six hundred years BC." Mormon

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[28] "Golden Bible." *The Gem: A Semi-Monthly Literary and Miscellaneous Journal*, September 5, 1829, 70.

history and tradition teaches that this record was "engraven" with "Egyptian hieroglyphics." Continuing on the tradition of their forefathers, Lehi, Nephi, and their descendents continued to write their historical record in the same script, albeit "reformed" somewhat through influences of Hebrew.

If one were to operate under the assumption that the Book of Mormon is not factually correct, nor a product of direct revelation from God, but instead in part, if not entirely, a human creation, then connections to the pervading culture of the early American republic can be seen in this association of the early inhabitants of North America to Egyptian and ancient Jewish history. As previously stated, Joseph Smith was no doubt well aware of the political, social, and academic interest that had spread throughout the United States as a result of Napoleon's escapades and European publications on Middle Eastern languages and cultures, including the study of biblical history.

According to Edward Said, one of the results of the publications of Napoleon's *savants*, the educated philosophers, scientists, and linguists that traveled with his invasion, was the emergence of "modern orientalism." Orientalism, as Said defined it, was the idea that Europe and "the West" came to define "the East" through a process of misrepresentation of facts and a reliance on preconceived archetypes. "Orientalism assumed an unchanging Orient," according to Said, and that unchanging Orient offered a "specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" against which Europe could set itself.[29] Essentially, envisioning the East as "the Orient" turned it into an "other"

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[29] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1979), 96, 273.

which, contrasted against the West as an "us," gave Europe and the United States the power to portray themselves as more advanced, better, or correct.

The world in which Joseph Smith lived was obsessed with the "otherness" of the Middle East. Turkey, Egypt, and the Levant were seen as exotic, directly embodying the histories through which they were studied and understood. The lands and their people were considered as wholly different from the modern and forward-thinking Westerners. Yet, as a key branch of antiquity, the Orient emerged also as an important factor in classical studies. Appreciation of these mixed perceptions of the Orient was a ubiquitous aspect of American culture, from academics to the common citizen.

When Joseph Smith published the Book of Mormon, he did so as both a new additional scripture and a factual history of early America. By connecting the stories of the peoples within its pages to the biblical history of the Middle East, he was, consciously or unconsciously, playing in, Said has retrospectively argued, to a process of cultural appropriation or cultural projection. Smith was legitimizing the work by placing it within the established body of biblical literature and history. At the same time, he was otherizing the work by presenting it as having been written in an untranslatable language that only he was "intended" to understand.

Elements of orientalism and Egyptomania appear also in the non-Mormon response to Joseph Smith and his new publications. Throughout the 1820-1840s, when the Latter-Day Saint movement was just getting under way and news of Joseph Smith as a translator was just spreading throughout the country, the general public was being

treated to lecture series and newspaper reports on a variety of topics related to the Middle East.

Beginning in 1798 with news of Napoleon's invasion, newspapers in New England published reports and descriptions of Egypt. Because Americans were well aware of Napoleon's invasions, many editors assumed that they would also be curious as to the countries he had invaded. A New Bedford, Massachusetts newspaper, in 1798, began a long description of Egypt by stating that "the attention of mankind is involuntarily drawn to that quartre" from which the reports of the "conquering heroism" of Bonaparte were emerging. Knowing that, the editor stated, "a sketch…from the history of that country, it is presumed, will not be unacceptable to the readers of the *Medley* at this time."[30] The article describes Egypt as "another world," full of "a variety of novel objects," "barbarous sounds," "beards & mustachios," "long garments, which…serve rather to veil than cloth the body," "hideous camels," and other "unusual objects."[31] The traveler, incapable of understanding Egypt or its people, "remains absorbed in surprise and astonishment."[32]

Forty years later, the *Southern Patriot*, in Greenville, South Carolina, reported of a young man, Henry James, who, upon returning from a tour of Europe, gifted the Albany Institute a copy of "the celebrated Egyptian relic, found at Rosetta in Egypt."[33] The newspaper further reported that it was the Stone, which contained "three inscriptions [of]

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[30] "Historical Traits," *The Medley* or *Newbedford Marine Journal* (November 16, 1798), 1.

[31] "Historical Traits," *The Medley*, 1.

[32] "Historical Traits," *The Medley*, 1.

[33] "The Celebrated Rosetta Stone," *The Southern Patriot* (November 7, 1837), 2.

Greek, Cauptic, and Hieroglyphic" that led to the "discovery of the key to the hieroglyphic alphabet which has caused such sensation in the literary world."[34] Clearly knowledge of the translation progress being made in Europe by Champollion and others was widespread.

The *Southern Patriot* also reported, ten years later, on a Mr. Gliddon, who was in the area giving lectures on the very topic of translation and "the language and writings of the ancient Egyptians."[35] Mr. Gliddon began his lecture, the paper reported, with an invocation of the mystery of foreign and ancient languages: "What studious man is there whose imagination has not been caught straying from conjecture to conjecture, from century to century, in search of the debris of a forgotten tongue, of those relics of words that are but the fragments of the history of *Nations*?"[36]

Within the language of these newspaper reports spanning a period of nearly fifty years, one can understand how some non-Mormons publicly reacted to Joseph Smith and his claims about the Book of Mormon. Mr. Gliddon described himself as a "studious" man whose imagination was caught in ruminations on philology and history. When reporting on the translation of the Rosetta Stone, the *Southern Patriot* specified that it was the "literary world" that had been caught up in the sensational news of the decipherment of the Stone's engravings. When traveling within the Middle East itself, the *Medley* emphasized that even while traveling in person, man is not truly ever capable of

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[34] "The Celebrated Rosetta Stone," *The Southern Patriot*, 2.

[35] "Mr. Gliddon's Second Lecture," *The Southern Patriot* (November 15, 1847), 2. For a report on Mr. Gliddon's earlier lecture series on Egypt and the Middle East, see also, "Miscellany. From the American Traveller. Mrd. Gliddon's Lectures," *The Farmer's Cabinent*, (January 13, 1843), 1.

[36] "Mr. Gliddon's Second Lecture," *The Southern Patriot*, 2.

understanding the culture enough to feel comfortable or to see the sights, hear its languages, or to view the people as anything other than in habitants of "another world."

Joseph Smith was the son of an indebted farmer, whose work included contracted labor and digging for treasure. Not surprisingly, when he claimed to be the only one in America who could translate and understand what he claimed were "reformed Egyptian" hieroglyphs, he was almost immediately and nearly exclusively met with contempt. Most non-Mormon reports and publications emphasized Smith's lack of formal education and "ignorance" as grounds for dismissing his claims. Eber D. Howe, author of one of the first anti-Mormon books, published in 1834, claimed that Joseph Smith was raised by "lazy, indolent, ignorant and superstitious" parents who did nothing to instill in their son the disposition "to obtain an honorable livelihood by labor."[37] As a result, Joseph was inclined to "impose upon the world by a pretended discovery of a new Bible" in order to gain fame and money.[38] Howe emphasized the "extreme ignorance and apparent stupidity of this modern prophet" but did point out that, to believers, those were Joseph's "greatest merit[s]."[39] Just as Martin Harris believed that his visit to Charles Anthon had been the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy, Joseph's other early followers believed that his lack of education meant that his apparent ability to translate must have come as an undeniable gift from God.[40]

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[37] E.D. Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled: or, A Faithful Account of the Singular Imposition and Delusion, From its Rise to the Present Time.* (Painsville, Ohio: Telegraph Press, 1834), 11.

[38] Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 11.

[39] Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 12.

[40] For further arguments in this vein see, Gordon Wood's analysis of anti-intellectualism as emblematic of the politics of equality, democracy, and popular sovereignty in the early American

To non-Mormons, though, Smith's ability to translate was the sign of an imposter. Isaac Hale, Joseph Smith's father-in-law, signed an affidavit, published in Howe's book, deriding Smith and warning his early believers. "I told them," Hale stated, "that I considered the whole of it a delusion, and advised them to abandon it."[41] Hale and others worried that the small but growing group of followers gathering around Joseph Smith were "dupes" destined to have their money, property, time, and lives stolen from them.

Charles Anthon, the scholar visited by Martin Harris, provided a signed affidavit as well. His affidavit contradicts Anthon's story and highlights the ways in which each side played up its beliefs in order to discredit the other. Martin Harris insisted that Anthon verified the transcribed characters as Egyptian, in line with Isaiah's prophecy, but Anthon vociferously denied Harris's account.

"The whole story about my having pronounced the Mormonite inscription to be 'reformed Egyptian hieroglyphics,'" Anthon stated in the opening paragraph of his letter to Howe, "is *perfectly false*."[42] Anthon went on to claim that he immediately perceived the transcribed characters brought to him a "hoax." The professor's language throughout his letter was incredulous and defensive. He emphasized the apparent absurdity of the translation process: the seer stones; Joseph Smith placing his face into a hat through which to read the text the stones showed him; and that only Smith had access to the trunk containing the gold plates and hid himself behind a curtain when translating. He added that, upon hearing these details, he "changed [his] opinion about the paper and, instead of

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republic. Gordon Wood, *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[41] Isaac Hale, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 265.

[42] Charles Anthon, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 270.

viewing it any longer as a hoax upon the learned, I began to regard it as part of a scheme to cheat the farmer [Martin Harris] of his money."[43] Claiming he had Harris's best interests in mind, Anthon "communicated [his] suspicions to [Harris], warning [Harris] to beware of rogues."[44]

Regardless of how the meeting really went and what the two men really said to each other, Anthon, like Harris, later framed the story so as to support his own beliefs and opinions. He believed the transcribed characters and Joseph Smith's story to be the work of a "scheming rogue," rather than a divinely inspired prophet. He portrayed himself as the hero, trying to save Martin Harris from Smith's machinations. And furthermore, he removed the connection to Egyptian from the story entirely, claiming that the characters he saw were instead, "Greek and Hebrew letters, crosses and flourishes, Roman letters inverted or placed sideways...arranged in perpendicular columns, and...[ending] in a rude delineations of a circle divided into various compartments, decked with various strange marks, and evidently copied after the Mexican Calendar."[45]

In its early days, Mormonism fit itself into the overall concept of orientalism through its own devices. Joseph Smith connected the Mormon story to the Middle East through the tale of several forgotten Jewish patriarchs leading small groups of colonists to North America. In doing so, he was making an effort to legitimize a new and difficult-to-accept story by connecting it to an already accepted version of biblical history. In

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[43] Anthon, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 271.

[44] Anthon, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 271.

[45] Anthon, quoted in Howe, *Mormonism Unveiled*, 272.

claiming that the plates he found were written in "reformed Egyptian," he was, consciously or unconsciously, drawing on the widely circulating news of the tales of Egyptian hieroglyphics and Champollion's efforts to decode the Rosetta Stone.

When the public responded by calling Smith "ignorant" or a "rogue," emphasizing his poor, rural, uneducated background and his former work as a contract laborer or treasure-hunter, he and his early followers capitalized upon the criticism. As Fuller argued in *Religious Revolutionaries*, "persecution gave their struggle value and reinforced their identity as saints called by God to separate themselves from a wayward world."[46] Martin Harris conceptualized the story of the Anthon Transcript to meet the requirements for the fulfillment of a biblical prophecy. Other early followers believed that the very ignorance that non-Mormons were deriding was a mark of the divine seal of approval on Joseph Smith's work.

As reported in the *Advocate and Messenger* in December of 1835, "the public mind has been excited" by reports of Egyptian papers, mummies, and the Mormon claim of a connection to their history. But excitement was not necessarily a good thing.[47] The public was interested in Joseph Smith and the new religious denomination growing up around him. They were curious about Mormon claims to be part of an ancient American history not yet understood by the public at large and intimately connected to the history and culture of the also little understood Middle East. But curiosity and interest could switch to passionate and violent dislike and hatred at the drop of a hat.

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[46] Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 81.

[47] Oliver Cowdery, "Egyptian Mummies – Ancient Records," *Messenger and Advocate*, (December 1835), 233.

While Mormon claims stayed innocently confined to Egyptian hieroglyphics and miraculous translation abilities, they could be easily dismissed by the more well-respected learned and academic worlds and the rest of the populace. When the theological aspects of Mormonism were revealed as so strikingly different from the status quo, Joseph Smith and the LDS movement came to be perceived as a threat to the American way of life and therefore a dangerous thread in the American cultural and religious fabric.

CHAPTER II

"HIS SYSTEM FILLED THE EAST": ORIENTALIZING AMERICAN PEOPLES

"Which is my word to the Gentile, that soon it may go to the Jew, of whom the Lamanites are a remnant, that they may believe the gospel and look not for a Messiah to come who has already come."[1]

"Whosoever I will shall go forth among all nations, and it shall be told them what they shall do; for I have a great work laid up in store, for Israel shall be saved, and I will lead them whithersoever I will, and no power shall stay my hand."[2]

Although the story of the discovery and existence of the Book of Mormon might be somewhat familiar to many Americans, what the book actually contains is far less well known. During the nineteenth century, however, pieces of the book were frequently published in newspapers throughout the country, and arguments over its content arose almost immediately. As revealed to Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon was considered

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[1] Doctrine and Covenants 19:27. The Doctrine and Covenants is a Mormon holy book containing lectures that set forth Mormon doctrine and a series of revelations. The book is organized into sections and verses and is technically part of the open scriptural canon of the Church, meaning that it can be added to as further revelations are received. Doctrine and Covenants are hereafter referred to as D&C and citations follow the biblical format.

[2] D&C 38:33.

to be a factual history of ancient North America. As such, the Native Americans, who were understood to be inhabitants of ancient North America, were incorporated into Mormon theology.

The incorporation of Native Americans into Mormon theology, however, created a complex paradox within Mormonism, especially as it related to American culture: Mormons claimed a religious and historical connection to Native Americans as ancient Jews; non-Mormons protested by framing Mormons within anti-Islamic rhetoric. Whereas Joseph Smith became, to Mormons, a connection to biblical history and the translator of a new revelation with which to save people lost to apostasy, he became, to non-Mormons, a potentially violent second Muhammed on the verge of leading an uprising against ordinary and respectable Americans.

Here arises a second question, however, and one important to modern scholars in understanding the process of orientalizing Mormons in the nineteenth century: how is it that Mormons could publicly portray themselves and Native Americans as remnants of ancient Jewish culture yet simultaneous be thought of as a covert American Islam by non-Mormons? After all, the biblical patriarchy and tribal culture that Joseph Smith was invoking in calling Native Americans a lost tribe of Israel was separated from Muhammed and the emergence of Islamic culture, not only by geography but also by thousands of years. The key to understanding this apparent paradox lies in understanding nineteenth century changing conceptions of time.

The title page of the Book of Mormon states that the record within "is an abridgement of the record of the people of Nephi, and also of the Lamanites – written to

the Lamanites, who are a remnant of the house of Israel; and also to Jew and Gentile."

Nephi and Laman were both sons of Lehi, a patriarchal leader who led a band of Jews fleeing Jerusalem out of Israel and across the sea to the "promised land," or North America, in about 590 BCE.[3] Nephi and Laman led feuding factions within the tribal family, who eventually divided into two people – the Nephites and the Lamanites, who lived the next several hundred years in a state of nearly constant warfare. The Nephites are usually depicted within the Book of Mormon as a righteous people, while the Lamanites are usually depicted as the wicked antitheses of the good Nephites.

Mormons believe, as is written in the Book of Mormon, that after Jesus was crucified in Jerusalem, his resurrected body appeared in North America to preach to the inhabitants on the continent. These included both the Nephites and the Lamanites. The two groups converted fully to Christianity and lived in peace and harmony from about 35AD to about 231AD, before, once again, the Lamanites grew more selfish and wicked and fell away from true Christian beliefs.[4] The Nephites and the Lamanites were thus again at war. In 421AD, there was a final battle between the Nephite and Lamanite peoples and the Nephites were destroyed. Mormon, a Nephite historian, had compiled records of his people and passed them down to his son Moroni before being killed. Moroni abridged the records, added some writings of his own, then buried the resulting book. With the burying of the book was buried the last of the Nephite society and people.

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[3] 1 Nephi 18:5-23 contains the story of the voyage from Israel to the "promised land."

[4] 4 Nephi 1:1-23 describes the years spent in peace and prosperity. 4 Nephi 1:24-34 describes the emergence of "pride" and materialism as well as "churches which professed to know the Christ, and yet they did deny the more parts of his gospel," "false prophets," and the works of Satan and the wicked. 4 Nephi 1:35-41 describes "a great division among the people" between "a people who were called the Nephites, and they were true believers in Christ" and those "who rejected the gospel" called "Lamanites" who "willfully [rebelled] against the gospel of Christ."

The Lamanites, no longer true Christians or Jews, reigned over the land.[5] It was this tribe of peoples that, the nineteenth century Mormons believed, were the ancestors of the Native Americans.[6]

Joseph Smith and his fellow Latter Day Saints were not the first, nor certainly the last, people to offer explanations of Native American origins and connect the Native American past to that of ancient Israel. According to B.H. Roberts, noted Mormon historian, interest in explaining Native American origins was "intense and widespread" among both the learned and the general public.[7] Interest in investigating and accounting for Native American origins went as far back as the first European settlers.

While nearly continuous wars between Native Americans and Europeans saw purposeful explorations of Native American history fall somewhat by the wayside, by the nineteenth century, interest in Native American origins had peaked yet again. Ethan Smith, for example, published *Views of the Hebrews or the Tribes of Israel in America* in 1823, with two more editions published in quick succession. In 1826, in *The Wonders of Nature and Providence*, Josiah Priest both republished and responded to Ethan Smith's work. Priest wrote at length about the likelihood of Native American's origins being connected to Israel, and included everything from prophetic evidence directly from the Bible to explanations about race. According to Priest, many aspects of Native American

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[5] Mormon 3:17-4:23 describes the final battles between the Nephites and the Lamanites during which "the Nephites were driven and slaughtered with an exceedingly great slaughter." Mormon 5-8:6 relates the final destruction of the Nephite peoples.

[6] D&C 54:8 uses the term "Lamanite" to describe Native Americans living in Missouri in the nineteenth century. The text reads, "take your journey into the regions westward, unto the land of Missouri, unto the borders of the Lamanites."

[7] B.H. Roberts, *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, edited by Brigham D. Madsen (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985), 153.

cultures were Hebraic in origin, particularly, he claimed, their languages, offering indisputable "proof" that Native Americans are descendants of the lost tribes of Israel. His work contained millennial undertones as well; he argued that understanding the Native Americans as Israelites was crucial, as the time of "their restoration is drawing near."[8] In addition to *The Wonders of Nature*, Priest, who fancied himself both a historian and a scientist despite lack of formal training, also published *American Antiquities*, in which he further discussed the Native American and ancient Israelite connection. Between 1833 and 1835, the book quickly ran through four editions, demonstrating the popularity of both Priest's writings and of speculations about possible Native American origins.

Why white Americans became interested in Native American origins and history in the nineteenth century is a complex question whose answers vary, depending on the historians who give them. Whereas some argue that Americans were trying to establish a uniquely national identity by honing in on the main thing that made America different from Europe – the Native Americans – others argue that Native Americans began to fascinate white Americans, particularly those in New England, because they were "vanishing" from every day life.[9] Some Native Americans were fighting to be considered American citizens and to be party to all the rights citizenship would provide; others rejected association with the Euro-American political and social identity in favor of

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[8] Josiah Priest, *Wonders of Nature and Providence Displayed: Compiled from authentic sources, both ancient and modern, giving an account of various and strange phenomena existing in nature, of travels, adventures, singular providences, &c.* (Albany: J. Priest, 1825), 372.

[9] For a discussion of the nineteenth-century interpretation of colonial and Native American history and the concept of the vanishing Indian, see the chapter entitled "The Curse of Metamora," in Jill Lepore, *The Name of War: King Philip's War and the Origins of American Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 191-226.

asserting a new Native American or tribal nationalism.[10] At the same time, thanks to the policies of Andrew Jackson and his Indian Removal Act, Eastern tribes were being pushed further and further west, out of sight and mind of the majority of northern white Americans.

Samuel Farmer Jarvis, a preacher well-known for sermons that supported the theory of Native Americans as Israelite in origin, was quoted in Josiah Priest's *The Wonders of Nature* to explain his interest in the subject of Native American history. "The history and character of the Indian tribes of North America," he said, was a topic that, while "for some time...a subject of no inconsiderable curiosity and interest with the learned in Europe," had only just been drawing renewed attention from American scholars. Jarvis claimed that, "As the Indian nations are now fast vanishing, and the individuals of them come less frequently under our observation, more lively interest than ever in the study of their character and history" was not only justified but should be encouraged.[11] To Jarvis, the fact that the Native Americans were thought to be "vanishing" lent both an air of mystery and the removal of a potential threat, creating ideal circumstances for investigating their history. Of course, it should be noted that because the Romantic scholars of New England considered Native Americans to be vanishing, there was no move to corroborate theories of their origins and understandings

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[10] William Apess aggressively campaigned for Native American citizenship rights. See Apess, "Eulogy on King Philip," in *Writing New England: An Anthology from the Puritans to the Present*, edited by Andrew Delbanco (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001), 346-355. For a discussion of other Native American views on Native and Euro-American relations in the nineteenth century, see Daniel K. Richter, *Facing East from Indian Country: A Native History of Early America* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), especially chapter 6, "Separate Creations."

[11] Dr. N.S. Jarvis, quoted in Priest, *Wonders of Nature*, 377-378.

of their culture and history with the Native Americans themselves. Nor did nineteenth-century scholars give much credence to the idea that Native Americans were even capable of having history.

Joseph Smith, intentionally or not, fit into the growing trend of offering explanations about Native American origins. According to Richard V. Francaviglia, several questions regarding Native Americans persisted in nineteenth-century society: that of their race, their origins, and their redemption and conversion. By incorporating Native Americans into Mormon theology, the Book of Mormon offered three answers in one fell swoop. First, the Indians had lost their original Israelite physical traits by being exposed to a harsh environment and were unable to gain their whiteness back immediately because of their apostasy. Second, explanations of origins and racial theories of Native Americans were placed within a biblical timeline, with historical legitimacy offered through a detailed genealogy tracing back to ancient Jewish patriarchs mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. And third, Mormon belief offered Native Americans redemption through conversion, something that had been an original and generally failed goal of the first generations of colonists who arrived in North America in the seventeenth century.[12]

As with many religious movements of the mid-nineteenth century, the theological foundations of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were rife with millennial undertones, particularly when it came to conversion of Native Americans. Millennialism is the belief that society has entered, or will soon enter, into a period of judgment lasting one thousand years before the second coming of Christ. To many Christians, the

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[12] Richard V. Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man: Imagining the American West as the Orient* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011), 98-99.

conversion of Jews to Christianity is essential before the period of judgment can begin and the coming of paradise draw near. Latter-day Saints believed not only that Native Americans were descended from ancient Jewish tribes, and thus connected to biblical history, but also that Native Americans, upon seeing a resurrected Jesus after his crucifixion in Jerusalem, had converted to Christianity and lived for several hundred years as righteous Christians. The conversion process for Native Americans was thus twofold: as a Jewish people, their conversion was necessary for the second coming of Christ, and as a Christian people, their conversion from apostasy was necessary for them to become a pure and righteous people once again.

Joseph Smith received many revelations commanding Mormons to preach to Native Americans with conversion as the ultimate goal. Most of these revelations are recorded in Doctrine and Covenants, a book that is part of the Mormon scriptural canon containing lectures on doctrine as well as revelations from God. Chapter nineteen was revealed to Joseph Smith in the summer of 1829. In that chapter, God commands Smith and all Latter Day Saints "that thou shalt not covet thine own property," property meaning the scriptures that make up the Book of Mormon. Instead, the mission is to "impart it freely" as it is "the truth and the word of God...that soon it may go to the Jew, of whom the Lamanites are a remnant, that they may believe the gospel, and not look for a Messiah to come who has already come."[13]

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[13] D&C 19:26-27. Mormons believe that on one level, the "covet" and "property" language of this passage refers to directions given by God to Martin Harris. He was instructed to help finance the publication of the Book of Mormon, which he afforded to do by mortgaging his farm. However, many believe that a less practical and more spiritual level of interpretation can be placed on this passage, thus giving it the interpretation used in this argument.

One of the biggest ironies of nineteenth-century Mormon beliefs about Native Americans, as pointed out by Francaviglia, was this Israelite connection. Most American Mormons were white Americans of European decent who considered themselves part of a pure and noble Christian history. Mormons believed that, through assimilation to the Euro-American way of life, Native Americans could essentially become white Mormon Americans, and thus also part of that pure and noble Christian history. But as direct descendents of ancient Israelites, it was Native Americans – not white, Euro-American Mormons – who were most directly related to biblical history. Therefore, in the end, it was the less "pure" Euro-Americans who should redeem the more "pure" Native Americans through conversion.[14] Essentially, the Saints were simultaneously viewing both the Native Americans and themselves as the more righteous and pure people. However, this paradox within the doctrine and practices of the nineteenth-century Saints did not appear to hinder conversion efforts in the slightest.

The conversion of the Native Americans to Mormonism was a source of major conflict between Mormons and non-Mormons, especially in the Mormon communities in Missouri and Illinois. There were many anti-Mormon residents on the American frontier who viewed the Saints as trouble makers and feared Mormons would form alliances with Native Americans. Such possible alliances, anti-Mormons argued, threatened the non-Mormon way of life.

In order to understand the orientalist and anti-Islamic rhetoric used against Mormons by these anti-Mormons, it is important first to understand how most Americans viewed themselves contextually in history. Throughout most of the history of

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[14] Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man*, 99.

Christendom, understandings of time came from the Bible. In the seventeenth century, an Irish bishop, James Ussher published a chronology based upon the Bible and contemporary understandings of natural philosophy in which he calculated the creation of the known world to be in 4004 BCE. Ussher's date stood as accepted fact for many years, and, while individual scholars very occasionally called it into question, most religious or governmental institutions never seriously doubted its authenticity.[15]

The most important aspect of dating the world as such is the fact that the entirety of human history was understood to exist within the confines of the Judeo-Christian tradition. To Christendom, then, everyone in the world existed in the same story, one that followed a single time line: from the Old Testament and the Jewish patriarchs through the coming of Jesus Christ to earth as the Messiah, through to nineteenth-century Christianity. Groups whose doctrine challenged traditional Christian beliefs and worldviews, including the Latter-day Saints and Muslims, were usually automatically considered anti-Christians.

Nineteenth century Americans were, according to historian Timothy Marr, far more aware of the Islamic political and cultural world than most citizens and scholars assume today. "This was in part," Marr explained, "because the Ottoman (or Turkish) Empire, the political center of the first orient to be encountered by Westerners moving east, was still a formidable political reality in world affairs," despite the fact that its "contemporary clout" was vanishing.[16] The Ottoman Empire's period of military and

[15]Thomas M. Allen, *A Republic in Time: Temporality and Social Imagination in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 147.

[16] Timothy Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 9.

political decline coincided with the expansion of the power and size of the United States. When combined with the millenarian spirit of American missionaries living and working in the Middle East, Americans had plenty of opportunity to be culturally aware of Islam and the Ottoman orient. The United States, many thought, was "fit to replace (even if only symbolically) the decadent and outmoded Turks, whom many viewed as a despotic and satanic opposition." Most importantly, the "transcendence of an increasingly partisan and divided transatlantic heritage, combined with the general absence of Muslims within domestic political constituencies, rendered the Islamic world a global matrix for imagining more universal fantasies of nationalist enterprise."[17]

Americans were part of a long Christian tradition of viewing Muslims as the prime example of anti-Christianity. As Marr stated, "unwilling to view Islam as a legitimate religious dispensation, Westerners from as far back as the Crusades have imagined it as a post-Christian provocation."[18] A provocation requires a response, and Westerners responded, "by devising an archive of ideological fictions aimed at defusing the heretical rivalry of what Edward Said has called its 'original cultural effrontery.'"[19] In other words, Americans exaggerated anti-Christian aspects of Islam that may or may not have even existed in the first place but could very well have simply been fictions, invented by the West to better frame Islam as an anti-Christianity.

Most non-Mormons, already exposed to this way of thinking with regards to Islam, were quick to apply the same principles to homegrown movements they believed

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[17] Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 9-10.

[18] Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 4.

[19] Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 4.

to be equally anti-Christian. Mormonism, to outsiders, seemed rife with similarities to Islam, including, but not limited, to the proclamation of a new prophet and new scripture. While Islam had Muhammed and the Quran, Mormonism had Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon. And once this initial connection was drawn, it was nearly impossible not to let pre-existing prejudices against Islam to bleed into the formation of new prejudices and fears against Mormonism.

In 1830, the same year the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints was officially founded, Abner Cole, a journalist from upstate New York, began publishing excerpts of the Book of Mormon in order to "warn the public." Cole advised his readers not to view Joseph Smith as a prophet and called him a "spindle shanked ignoramus" better suited to be understood amongst the likes of "ancient impostures" like Muhammed.[20]

This parallel drawn between Smith and Muhammed served a purpose. As J. Spencer Fluhman argued, "Muhammed ultimately helped anti-Mormons cope with both Smith's assumed chicanery and his otherwise inexplicable success."[21] Nineteenth-century Americans were far more aware of Islam that many modern historians had originally given them credit for. But for the most part, their understanding of Islam was limited to broad generalizations and stereotypes generated by an overwhelmingly Christianized perspective on time and history.[22]

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[20] Abner Cole, "Gold Bible," *Reflector* (Palmyra, NY), June 30, 1830 and January 6, 1831.

[21] J. Spencer Fluhman, "'An American Mahomet': Joseph Smith, Muhammed, and the Problem of Prophets in Antebellum America," *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 3 (Summer 2008): 30.

[22] Islam featured almost as prominently as Judaism did within the eschatology of early American Protestantism. In typically millenarian vision, the mass conversion of the Jews as well as the destruction of Islam would precede the second coming of the Messiah. For further discussion of

Many of the things that Americans believed about Islam originated in Humphrey Prideaux's tract, first published in Europe in the late seventeenth century but reprinted in two editions in America in 1796 and 1798. Prideaux believed and wrote that Muhammed designed Islam based on an amalgamation of Judaism, some "Christian heresies," and "sensual delights" in order to best draw in new followers.[23] This is essentially what nineteenth-century Americans perceived that Joseph Smith was doing. To non-Mormons, the connections of Mormonism to their perceptions of Islam were easy to see: by identifying Native Americans as descendents of ancient Jewish tribes, Smith incorporated Judaism; claiming to be inspired by divine revelations and professing to be the one true Christian church, Smith incorporated "Christian heresies"; and with the 1843 revelation allowing plural marriage, Smith incorporated "sensual delights."

Muhammed served as a common go-to for examples of imposture, and most nineteenth-century Americans, somewhat inexplicably, thought of his success as proof of his lies. This thought process is an example of what Timothy Marr called "domestic orientalism." Marr argued that "a primary strategy of many Protestant reformers was to domesticate islamicist opposition in order to 'infidelize' the practices of domestic communities within the United States whose ideologies were suspect and whose behaviors transgressed conventional bonds of communal virtues."[24] The Mormons operated outside of many American norms, most obviously in the practice of polygamy

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early American understanding of Islam, see Thomas Kidd, *American Christians and Islam: Evangelical Culture and Muslims From the Colonial Period to the Age of Terrorism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 1-37.

[23] Prideaux referenced and quoted in Fluhman, "'An American Mahomet,'" 32.

[24] Marr, *The Cultural Roots of American Islamicism*, 11.

beginning in 1843, but through other aspects as well, especially in the belief in a new scripture and modern prophet. Non-Mormons capitalized on the most obvious oddities of Mormon doctrine and practices in an effort to otherize Mormons and separate them from the "true" American tradition. The more successful Joseph Smith got, to the bemusement and concern of most non-Mormons, the more easily comparisons to Muhammed were made.[25]

In 1840, an author identified only as a "Philanthropist of Chester County" drew connections between Mormonism and Islam in a piece he wrote primarily "in order more fully to acquaint the public with [Mormons'] ridiculous and astounding errors." In writing with this purpose in mind, he is just one among many authors in the nineteenth century who drew connections between Mormonism and Islam with the express purposes of discrediting the Mormon religion and warning non-Mormons of the dangers of Mormonism. "Shall we have here in our enlightened country," Philanthropist wrote, "a Mahomet and Koran? Let those who would be convinced of the effects of countenancing imposture, read an account of the state of those countries, wherein Mahometism has prevailed...and they will not be much disposed to favor...Mormonism, which if unshackled, perhaps, would be many degrees the worse of the two."[26]

Writing in 1838, James M'Chesney provided one of the most scathing attacks on Mormonism. M'Chesney's pamphlet, entitled *An Antidote to Mormonism*, explicitly framed Mormonism with anti-Islam orientalist rhetoric and connected this to fears of Native American-Mormon relations. M'Chesney believed that Mormons "are dreaming

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[25] Fluhman, "'An American Mahomet,'" 30.

[26] Philanthropist of Chester County, *Mormonism Unmasked, Showed to be an Impious Imposture, and Mr. Bennett's Reply Answered and Refuted* (Philadelphia: T.K. & P.G. Collins, 1840), 8.

now, as they were at the beginning, of obtaining the Indian influence." He believed that "they expect the remnant of the seed of Jacob, as they call the Indians, to massacre and slaughter all that will not join in their dark proceedings." Perhaps anticipating that such a blatant connection might at first be hard to swallow, M'Chesney acknowledged that "people may laugh at such an idea as this," but, he reminded his readers, "so they did at Mahomet, no doubt, till his system filled the East, scourged that side of our earth, and has held dominion for twelve hundred years!"[27] To M'Chesney, the danger of Mormonism was not simply in the imposture of Joseph Smith as a prophet, but in what he was doing with his false message: converting Native Americans. According to M'Chesney, it was only a matter of time before "Smith, with all his deluded followers, and the Indian tribes, will possess the nations, while their blood will enrich the soil."[28]

M'Chesney was not the only American who feared a Native American uprising, inspired by Mormon teaching and led by Joseph Smith. William Harris, writing in 1842, thought that "while the idea of a second Mahomet arising in the nineteenth century may excite a smile," Mormons' "ultimate design" was to "concentrate their numbers…[and] unite themselves with the Indians." He added that, "it will not be at all surprising, if scenes unheard of since the days of Feudalism should soon be re-enacted."[29]

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[27] James M'Chesney, *An Antidote to Mormonism; A Warning Voice to the Church and Nation; The Purity of Christian Principles Defended; and Truth Disentangled From Error and Delusion* (New York: NY: Burnett & Pollard, 1838), 9-10.

[28] M'Chesney, *An Antidote to Mormonism*, 10.

[29] William Harris, *Mormonism Portrayed, its Errors and Absurdities Exposed, and the Spirit and Designs of its Authors Made Manifest* (Warsaw, Illinois: Sharp and Gamble Publishers, 1841), 44. For a similar argument on the topic of Muhammed-Smith comparisons in the nineteenth century, see J. Spencer Fluhman, *"A Peculiar People": Anti-Mormonism and the Making of Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012), 29-39.

In his study of the tendency to understand the American west in terms of "the Orient," Richard Francaviglia presented evidence that gives a clearer picture of nineteenth-century perceptions of Native Americans, particularly those on the frontier. These perceptions make it easier to understand why it was more than a connection between Joseph Smith as prophet and Muhammed as prophet that fostered the orientalist rhetoric of anti-Mormonism. Francaviglia argued that there was already a tendency to view Native Americans as orientalized, even outside of the belief that they were possibly descended from ancient Jewish tribes, but instead in islamicist terms as well. In 1775, for instance, James Adair published some descriptions of south-eastern Indian traders as being "Arab-like pedlars." In 1812, Daniel Clark Sanders compared Indian women to "Arabian wives" in their work customs. And in 1861, British explorer Sir Richard Burton described Native Americans as being "like the Bedouin Arabs," from their general hospitality to the clothes they wore.[30] If Native Americans were already thought of as Arabs or Bedouins, it is a logical assumption that there would be concern that Joseph Smith, as an "American Mahomet" would lead them in an uprising against non-Mormon Americans of European descent.

As Fluhman pointed out, the 1838 Mormon War in Missouri "sparked an anti-Mormon field day."[31] After the Mormons were ejected from Missouri and moved to Illinois to establish the stronghold of Nauvoo, anti-Mormon fears were further elevated. As William Harris assumed, "the object of Smith, in all this, is evidently to collect all his followers into one place, and thus to concentrate all his power and enable him to better

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[30] Francaviglia, *Go East, Young Man*, 15-17, 46.

[31] Fluhman, "'An American Mahomet,'" 43.

secure wealth."[32] With concentrated power and secure wealth, Smith would, anti-Mormons believed, have all the resources he needed to establish an empire in America, just as Muhammed had done in the Middle East.

For their part, the Latter Day Saints of the nineteenth century saw themselves as firmly rooted within the Judeo-Christian tradition. They believed themselves to be deeply connected with a Jewish past. As Francaviglia eloquently put it, "to Smith, the American landscape was haunted by the memories of Old World peoples who ventured here more than two thousand years before Columbus." Those peoples brought with them the "Garden of Eden" and the "altars of Abraham." And while "on the one hand this might seem to devalue America as a place…looked at in another light, it dignifies America as being a place where God spoke to man."[33] Connected to God through the American landscape and the experiences of the ancient Israelites who first arrived on the continent, Mormons viewed themselves as the pure Christians, better connected with the Judeo-Christian timeline than their non-Mormon neighbors.

Non-Mormons, however, rejected these connections. Rather than being a legitimate religion or historical tradition, Mormons were a body of anti-Christians threatening the American way of life. As such, they were lumped into the same group as Muslims, who, non-Mormons believed, were the epitome of anti-Christianity. Anti-Mormons mocked Joseph Smith's founding beliefs and the Latter-day Saint movement as a whole, and they expended much energy on warning other Americans of alleged dangers

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[32] Harris, *Mormonism Portrayed*, 44.

[33] Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man*, 88.

of the movement. If Joseph Smith was to be believed rather than discredited, and allowed

the opportunity to gather an army made up of delusional converts, both whites and Native

Americans, America as a whole would be in danger of falling prey to his sword, just as

had happened with Muhammed in the Middle East.

In fact, of course, biblical Jewish history, particularly the lore of the lost tribes of

Israel, is thousands of years separated from Muhammed and the rise of Islam. And yet

Mormons and Native Americans alike were somehow seen as simultaneously Jews,

Arabs, and Americans. What emerges from this investigation, then, is a sense of

timelessness or a shifting in the understanding of time within the early American

republic.

As Thomas M. Allen argued in *A Republic in Time*, time in the early republic was

not simply a single idea shared by a common people, but instead "heterogeneous, local,

and transient," and "multifarious and protean, riven with conflict."[34] Time was based on

both religion and the natural world: years, months, days, and hours, as Allen noted, were

"originally a partitioning of the natural periods of the day and night in the practices of

medieval monks."[35] This religious and natural way of conceptualizing time changed,

however, when it "morphed into the more rigid forms of mechanical timekeeping"

evident in the introduction of minutes and seconds as divisions of time.[36]

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of new scientific theories that led to a

fundamental change in the understanding of time. Recall Ussher's dating of creation to

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[34] Allen, *A Republic in Time*, 10, 219.

[35] Allen, *A Republic in Time*, 2.

[36] Allen, *A Republic in Time*, 2.

4004 BCE, and one can see that human antiquity had long been understood to exist within a very limited timeframe, established by biblical chronology. As Allen showed, scientists and naturalists, including the Comte de Buffon, James Hutton, Charles Lyell, and Louis Agassiz, writing between about 1750 and 1860 "revolutionized the western wrold's understanding of time by expanding the scale of the earth's history from thousands to millions of years."[37] With new paleontological and geological discoveries being made in the 1840s, historian Ronald L. Numbers stated, a "sustained scientific (as opposed to literary) discussion of human antiquity began," and with the 1859 publication of Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, the public was finally "roused" from its "uncritical" view of biblical chronology.[38] The debate over human existence that had begun in the mid-eighteenth century, sparked by Enlightenment emphasis on reason and observation, was only intensified by this new understanding of the physical earth and nature in the nineteenth century.

Even if most Americans' ideas about human antiquity were shifting with the publication of new scientific discoveries, there remained a missing link: Native Americans. Most scientists and naturalists were unsure of how to view Native Americans. Louis Agassiz argued, for example, that Native Americans were part of a separate creation and should not be thought of as either equal to, or from the same history as, Europeans and white Americans.[39] Emma Willard, in her timeline of human history,

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[37] Allen, *A Republic in Time*, 14.

[38] Ronald L. Numbers, "William Henry Green and the Demise of Ussher's Chronology," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (June 2000): 258 and 262.

[39] Louis Agassiz, "The Diversity of the Origin of the Human Races," in *The Christian Examiner and Religious Miscellany* 4th series, volume 14 (July, September, November 1850): 121-156.

placed Native Americans completely outside of history as well.[40] If scientists like Agassiz, or educators like Willard, could not even adequately place Native Americans within historical context, their history and origins were left open to interpretation.

In a period of fundamental shifts in understanding chronology and the place of biblical record in the history of the world, Native Americans were, to most white Americans, a timeless and history-less group of people. The Mormons were thus able to co-opt their history and turn it into a connection to a Jewish past, to place both Native Americans and the entire continent within a Judeo-Christian understanding of the world. Non-Mormons were likewise able to conceptualize Native Americans in their own way and, in so doing, connect them with a man claiming to be a prophet much like Muhammed. It was easy, then, to take the next step and proclaim threats of an uprising or the foundation of a Mormon empire like that of the Muslim empire in the Middle East.

It did not matter to those applying the metaphor that ancient Israelites existed thousands of years before and a not insignificant geographic distance from Muhammed. All were part of "the Orient," belonging in a religious timeline that began with Israelites, continued with Jesus Christ, and was threatened by such perceived "anti-Christian" threats as the rise of Islam. The timeline's dates constantly shifted and changed with each new geological and biological discovery, but it had a single timeless thread: the displaced and not easily understood history and origins of Native Americans.

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[40] Susan Schulten, "Emma Willard and the Graphic Foundations of American History," *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007): 551, 558. Schulten discusses how Willard charted Native American history on an "introductory" map and timeline rather than placing them with white Americans. The map "charted 'aboriginal wandering'…[and] both reflected and reinforced the existing assumption that Native Americans existed in a timeless space prior to the advent of human history."

Nineteenth-century American culture operated with a complex understanding of time, based in part on religion, in part on the natural world, and in part on an increasingly industrialized and mechanical developing world. As part of American culture, Mormonism was born into an era of fundamental changes in the conceptualization of the North American continent, the Native American people, and the history of the world. Joseph Smith and his followers sought to connect themselves to Judeo-Christian tradition, and an element of this connection was found in the imagined history of Native Americans as a remnant of Israel. Picking up where early European settlers left off, Mormons believed themselves called to convert Native Americans to a new and more pure version of Christianity.

Non-Mormons, in part fearful of a frontier uprising of Native Americans led by Joseph Smith and the Mormons, passionately warned against the Mormon threat to the American way of life. They characterized Joseph Smith as an American Muhammed. Arguments toward and about Mormonism became less focused on a fraudulent book or uneducated leader taking advantage of dupes. Instead, worries focused on Mormonism as a threat to society itself. Framing their anti-Mormon publications with orientalist rhetoric, non-Mormons warned that, should Mormonism succeed, as Islam did in the Middle East, American society likely stood to disappear completely.

In the 1840s, when the majority of Mormons, after being expelled first from Missouri and Illinois, moved west to Utah they disappeared from the sight and minds of many Americans for a short time. Fear of imminent uprisings subsided. While many in the east were writing pamphlets and books about the certain demise of Mormonism, particularly after the death of Joseph Smith in 1844, Brigham Young and others emerged

as strong and unifying leaders. During their time in Utah, Mormons capitalized on the opportunity to come together as a centralized church and defined religious culture.

Two events changed that situation in just a few short years. The end of the Mexican-American War in 1848 saw the United States acquiring new territory in the West, including Utah, and the push for westward expansion and migration increased a hundredfold. And in 1852, the Mormon Church announced official doctrinal support of the practice of polygamy, or "plural marriage," and American interest in the religious affairs of the Church came to the forefront once more. When attention turned west, the American government and people realized how far removed from the mainstream Mormons had become. The opportunity arose to incorporate Utah and the other western territories to which Mormons had fled into the United States. Anti-Mormon arguments once again exaggerated and re-emphasized the islamicist perceptions of Mormons as a vicious and final attempt to re-assimilate them into American culture.

CHAPTER III

"THE PROPHET AND HIS HAREM": ORIENTALIZING MORMON POLYGAMY

PRACTICES

"If any man espouse a virgin, and desire to espouse another, and the first give her consent, and if he espouse the second, and they are virgins, and have vowed to no other man, then he is justified; he cannot commit adultery for they are given unto him."[1]

"Wherefore, hear my voice and follow me, and you shall be a free people, and ye shall have no laws but my laws when I come, for I am your lawgiver and what can stay my hand?"[2]

On February 13, 1884, *Puck*, a popular New York-based satire and comical magazine, published an image titled, "A Desperate Attempt to Solve the Mormon Question." The chromolithograph contained four panels from four well-known illustrators, each commenting on Mormonism in American society. The first panel depicted a domestic scene: a man in the clutches of his wife attempts to duck her upheld and threatening fireplace ash scoop, saying, "I think one wife is enough." A second panel

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[1] D&C 132:61 Revelation given to Smith and recorded on July 12, 1843.

[2] D&C 38:22. Revelation given to Joseph Smith on January 2, 1831.

showed a "monster" resembling an octopus catching in its tentacles Uncle Sam, Justice, Public Opinion, and more, and asked the question, "How long will this destructive monster be allowed to live?" A third showed large crowds of men rushing into the Chicago city hall building, with signs declaring, "Saturday. Divorce day in Chicago," and "Divorces without publicity, Divorces procured without delay. Liberal charges, [and] Divorces obtained for $5.00." The panel asked, "What is the muse of Mormonism, when a man can change his wife whenever he likes?" And the fourth panel depicted a lounging, rotund man surrounded by beautiful, scantily clad dancing women. The man is smoking a hookah, clearly enjoying being in the center of his harem. The man, rather than being a Mormon, is actually a representation of the artist himself. The caption reads, "I imagine it must be a perfect paradise."

Figure 1 Joseph Ferdinand Keppler, Frederick Burr Opper, Berhard Gillam, and F. Graetz, "A Desperate Attempt to Solve the Mormon Question," *Puck* (New York: Keppler and Schwarzmann, 1884). Digitized by the Library of Congress.

The decades during which the fight over Mormon polygamy raged coincided with the decades in which illustrated periodicals grew in popularity throughout America. With subscriptions exceeding the hundreds of thousands, periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Leslie's Illustrated Weekly* capitalized on anti-Mormon sentiment and on the very public debate over Mormon marriage practices. According to Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, no other illustrated weekly of the 1850s "could compare to *Harper's Weekly* in the space allocation given to the Mormons."[3] News briefs, articles, and illustrations about the Mormons were included in nearly every issue published by *Harper's*, most containing orientalist rhetoric or imagery. Polygamy, as the primary example of Mormon un-Americanism, was *Harper's* favorite topic.

When Joseph Ferdinand Keppler, the artist of the panel with the hookah-smoking man, imagined that Mormonism must be a "perfect paradise," he was doing so in the context of the popular harem imagery. Smoking hookah, flavored tobacco smoke, was and remains a popular activity throughout the Middle East, particularly in Turkey, Egypt, and Morocco, and other parts of the Islamic orient made more accessible to Americans after the Napoleonic Wars. The idea of a harem as a home full of women, kept by men for sexual and sensual purposes, was becoming common in both high and popular art. In 1852, when the practice of polygamy was officially acknowledged by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, non-Mormons jumped on the chance to compare what they imagined Mormon polygamous households looked to their imagined Ottoman harems.

Mormon women, and the unique position that polygamy placed them in, joined the ranks of a long line of white women perceived as sexual slaves of men. While neither

[3] Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, "Illustrated Periodical Images of Mormons," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 3 (Spring 1977): 88.

inherently nor universally orientalist, this idea was especially popular in orientalist literature and art. During the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the legend of "Circassian beauties" was well-known to popular American culture. The best example of the myth comes from the influential showman P.T. Barnum. A businessman and pseudoscientist, Barnum was well known for his New York City museum that contained various collections related to race, religion, history, and culture.[4]

Most Americans in the nineteenth century believed that the mountainous region of Eastern Europe, bordering the Black Sea and now on the Russian and Georgian borders, was the birthplace of the Caucasian "white" race.[5] Barnum hired a Circassian woman to represent the "purest" type of white person, feeding off the intellectual and folkloric traditions about the origin of the Caucasian race. While in all likelihood the woman he hired was simply a New York City actress, he put her on display as a woman rescued by his associate from the slave markets in Istanbul, where she had been destined to become a sex slave to a Turkish sultan. Barnum was utilizing not just her purported beauty and purity, but also the popular conceptions of Near East culture.[6] Regardless of evidence to

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[4] The Lost Museum, City University of New York, accessed April 2013, http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/.

[5] This belief came from the theories of German natural philosopher Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, who proposed that the best example of the white Caucasian race were the physical characteristics – including size of the head, jawbone, teeth, eye sockets, etc - of the Georgians from the Caucasus Mountains. Blumenbach intended this to be a simple classification and refused to put the various races he theorized about in any sort of hierarchical order. Despite these intentions, his work laid the foundations for later "scientific racism" in the nineteenth century and served as evidence by those who co-opted his work for their own political and racial agenda. See George M. Frederickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 57.

[6] "The Circassian Beauty Archive," The Lost Museum, City University of New York, accessed April 2013, http://chnm.gmu.edu/lostmuseum/.

support the belief, many Americans thought that Muslim men lived in a polygamous and debauched society, trapping women in harems and treating them as sex slaves.

There is an interesting distinction between the high art that eroticized harems, particularly art coming out of the European academies, and the harem references typical of American discussions of Mormons. As historian Joan DelPlato noted in her analysis of clothing and imagery in harem paintings, painters tried to draw a viewer into the experience of the harem. Using Jean Auguste Dominique Ingres's famous 1814 painting, *Grande Odalisque*, as an example, DelPlato argued that. when looking into the eyes of the young woman in the painting who is glancing flirtatiously over her shoulder at the viewer, the viewer and the pasha of the harem become one and the same. There is, then, a suggestion of "fantasy and projection" that is "crucial for erotic art's dynamic interchange with the spectator."[7]

In the harems of high art, the viewer can participate in the eroticism of the situation without overtly violating any Western social norms. There is an element of desire on the part of the viewer, but that desire is reined in because they, as civilized onlookers of an "other" society, are participating only on an observational rather than physical level. When it comes to harem references in American political cartoons, however, any element of participation is removed.

This is not to say that Americans lacked the desire to participate in the overt eroticization of the harem experience. There were plenty of opportunities for Americans to read about, or see, high-art visual representations of Ottoman harems. The large

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[7] Joan DelPlato, "Dress and Undress: Clothing and Eroticism in Nineteenth-Century Visual Representations of the Harem," in *Harem Histories: Envisioning Places and Living Spaces*, ed. Marilyn Booth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 269.

numbers of travel narratives and sensational novels published for an American audience demonstrates that the United States was orientalizing the Islamic east. When it came to Mormons, however, fantasy was seaparated from reality as seen by the lack of overly romanticized representations of "Mormon harems." To non-Mormon Americans, Mormonism posed a threat to the family and social system, and they wanted neither to allow that threat to continue, nor participate as voyeuristic observers of its more titillating aspects. Sensuality was removed from images of Mormon polygamy, perhaps in the hopes of making it seem less desirable and hasten its decline through ridicule. Even Keppler's imagined "perfect paradise" was offset by three other panels depicting different imagined negative aspects of plural marriage. By contrasting a hookah and harem-girl-filled "paradise" with divorce, economic hardship, and monstrous tyranny, *Puck* and the illustrators were carefully suggesting that Mormon paradise did not exist outside of the imagination, and that the reality was far worse.

Figure 2 "The Elders' Happy Home," (New York, 1881). Digitized by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

A lithograph published in 1881 demonstrates this lack of romanticization of Mormon polygamy. Titled "The Elders' Happy Home," the cartoon shows anything but a happy home or sensual harem. Instead, there is a complete breakdown of order in the bedroom as many wives are shown physically fighting amongst themselves in their nightclothes, while an overfull cradle of screaming babies goes neglected. The Mormon husband, in contrast to depictions of sensual sultans or pashas surveying their girls, hides away from the action on top of a large wardrobe.

An image published in *Harper's Weekly* in 1897 provides another example. Although titled "Scenes from an American Harem," the wood engraving simply depicts Brigham Young and his many wives on their way to church, all dressed in church-appropriate clothing. While the image itself might appear innocent enough simply

including the words "American harem" in the title displays a certain fear about the Mormon marriage system's threat to the social fabric of the United States.

Figure 3 "Scenes from an American Harem," *Harper's Weekly* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1897). Digitized by the J. Willard Marritt Library, University of Utah, 2009.

The fear of Mormon polygamy was only intensified by worry about Mormon politics. As Christine Talbot wrote, "orientalism appealed to anti-Mormons because it could link the practice of plural marriage to the political despotism anti-Mormons located in Mormon politics."[8] While at first viewed as an "anomaly," Mormon political involvement became a "pollution, a threat to the purity of an imagined, naturalized Americanness."[9] Orientalizing Mormons became increasingly important to anti-Mormon Americans because plural marriage, emblematic of the Mormon Church's inability to conform to American values, stood as the most important thread in the growing danger

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[8] Christine Talbot, "'Turkey is in Our Midst': Orientalism and Contagion in Nineteenth Century Anti-Mormonism," *Journal of Law and Family Studies* 8, no. 2 (2006): 364.

[9] Talbot, "'Turkey is in Our Midst,'" 364.

that Mormonism posed. Ruin the family system, and the entire societal system would be ruined as well.

Published in February of 1857, an article on the state of Mormon children highlighted mainstream cultural fears about the breakdown of the family stemming from the perceived barbarian practice of plural marriage. Mormon children "appear like a neglected uncared-for set, generally dirty and ill clad," the article claimed.[10] Portraying Mormon women as trapped in polygamous relationships, living as sex slaves in the western equivalent of a harem, the article claimed that, "the majority of [children] are girls, and this troubles the women very much, for they know a female is doomed to slavery and a life of misery."[11]

The idea that the American family was threatened was not unique to the debate over Mormon plural marriage; it was a common thread in arguments over westward expansion in general, the debate over slavery and the post Civil War Reconstruction period, and even industrialization and urbanization. In a period of American history filled with intense and radical social changes, concern over the family was not new. What makes the Mormon case stand out was the ease with which anti-Mormons managed to orientalize Mormon marriage practices as a type of American harem, and their success in bringing about the speedy downfall of polygamy.

As preeminent scholar of women's history Nancy F. Cott argued, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a solidification of the idea what marriage meant. While there had long been debates over interracial marriage, sexual and living

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[10] *Harper's Weekly*, February 21, 1857, as quoted in Bunker and Bitton, "Illustrated Periodical Images of Mormons," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 10, no. 3 (1977): 89.

[11] *Harper's Weekly*, February 21, 1857, as quoted in Bunker and Bitton, 89.

arrangement experiments by fringe religious groups, including but certainly not limited to Mormons, and expanding divorce laws, the "refurbished alliance between national authority and Christian monogamous morality" made alternative marriage systems less and less available to Americans.[12]

When Mormons officially admitted to practicing plural marriage in 1852, public objections arose almost immediately. According to historian Richard H. Cracroft, moral outrage against polygamy came to a national forefront when "the newly formed Republican party included in its platform a resolution asserting that it was the right and duty of Congress to 'prohibit in the Territories those twin relics of barbarism – Polygamy and Slavery.'"[13] In the political and cultural fight, polygamy and Mormonism became "synonymous evils in the public mind."[14]

The debate about polygamy was made more complicated by the larger debate on the role of women in society in the nineteenth century. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Margaret Fuller, among others, argued for men's and women's roles to be more equal. These thinkers believed that the "cult of domesticity" harmed women by placing them on a pedestal and thus under far too much pressure. Women, instead, should be educated and their self-worth fostered in order to maintain the "natural" balance of humankind. On the

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[12] Nancy F. Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 131.

[13] Richard H. Cracroft, "'The Assault of Laughter,': The Comic Attack on Mormon Polygamy in Popular Literature," *Journal of Mormon History* 34, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 234.

[14] Cracroft, "'The Assault of Laughter,'" 234. For a visual representation of the concern over Mormon political influence, see Frank Leslie's illustration, "How to Get a Nomination: Take your Friends to a Primary Meeting. You embrace all the 'issues,' especially Bloomerism and Mormonism," *Budget of Fun* (New York: Frank Leslie, 1872), digitized by the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

other side of the argument were women such as Louisa McCord, who argued that women's place was the home, as mother and moral educator for her children. Such ideas of "republican motherhood" held that women, as the gentler sex, fostered virtue in their sons and thus were the key to producing industrious and morally upright citizens. The concept stemmed, as Linda Kerber argued, from Enlightenment values of civic virtue and the "classic formulation of the Spartan Mother who raised sons prepared to sacrifice themselves to the good of the *polis*." With republican motherhood came the "apparent integration of domestic and political behavior in a formula that masked political purpose by promise of domestic service."[15]

By the latter half of the nineteenth century, Victorian ideals of female purity and morality had begun to pervade the debate over women's place in society. According to historian Peggy Pascoe, women, especially white, Protestant women, began to campaign for "female moral authority," particularly in the American West. Pascoe claimed that, influenced by Victorian traditions of female piety, middle-class Protestant women became "appalled by the overwhelmingly masculine milieu of western cities," and, believing that women should be "pure moral guardians...set out to 'rescue' female victims of male abuse."[16] The importance of this approach is evident in the fact that "missionary groups were the largest women's organizations in the country from the 1870s to 1900; larger than their close cousin, the Woman's Christian Temperance Union,

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[15] Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment – An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1976), 188.

[16] Peggy Pascoe, *Relations of Rescue: The Search for Female Moral Authority in the American West, 1874-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), xvi.

and far larger than the more thoroughly studied suffrage organizations."[17] Individuals and organizations working to improve, define, or solidify the role of women in American society were ubiquitous in the States and western territories.

Any side of the debate over the "woman question" could and did find fault with polygamy. Missionary women like Angie Newman claimed the practice of plural marriage represented "the substitution of the Harem for the Home in all our western borders."[18] Catherine Van Valkenburg Waite, an activist for women's rights and suffrage, wrote in 1866 that plural marriage was neither "reasonable" nor "natural." In fact, she claimed, the practice "tends necessarily to the degradation of woman. Instead of being a companion of man, socially his equal, sympathizing with his moral and intellectual nature, and sharing in all his pursuits and enjoyments, she becomes, under this system, merely the minister to his passions and physical comfort."[19] Polygamy, then, not only prevented women from becoming man's equal, but also diminished what little role she already held.

As J. Spencer Fluhman has shown, some women arguing against polygamy feared that it would lead to the literal breakdown of the family and home unit as a result of the practice. Fluhman cited Caleb Lyon, a politician from New York, who wrote that, "an 'American Harem' reverted toward barbarism." Lyon believed that, "as in the 'Orient'...Mormon homes featured jealousies among wives, a lack of 'respect of parent authority,' and probably 'infanticide' since husbands no doubt struggled to support their

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[17] Pasco, *Relations of Rescue*, xviii.

[18] Angie Newman, quoted in Pasco, *Relations of Rescue*, 24.

[19] C.V. Waite, *The Mormon Prophet and His Harem; or, An authentic history of Brigham Young, his numerous wives and children* (Chicago: JS Goodman, 1867), 243.

sizeable broods."[20] Lyon, then, was not only addressing the controversial role of women in American society, but also incorporating orientalist rhetoric in doing so. To him, the "Orient" represented a backward society that promoted, beginning first in the home, a lack of authority and morally outrageous acts such as infanticide. The spread of Mormon "harems," then, spelled doom for America.

In 1857, a book appeared on the American market detailing, as its title claimed, *Female Life Among the Mormons*. It told the story of a young woman named Maria Ward who, while on a trip out west, was persuaded to stay behind at a carriage stop by an engaging man who, it was soon thereafter revealed, was a Mormon. She was drawn into the Mormon community, adopted into the care of Mrs. Bradish, and lived amongst the Mormons, including their prophet Joseph Smith. Repulsed by the seemingly foreign marriage practices, Maria struggled to understand the reasoning behind polygamy and divorce. A conversation ensued between Maria and Mrs. Bradish when Maria protested the actions of a Mormon man divorcing his non-Mormon wife. Mrs. Bradish told Maria that the man was advised by revelations and teachings from Joseph Smith to do so. When Maria questioned Smith's power, Mrs. Bradish replied, "Brother Smith stands in precisely the same relation to us that Moses did to the children of Israel."[21]

Like Moses, Joseph Smith received the word of God directly. Joseph Smith had to follow Moses's example and "lead the chosen people to the promised inheritance." In fact, Mrs. Bradish continued to Maria Ward, "Were not the Israelites commanded to spoil

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[20] Fluhman, *A Peculiar People*, 108.

[21] Maria Ward, pseud., *Female Life Among the Mormons: A Narrative of Many Years' Personal Experience* (New York: Burdick Brothers, 1857), 47-48.

the Egyptians? Suppose that some of the Jews had heathen wives, or that some of the Jewish women were united to Egyptian men. What would have been the command of God in this case? Why, that the believers should abandon their heathen companions and go forth with the children of God." Maria Ward found fault in this argument, though, and protested that, "We are not Jews, neither are the others Egyptians." But Mrs. Bradish stood firm and insisted, "That makes no difference, as the circumstances are exactly parallel."[22]

Female Life Among the Mormons is a fictional story, and Maria Ward is simply a pseudonym.[23] It was one of more than fifty novels between 1850 and 1900 that included Mormonism, and especially polygamy, in their plots, and it was read widely throughout the United States.[24] Although the story was sensationalistic, there are many elements of truth in it, particularly with regards to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, and the Latter-day Saints' justification for the practice of polygamy.

According to historian B. Carmon Hardy, polygamy was the most influential theological practice in defining the religion as a whole; it was a high principle and its importance to the Mormon religion and its history should not be underestimated. As Hardy put it, "it was in polygamy that male preeminence found its most natural ally.

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[22] Ward, *Female Life Among the Mormons*, 47-48.

[23] Some historians think that "Maria Ward" was a pseudonym for Elizabeth Cornelia Woodcock Ferris, wife of Benjamin G. Ferris, the Utah Territorial Secretary from 1852-1853. See Michael W. Homer and Massimo Introvigne, "'The Great Polygamy Hotel': Sherlock Holmes, Farandoul, and the Popularization of Mormon Stereotypes in Nineteenth Century Fiction," *Center for Studies on New Religions* (February 2005).

[24] For a discussion of anti-Mormon sensationalist literature and the incorporation of orientalist rhetoric in nineteenth century propagandistic writing, see Givens, *The Viper on the Hearth*.

Many reasons were given to justify the practice but none surpassed its service as a brace for paternal authority."[25]

The arguments made by contemporary Mormons justifying that paternal authority came from their readings the Bible. Polygamy is thus perhaps one of the most important and obvious examples of Mormons using biblical antiquity and orientalist rhetoric to legitimize the new and quickly growing religion. Plural marriage, seen by nineteenth century Mormons as a gift from God, given to Joseph Smith through a revelation, was a restoration of the Abrahamic promise.[26] To non-Mormons, polygamy was a threat to American culture, it was orientalized in the tradition of portraying women caught under its spell as trapped or enslaved by the men who housed them in harems accessible on their terms alone. To Mormons, it came from God directly, reminding a chosen people that "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you."[27]

The history of Mormon polygamy is somewhat murky and particularly complex. Most likely it began in the 1830s, but was officially introduced in 1843 with a revelation given to Joseph Smith.[28] While some sources suggest that Smith's 1843 revelation was

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[25] B. Carmon Hardy, "Lords of Creation: Polygamy, the Abrahamic Household, and Mormon Patriarchy," *Journal of Mormon History* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1994), 138.

[26] B. Carmon Hardy, "Lords of Creation."

[27] Genesis 12:2.

[28] Most Mormon scholars agree that a minority of early Mormons both believed in and practiced polygamy before Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation directly addressing it. For a detailed discussion of the earliest references to polygamy, see "'Go Ye, Therefore, and Do the Works of Abraham': Mormon Polygamous Beginnings," in *Doing the Works of Abraham: Mormon Polygamy, Its Origin, Practice, and Demise*, ed. B. Carmon Hardy, vol. 9 of *Kingdom in the West: The Mormons and the American Frontier*, ed. Will Bagley (Norman, OK: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 2007), 33-72. The chapter contains several primary documents, specifically letters and memoirs, discussing the origins of the theology of polygamy, as well as a secondary analysis of these sources.

not his first regarding polygamy, it was, for the purposes of this chapter, the most clearly and plainly stated, and it therefore is accepted as the first official revelation on the subject.[29] Although the revelation eventually became Section 132 in the Doctrine and Covenants, most Mormons did not know of the practice, nor were many aware of Joseph Smith's early polygamous marriages outside of his first marriage to Emma Hale Smith, until the 1850s.

Yet from its earliest days, the same type of orientalist rhetoric, hearkening back to a Jewish past, can be found in Smith's revelations. Smith had prayed upon the matter and received reassurance that, "behold, and lo, I am the Lord thy God, and will answer thee as touching this manner." God, Joseph Smith claimed, had provided justification for plural marriage on the basis that God's "servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and also Moses, David, and Solomon" had God's blessing for having "many wives and concubines."[30]

The type of polygamy that Joseph Smith's revelation endorsed was actually polygyny, or the marriage of one man to many women. Part of the Abrahamic promise was propagation. One man's marriage to many women provided the opportunity for fulfillment of God's commandment to "multiply and replenish the earth." "Herein is the work of my Father continued," Smith's revelation stated, "that He may be glorified."[31] During Mormonism's formative years, Joseph Smith worked hard to make sure that his

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[29] For an example of a recollection of earlier revelations on polygamy see the retrospective account written by Benjamin Franklin Johnson in 1903. In a letter to George Francis Gibbs, Johnson claimed that "in 1835 at Kirtland I learned from my Sisters Husband Lyman R Shirmann, who was *close* to the Prophet and Received it from him, 'that the ancient order of plural marriage was again to be practiced by the Church['.']" Benjamin Franklin Johnson, "To George Francis Gibbs, 1903," in *Doing the Works of Abraham*, ed. Hardy, 43.

[30] D&C 132:1-2.

[31] D&C 132:63.

followers felt comfortable with their new religious beliefs. By connecting a potentially controversial practice – a practice long understood by Americans to be a foreign or "savage" one, found only in Native American cultures or the "backwards" Orient – to an accepted theological and historical biblical timeline, Smith provided a justification for polygamy.[32]

From its earliest days, most tenets of the Mormon religion featured men in the important roles, as receivers of revelation, holders of the restored priesthood, leaders of the household, and members of the Church hierarchy. Polygamy established men in one of the most important roles Mormonism offered: fathers of the coming generation, who would hopefully live to see the "latter day." Parley P. Pratt, one of the most influential and important early Mormon leaders and thinkers, spoke of the "esteem" and "true dignity" of men who, as sons of God, lived "as the patriarch and sovereign of his countless offspring." The "highest dignity of womanhood," Pratt wrote in his autobiography, "was to stand as a queen and priestess to her husband, and to reign for ever and ever as the queen mother of her numerous and still increasing offspring."[33] What eventually became known as "the principle" was the clearest connection that Mormons could make between their own religion and that of the biblical Jewish patriarchy.

Polygamy as both a practice and a theological concept was just as paradoxical as Mormons' understanding of and relation to Native Americans. Just as complex beliefs about race, time, and history, created a situation in which both white Americans and

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[32] Hardy, ed., *Doing the Works of Abraham*. See especially Footnote 10 in the Introduction.

[33] Parley P. Pratt, ed., *Autobiography of Parley Parker Pratt* (1874), 259-260, in *Doing the Works of Abraham*, ed. Hardy, 39.

Native Americans could both be seen as the purest example of an ancient Hebrew past, polygamy, too, was perceived in contradictory ways.

While the practice was the perfect example of a connection to biblical patriarchs and the restoration of an Abrahamic promise, as Lawrence Foster pointed out in his study on religion and sexuality in the early republic, "Americans of Smith's day were not inclined to look kindly on polygamy, even in the Bible."[34] In fact, there are several instances of attacks on polygamy even in the Book of Mormon. But, as Foster further argued, many of the references to polygamy in the Book of Mormon, and later revelations received by Joseph Smith, were couched in ambiguous language and double entendres.[35] Smith and other early Mormons, desiring a clear and strong connection to biblical history and a place alongside the Hebrew patriarchs, struggled with how to deal with the concept. As such, "it is difficult to know whether a statement about polygamy actually means what it appears to mean."[36]

The institution of polygamy and the theological and practical justifications for it were generally not publicly admitted by Mormon leaders and, especially in the early days, only a small minority of Mormons partook in plural marriage. But whereas "Joseph Smith conceived and started polygamy," according to Foster, "Brigham Young made it work."[37] The practice of plural marriage was officially announced to both Mormons and non-Mormons in 1852. Brigham Young directed the announcement and chose influential

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[34] Laurence Foster, *Religion and Sexuality: Three American Communal Experiments of the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), 132.

[35] Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 133.

[36] Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 133.

[37] Foster, *Religion and Sexuality*, 126.

Mormon leader Orson Pratt to give a sermon indicating that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints not only supported polygamy but encouraged it. "We read that those who do the works of Abraham, are to be blessed with the blessings of Abraham," Pratt preached, calling upon the biblical rhetoric so commonly employed by Mormon leaders.[38]

Pratt offered five reasons for the support and justification of polygamy that went beyond the basis of Joseph Smith's 1843 revelation. Most of the reasons were based upon Old Testament theology. Pratt believed that polygamy would allow for Mormons to "multiply and replenish the earth," recalling Smith's words in the Doctrine and Covenants. He also argued that polygamy allowed Mormons to have a stake in Abrahamic promises. Bringing history to the fore, he furthered stated that the practice was prevalent in most cultures throughout the world and claimed that "four-fifths [of the population of the globe] believe in the doctrine of a plurality of wives." Pratt argued that polygamy offered a version of moral and social reform because it saved men from the potential "debauchery" of visiting a brothel if they were bound to a monogamous relationship. And finally, Pratt claimed, doctrine unique to Mormonism supported it, particularly Mormons' specific beliefs of the afterlife and the God-like status obtained after death in a kind of celestial existence.[39]

Although never practiced by a majority of Mormons, most Mormons supported polygamy and believed it to be a spiritual and practical connection to a dignified Hebrew

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[38] Orson Pratt, quoted in "Containing a Revelation on Celestial Marriage," *Deseret News*, 14-22, in *Doing the Works of Abraham*, ed. Hardy, 78.

[39] Pratt, in *Doing the Works of Abraham*, ed. Hardy 78-79. See also, David J. Whittacker, "Early Mormon Polygamy Defenses," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 44.

past. Those who lived in plural marriages defended their beliefs, including Mormon women who were seen by non-Mormon Americans to be slaves to an oriental practice. Belinda Pratt, the wife of Parley P. Platt, living in a plural marriage, wrote a letter to her sister defending polygamy, using her own apparently happy circumstances and citing Orson Pratt's, Brigham Young's, Joseph Smith's, and other leaders' biblical justifications as proof for the sanctity of the practice. The letter, written in 1854 from Salt Lake City by Belinda Marden Pratt to her sister living in New Hampshire, was reprinted first in a New Hampshire newspaper and then later as a pamphlet entitled, *Polygamy Exposed by a Lady of Utah*.

Belinda Pratt, responding to her sister's pleas to abandon the Mormon faith, argued that polygamy had moral and social benefits and wrote that "a nation organized under the law of the gospel, or in other words, the law of Abraham, and the patriarchs, would have no institutions tending to licentiousness; no adulteries, fornications, etc., would be tolerated." Neither would there be "houses" or "institutions" that "exist for the traffic in shame, or in the life blood of our fair daughters." Men would "have no inducement to keep a mistress in secret, or unlawfully" and "females would have no grounds for temptation in any such lawless life." Furthermore, she said, "neither money nor pleasure could tempt them, nor poverty drive them to any such excess: because the door would be open for every virtuous female to form the honorable and endearing relationships of wife and mother."[40]

It is no coincidence that the "Lady of Utah" was defending both the family structure and the moral fabric of a polygamous society. When it came to the non-Mormon

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[40] Belinda Marden Pratt, *Defence of Polygamy, by a Lady of Utah, in a Letter to Her Sister in New Hampshire* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1854), 8.

response to polygamy, in fact, it was not just the theological justification that concerned those vocally protesting the practice. The main concern was over the maintenance of the family structure. To non-Mormons, polygamy fostered jealousy, idleness, and licentiousness. To Mormons, polygamy served as a guarantee of Mormons and workers for generations to come, as well as a deep connection to an ancient and biblical past.

Since its introduction, polygamy has been one of the most controversial aspects of Mormonism. Because of the success of anti-Mormon rhetoric, convincing non-Mormons that the church Joseph Smith founded and the practice of plural marriage were one and the same, many not familiar with the Mormon Church even today still believe that Mormons practice polygamy. The controversy over the practice even led to Joseph Smith's death in Illinois in 1843.

Spurred by the Republican Party's 1856 platform against polygamy, anti-polygamy legislation and social movements spread rapidly throughout the country. Polygamy came to be seen as the number one threat of Mormons against American culture, and consequently, according to non-Mormons, the number one tenet of Mormon life that needed to be done away with.

By turning Mormon polygamy into a licentious and tantalizing topic, and making use romanticized orientalist terminology about "harems" and female "sex slaves," anti-Mormons first drew the attention reform-minded non-Mormons to the topic. While the sensualized voyeurism of high art made the practice seem vaguely appealing, American political cartoons highlighted the undesirable aspects of life in a plural marriage.

Polygamy and the orientalist rhetoric used to describe it also served as a connecting element to earlier fears about Mormonism. As Francavilgia wrote, "if the open landscape of the semiarid American West suggested the Sahara, Arabia, Mongolia, or other exotic locales, that in turn suggested the more uninhibited sexuality of the barbarians who lived in those distant lands."[41] Mormons were not the only set of people in the West who were feared for their licentiousness by more "civilized" peoples in the East. "Throughout the 1860s and 1870s," Francaviglia argued, "the prospect of capture by Plains Indians was associated with the sexual enslavement of women. While such captivity became less likely in the 1880s, the fear and fascination remained."[42] Fear and fascination with the sexual enslavement of white women by Native Americans coincided with the fear and fascination with the sexual enslavement of Mormon plural wives. Recalling the fear of a Mormon-led Native American uprising, leading to a western empire like that of Muhammed in the Middle East, there is little wonder that the anti-polygamy crusade was successful. The crusade combined two elements of fear – "uninhibited sexuality" and religious despotism. By the late nineteenth century, this was more powerful than the singular fear of uprisings in the earlier decades of Mormon versus non-Mormon relations prior to the Mormon exodus to Utah.

With so much negative attention directed at Mormons in Utah, the American government finally took legal and political action. According to Sarah Barringer Gordon and Richard Cracroft, historians of the political influence on the decline of polygamy, the decades between 1852 and 1890, when Mormons officially and publicly practiced plural

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[41] Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man*, 59.

[42] Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man*, 59.

marriage, saw the "gradual erosion" of "the Mormon legal defense of polygamy based on

the First Amendment guarantees of religious freedom."[43] The legal and political debate

over polygamy and Mormon autonomy in Utah was fundamental in defining religion in

America and forever solidifying the boundaries between church and state.

As Cracroft stated, the end of the practice of polygamy "hastened Mormon

accommodation."[44] Where derision of Joseph Smith's intelligence and claims of the

possession of skills enabling the translation of ancient "reformed Egyptian" did not

dissuade people from converting, and where warnings against an "American Mahomet"

and Native American uprisings did not adequately frighten the public into banning

Mormonism, the crusade against polygamy succeeded in forcing the Mormon "other" to

conform.

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[43] Cracroft, "The Assault of Laughter," 235. See also Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Cetutry America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[44] Cracroft, "The Assault of Laughter," 236.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

Given the prevalence of the Muslim – Mormon comparison in the nineteenth century, it is somewhat ironic that Mormons in the twenty-first century are often portrayed as an emblematically American people. The popular Broadway musical, *The Book of Mormon* shows how much of a turn-around there has been in Americans' perceptions of Mormons. "Have you heard of the all-American prophet? The blond-haired, blue-eyed voice of God," the opening lines of one of the songs ask. "He didn't come from the Middle East, like those other holy men," it continues, in a reversal of nineteenth-century rhetoric. Whereas Americans of the past otherized Mormons, beginning with removing their prophet from American tradition and placing him alongside Muhammed, the "imposter" of the Middle East, *The Book of Mormon* jokingly highlights Joseph Smith's "all-American" qualities.

The emergence onto the political scene of a practicing Mormon as candidate for the office of the presidency further marked a change in the popular perceptions of Mormons. Since its creation, Mormonism as a religion has been in flux. While the earliest days called for repentance and anticipated a millennial war, within just a few decades, the focus on imminent destruction of ungodly peoples was downplayed in favor of establishing doctrine and finding a place within Christian theology. As National Public

Radio journalist Barbara Bradley Hagerty reported, in recent decades a focused "branding" of Mormonism as "just another branch of Christianity" has emerged in popular culture.[1] Trying to downplay aspects of the faith that might seem especially bizarre or hard to swallow for non-Mormons, Mormons instead emphasize aspects such as the role of Jesus as a redeemer.

Mormons are a complicated part of American history. There is no consensus on whether or not to view them as part of the Christian tradition, on the exact role they played in the foundation of the American west, and on how to address their religion in the context of America's religious past as a whole. Exceptionalism and self-making are important throughout United States history, but Mormons, according to Richard Francaviglia, "as a unified group, acted out [Manifest Destiny] in a religious context on the [American] frontier. Their move to the Rocky Mountain West...was a singular event in not only American but world history." Francaviglia does not overstate this point. "The wholesale movement of this one Christian religious group," he continued," reenacted the Jews' flight out of Egypt. By doing so, the Mormons recast a large portion of the American West as the Near East almost overnight."[2]

When the Mormon pioneers left Illinois for the American West, they were embarking on a literal exodus. Antagonized by a majority that feared and despised them, they saw Utah and the Western territories as a refuge, a chance to establish themselves in their own "promised land." In doing so, they were cementing themselves in association with a biblical past to which they saw themselves intimately connected.

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[1] Barbara Bradley Hagerty, "Mormonism: A Scrutinized, Yet Evolving Faith," *All Things Considered*, National Public Radio (Washington, DC: November 28, 2012).

[2] Francaviglia, *Go East Young Man*, 93.

To Mormons, connections to Egypt, the Holy Land, and Jewish antiquity were a way of legitimizing an otherwise fantastical new set of religious beliefs. North America as a continent became the most important piece to understanding the world as they knew it. North America became Eden itself, and the tribes of ancient Jews who fled to America before the time of Jesus served as the brave and noble men and women who were returning to a home otherwise long forgotten. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints represented a restoration of God's true gospel, and Mormons were the ones with the key to survival.

To non-Mormons, however, the Mormons seemed increasingly bizarre. To them, what started as a young man duping delusional followers with tales of treasure buried in the ground became a dangerous threat to the political and social framework of American society. Rather than restoring the gospel, Mormons were reverting to the barbaric ways of the east, threatening the United States with theocracy, military rebellion, and a breakdown of societal and sexual norms.

Perceptions of Mormons' exodus to the west remained contentious. Throughout the nineteenth century, non-Mormons struggled to make sense of the new religious group. Were they Americans, as they appeared? Were they Jews, as they claimed? Or perhaps, did they fit more as Muslims? Mormons were not understood as literal Muslims or Jews, but the terminology and rhetoric employed by non-Mormon writers in an effort to understand Mormon theology and actions are emblematic of a confusion of identity, based on imagined understandings of foreign cultures. The nineteenth century was a time in which travel narratives from Christian missionaries, full of millennial fervor, worked to convert an Islamic east. Art and scientific discoveries from *savants* and military

expeditions increased imperial interest in the foreign affairs of the Middle East. While these elements flooded popular, academic, and political markets in America and Europe, Mormons and non-Mormons alike turned to orientalism as a means of understanding each other and themselves.

A biblical connection became important to Mormons from the earliest days of the Church's infancy. Interpreting unfolding events in the translation process and seeing the initial non-Mormon response, within the context of biblical prophets such as Isaiah gave the new church a claim to legitimacy within the Christian tradition. To Mormons, Joseph Smith was a prophet in a long line of ancient and holy Jewish patriarchs. To outsiders, though, he remained a con artist and belonged in the company of Muhammed and other prophet figures perceived as anti-Christians.

Connecting the very continent to the holy land was a key step for Smith and what was written in the Book of Mormon was fundamental to understanding American history. The continent was not just connected to the holy land; it *was* the holy land. Explanations of North America's prominence within Mormon theological tradition extended to the original inhabitants of the land as well. Reflecting some of the earliest generations of European colonists, Mormons believed and preached that the Native Americans were descendents of ancient tribes of Jews. Having lost their Christian religion and racial features due to war and hardships, the Native Americans now could be redeemed by Mormonism. But, while this was a noble message of mission to white Mormons, non-Mormon Americans feared the consequences. Likening Joseph Smith's rhetoric and activities to Muhammed's rise to power in the east, warnings about Native American uprisings, war, and destruction of American society began to surface. Muhammed and

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Islam served as the best way to explain what could barely be understood about Mormons by their non-Mormon neighbors.

Many early anti-Mormon warnings fell on deaf ears. While Mormons were antagonized locally, even to the point of war in Missouri, the United States as a whole, and the government in particular, did not pay much attention to the religious group. It was not until Mormons began to claim the prerogative of plural marriage, claiming the precedent of ancient Jewish patriarchs in doing so, that national outrage reached its boiling point. When government interest in the western territories coincided with a realization of how deeply entrenched Mormon theocracy had become in Utah, anti-Mormon sentiment latched on to polygamy as its chief grievance against Mormonism. The crusade against polygamy led to congressional acts that outlawed the practice, and exaggerated fear of Mormon despotism led to Mormons' disenfranchisement. With the government back in the position to reinstate full political power in Utah, anti-Mormons had won the fight. Where previous attempts at "warning" the public against Mormonism had failed, the aggressive campaign against plural marriage garnered enough attention to the anti-Mormon cause for the re-integration of Mormons into American society.

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