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Eugene R. Fingerhut, *Explorers of Pre-Columbian America?: The Diffusionist-Inventionist Controversy*;  
Ronald H. Fritze, *Legend and Lore of the Americas before 1492: An Encyclopedia of Visitors, Explorers, and Immigrants*

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**Title**

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**Abstract** Review of *Explorers of Pre-Columbian America? The Diffusionist-Inventionist Controversy* (1994), by Eugene R. Fingerhut; and *Legend and Lore of the Americas before 1492: An Encyclopedia of Visitors, Explorers, and Immigrants* (1993), by Ronald H. Fritze.

**Eugene R. Fingerhut.** *Explorers of Pre-Columbian America?: The Diffusionist-Inventionist Controversy.* Claremont, CA: Regina Books, 1994. xvi + 268 pp., with index. \$12.95, paperback.

**Ronald H. Fritze.** *Legend and Lore of the Americas before 1492: An Encyclopedia of Visitors, Explorers, and Immigrants.* Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1993. xvi + 319 pp., with index. \$65.00, hardback.

### Reviewed by William J. Hamblin

Eugene R. Fingerhut's *Explorers of Pre-Columbian America* is a historiographical introduction to the academic controversies surrounding the question of possible pre-Columbian explorations of the New World. It is not an attempt to resolve the debates, but simply to summarize the assumptions, methods, arguments, and evidence of the various sides in the issue. The topics examined include: the nature and limitations of the evidence, Ogam epigraphy, possible medieval European and Norse contacts, trans-Pacific contacts from Asia, and trans-Atlantic contacts from Africa. Fingerhut does not deal directly with the Book of Mormon, since he consciously excluded "theologically related discussions, such as descendants of the supposed lost tribes of Israel" (p. xviii) from consideration. Nonetheless, the book sheds a great deal of indirect light on the controversy surrounding the Book of Mormon by examining similar controversies on other alleged pre-Columbian contacts. His work relies heavily on "the single most important research tool on the subject of pre-Columbian transocean culture diffusion" (p. xvi), John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Pre-*

*Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography.*<sup>1</sup>

Ronald H. Fritze's *Legend and Lore* is a compendium of articles in encyclopedic form on the wide range of theories that have been put forward on possible pre-Columbian contacts between the New and Old worlds. The range of articles is quite extensive, from "Abubakari II" (a king of Mali who allegedly visited the New World in the early fourteenth century) to the nearly unpronounceable "Zichmni," a supposed fourteenth-century North Atlantic visitor. Most articles include brief histories of the origin of the legends or theories, a summary of the main proposition, and bibliographic references. Fritze also appears to have used Sorenson and Raish's "excellent" (p. xi) bibliography extensively.

Fritze has attempted to include all known theories and legends. Thus the archaeologically confirmed Norse voyages receive treatment alongside theosophic speculations about the lost continents of Mu and Atlantis. His book is not an attempt to determine which contacts did or did not occur (although he voices frequent skepticism), but is an encyclopedia of the intellectual history of theories about pre-Columbian contacts that have been proposed throughout the past four centuries. Fritze's book is an invaluable resource in tracking down obscure people, legends, and theories about pre-Columbian contacts.

How does the Book of Mormon fare in all of this? Eight separate entries deal directly with the Book of Mormon: "Book of Mormon" (pp. 34–37); "Hagoth" (p. 111); "Jaredites" (pp. 137–39); "Jesus" (pp. 169–71); "Lamanites" (pp. 151–52); "Mulekites" (pp. 180–81); "Nephites" (pp. 183–85), and "Joseph Smith" (pp. 232–34). In addition, a useful index indicates that topics related to the Book of Mormon are discussed in a number of other articles (pp. 113, 115, 135, 164, 169, 177, 209, 223, 236, 246, 263, 270). In total, about 33 out of 278 pages are devoted in some way to the Book of Mormon—nearly twelve percent of the book. It is quite clear that Fritze does not accept the

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Sorenson and Martin H. Raish, *Pre-Columbian Contact with the Americas across the Oceans: An Annotated Bibliography*, 2 vols. (Provo, UT: Research Press and FARMS, 1990).

historicity of the Book of Mormon; his articles reflect standard secular caveats, explanations, and assumptions. Although his understanding of the Book of Mormon is not profound, Fritze is to be commended for taking the Book of Mormon seriously enough to attempt to inform himself accurately on current Latter-day Saint thinking on the topic (e.g., some of his articles cite the work of Nibley and Sorenson). Fritze concludes his article on the Latter-day Saint idea of the visit of Christ to the Americas as follows: "If Jesus Christ did come to the Americas [as described in the Book of Mormon], he would definitely rank as the region's most significant pre-Columbian visitor—or post-Columbian visitor, for that matter" (p. 140). Indeed.

In conclusion, although these books do not directly provide any new insights into the Book of Mormon, both can be recommended as useful reference works and summaries of the range of theories and current academic disputes concerning the possibility and nature of pre-Columbian contacts.