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The Quest for America Geoffrey Ashe, Thor Heyerdahl, Helge Ingstad, J. V. Luce, Betty J. Meggers, and Birgitta L. Wallace

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GEOFFREY ASHE, THOR HEYERDAHL, HELGE INGSTAD, J. V. LUCE, BETTY J. MEGGERS, AND BIRGITTA L. WALLACE. *The Quest for America*. London: Pall Mall Press, 1971. 298 pp. £5 (\$13.25).

(Reviewed by John L. Sorenson, professor of Anthropology at Brigham Young University. Dr. Sorenson, who is a specialist on cultural theory, Mesoamerica, and social structure of the social sciences, has published widely in professional and Church journals.)

In his introduction, Geoffrey Ashe says "this book will have served its purpose if it defines the problems, and sug-

gests how researches which are not yet scientific may become so." This is a worthwhile aim, but it cannot be said to have been carried out adequately by the six authors of its various sections. Yet the volume has some interest for LDS readers.

Excellent scholarship is evident in Ashe's own treatment of the "Speculations of the Old World" about a dimly-known America. In open-minded but not incautious fashion he considers speculations of the Classical world (e.g., Atlantis) and of the Middle Ages (with emphasis on the St. Brendan legend). Luce covers some of the same topics from the point of view of navigation and cartography rather than legend. His discussion of Egyptian, Phoenician, Greek, and Roman voyaging and cartography are sound though brief. The caution of both Ashe and Luce (for example, Luce is not persuaded by Cyrus Gordon's claims for the Parahyba Stone from Brazil) may make the general reader somewhat impatient to get on to the more romantic speculations in some of the later articles.

Helge Ingstad's piece on "Norse Explorers" capably but succinctly sets the stage for Wallace's article surveying the evidence in Canada and the northeastern portion of the United States for Norse-derived runic inscriptions, artifacts, and sites. Little or no hard evidence is found, except for the Ingstads' material from *L'Anse aux Meadows* in northern Newfoundland, which is discussed in the last of the three articles on the Norse. Many Mormons could learn a valuable lesson in caution about the definition of a problem and the interpretation of evidence relating to its solution by a careful reading of these three articles. Ingstad argues his case for considering the northern tip of Newfoundland as the Vinland of the Norse sagas, yet indicates at least some of the reasons why not all scholars accept this view.

Heyerdahl's two contributions are much less substantial. His "Isolationist or Diffusionist?" discussion is framed in terms which ignore the development of thought on cultural processes which has gone on in the relevant disciplines in the past generation. His second article, "The Bearded Gods Speak," is a brief rehash of some points made in his popular books. If anyone has failed to appreciate Heyerdahl's one significant contribution to science, the demonstration that simple technology was no bar to ocean crossing, they will pick it up there, but the melange of cultural comparisons

and speculations add nothing of substance, as Ashe almost admits in his conclusion (pp. 274-278).

Betty Meggers's treatment of Asiatic influences on the major American cultures of early times is disappointing, perhaps because of its brevity. Had she treated the *Valdivia* (Ecuador) and *Jomon* (Japan) ceramic similarities more carefully, while attempting to meet some of the cogent objections which archaeologists have raised about her comparison, the paper would have rested on sounder ground. The few artistic and architectural motifs she adduces in favor of contacts between Mesoamerica and East Asia are not set in context sufficiently to persuade many culture specialists of their significance.

The Mormon position is referred to twice. Ashe's introduction alludes briefly to Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon but begs off fuller consideration since "the nature of the prophet's experience is outside our present scope." Then Heyerdahl observes in passing that "religious sects," including the Mormons, have made "mystical claims" which have not furthered "the Diffusionist cause."

If this book can be seen by LDS readers, as Ashe intended it, as an opening up of the problem of "the quest for America" for scientific examination, they will profit from reading it. Unfortunately the predispositions of most such readers, reinforced by the manner in which parts of the volume are written and illustrated, is likely to lead them to conclude that the issues are all settled. The book is so handsome that it is too bad it proves to have little enduring value.