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Daniel C. Peterson

Matthew Roper

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Author(s) Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper

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Abstract Review of *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon* (1996), by Stan Larson.

EIN HELDENLEBEN?
ON THOMAS STUART FERGUSON AS AN ELIAS
FOR CULTURAL MORMONS

Daniel C. Peterson and Matthew Roper

“Thomas Stuart Ferguson,” says Stan Larson in the opening chapter of *Quest for the Gold Plates*,¹ “is best known among Mormons as a popular fireside lecturer on Book of Mormon archaeology, as well as the author of *One Fold and One Shepherd*, and coauthor of *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*” (p. 1).² Actually, though, Ferguson is very little known among Latter-day Saints. He died in 1983, after all, and “he published no new articles or books after 1967” (p. 135). The books that he did publish are long out of print. “His role in ‘Mormon scholarship’ was,” as Professor John L. Sorenson puts it, “largely that of enthusiast and publicist, for which we can be grateful,

1. For another review of this book, see John Gee, “The Hagiography of Doubting Thomas,” *FARMS Review of Books* 10/2 (1998): 158–83.

2. Other Larson publications on Ferguson include Stan Larson, “The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson,” *Dialogue* 23/1 (1990): 55–93; and Larson, “Thomas Stuart Ferguson and Book of Mormon Archaeology,” in *Mormon Mavericks: Essays on Dissenters*, ed. John Sillito and Susan Staker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 243–83.

Review of Stan Larson. *Quest for the Gold Plates: Thomas Stuart Ferguson's Archaeological Search for the Book of Mormon*. Salt Lake City: Freethinker Press, in association with Smith Research Associates, 1996. xiv + 305 pp., with appendixes, bibliography, and index. \$24.95.

but he was neither scholar nor analyst.”³ We know of no one who cites Ferguson as an authority, except countercultists, and we suspect that a poll of even those Latter-day Saints most interested in Book of Mormon studies would yield only a small percentage who recognize his name.⁴ Indeed, the radical discontinuity between Book of Mormon studies as done by Milton R. Hunter and Thomas Stuart Ferguson in the fifties and those practiced today by, say, the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS) could hardly be more striking. Ferguson’s memory has been kept alive by Stan Larson and certain critics of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as much as by anyone, and it is tempting to ask why. Why, in fact, is such disproportionate attention being directed to Tom Ferguson, an amateur and a writer of popularizing books, rather than, say, to M. Wells Jakeman, a trained scholar of Mesoamerican studies who served as a member of the advisory committee for the New World Archaeological Foundation?⁵ Dr. Jakeman retained his faith in the Book of Mormon until his death in 1998, though the fruit of his decades-long work on Book of Mormon geography and archaeology remains unpublished.⁶

The professional countercultists John Ankerberg and John Weldon will serve to illustrate this initially puzzling phenomenon. In their memorable tome *Behind the Mask of Mormonism*, they persist in trumpeting the story of the late Thomas Stuart Ferguson as an example of an authority on archaeology and a “great defender of the faith” who lost his testimony when he learned that the Book of Mormon was

3. John L. Sorenson, in addendum to John Gee, review of . . . *By His Own Hand upon Papyrus: A New Look at the Joseph Smith Papyri*, by Charles M. Larson, *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 118.

4. Professor William Hamblin asked a history class in spring 1996 if they had ever heard of Thomas Stuart Ferguson. Out of ninety students, none had. There is no reason to suppose that Ferguson’s name-recognition has increased since 1996.

5. For further information on the founding and purposes of the New World Archaeological Foundation, see Daniel C. Peterson, “On the New World Archaeological Foundation,” in this number of the *FARMS Review*, pages 221–33.

6. For a brief sketch of Professor Jakeman’s contribution to research on the Book of Mormon, see “Memorial: Max Wells Jakeman,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 7/1 (1998): 79.

merely a work of American frontier fiction.⁷ They do this despite the fact that Ferguson, a lawyer based in northern California, was neither an archaeologist nor, for that matter, a scholar.⁸ (In our judgment, based on conversations with several of those who knew him, as well as on a fair amount of reading, Ferguson seems, among other things, to have lacked patience, or the scholar's temperament. He apparently expected that conclusive evidence would emerge almost immediately to "prove" the Book of Mormon true. But archaeology simply does not work that way—not in the world of the Bible and certainly not in the far more imperfectly understood world of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.) The object of Ankerberg and Weldon's exercise seems to be to increase the potentially shocking effect on Latter-day Saints of Ferguson's apparent loss of faith by overstating his prominence as a scholar and intellectual.⁹

7. John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 289–90, quoting Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 5th ed. (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1987), 332; compare John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 1992), 289–90. *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* is a quietly revised reprinting—it even bears the same copyright date as its original, although it was actually published roughly three years later—of *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism*. One of the present reviewers examined *Everything You Ever Wanted to Know about Mormonism* in considerable detail, in Daniel C. Peterson, "Chattanooga Cheapshot, or the Gall of Bitterness," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 5 (1993): 1–86, and, when they stealthily revised it and reissued it as *Behind the Mask of Mormonism*, examined it again in Daniel C. Peterson, "Constancy amid Change," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 60–98.

8. See Peterson, "Chattanooga Cheapshot," 55–56. As their frequent and very displeased allusions to it in *Behind the Mask of Mormonism* make unmistakably clear, Ankerberg and Weldon were well aware of the critique to which they had been subjected in "Chattanooga Cheapshot." Although they quietly changed a number of passages to evade that critique, they appear to have consciously decided to repeat their incorrect claims about Thomas Stuart Ferguson.

9. Compare Janis Hutchinson, *The Mormon Missionaries: An Inside Look at Their Real Message and Methods* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Resources, 1995), which speaks of "BYU's Stuart Ferguson," although Ferguson never worked for BYU. Kurt Van Gorden, *Mormonism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), p. 9 n. 9, makes "Thomas Steward [sic] Ferguson" the "founder of the Archaeology Department at Brigham Young University." Jerald Tanner and Sandra Tanner, *The Changing World of Mormonism* (Chicago: Moody, 1981), 140–41, 356, and Tanner and Tanner, *Mormonism—Shadow or Reality?* 332–33, also make much of the Ferguson case. See, however, the statement of John L. Sorenson in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 117–19.

Thomas Stuart Ferguson's interest in the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica did not begin with his 1946 trip to Mexico in the company of J. Willard Marriott. Rather, it seems to have originated during his student days at Berkeley in the 1930s, where he associated with Jakeman and with his future collaborator, the eventual General Authority Milton R. Hunter. So far as any mortal can know, Elder Hunter, who earned a PhD in history from the University of California and served as a director of the New World Archaeological Foundation, also believed in the Book of Mormon until the day of his death in 1975. Isn't Elder Hunter's career at least as interesting and significant as Thomas Ferguson's? "One needs to examine all the relevant evidence," declares Larson, "in order to have as well-rounded a picture of Ferguson as possible" (p. 6). But why should anybody outside of his family *care* about having a "well-rounded picture of Ferguson"? In the discipline of Thomas Stuart Ferguson studies, the final state of Ferguson's testimony may be, as Larson puts it, "a major enigma" and a subject of "intense controversy" (p. 3). But it remains unclear why it should be of anything more than peripheral interest anywhere else—except, again, to his family and perhaps one or two specialist intellectual historians of contemporary Mormonism.

What we seem to have in Larson's book is a hagiography of a doubting Thomas Ferguson, a depiction of Ferguson as a role model. Listen to the author's occasionally almost reverent language: Ferguson possessed a "deep-seated desire to follow the truth wherever it led him—even if it took him far from the fervent convictions of his youth" (p. 213). "His legacy is a commitment to the search for truth" (p. 218). (Is that *not* the legacy of, say, Wells Jakeman?) Echoing Eric Hoffer's classic study of Nazis and other fanatics, Larson says that the early Ferguson "expect[ed] with the certainty of the true believer that he would find archaeological proof of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon" (p. 217).¹⁰ But in the last thirteen years of his life Ferguson became much more "broad-minded" (p. 217). He "developed

10. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper, 1951).

a more tolerant attitude about the opinions of others, felt that religion served a genuine need in human life, found relaxation in working in the garden, and enjoyed life immensely” (p. 218). “The bottom line of Ferguson’s position was that whatever works for a person and gives meaning to life was, by definition, good for that person” (p. 218).

Larson’s work is strikingly partisan in its defensiveness toward a doubting Thomas Ferguson. Do we really have any direct evidence, for example, of precisely how much Bruce Warren knew about the state and history of Ferguson’s testimony? Larson provides none but still paints Dr. Warren as disingenuous for having supposedly engaged in a cover-up of Ferguson’s faltering religious belief (pp. 269–74). But this seems unjustified and, very probably, unfair. Given Thomas Stuart Ferguson’s evident lack of candor about his views—it is noteworthy that Larson refuses to call *him* “deceptive”—can Warren really be blamed if he was wrong about them? Especially in light of the fact that, as Larson himself observes in another context (where, once again, it is taken to count against Warren), Warren’s “total association with Ferguson during the last thirteen years of his life”—the very time, be it noted, of Ferguson’s apparent doubts—“consisted of a five-minute conversation in 1979” (p. 272)? In a letter to one of the authors, Warren puts it at about *two* minutes and remarks that his statement in the preface to *The Messiah in Ancient America* “was written in the spring of 1987 before I knew anything about Tom Ferguson’s problems with the Book of Abraham or the various negative letters he had written between 1970 and the time of his death.” Warren had been led to believe that Ferguson was in touch with Bookcraft and was revising the book for publication when he died.¹¹

At several points in Larson’s book, judgments are pronounced without a clear basis to justify them. For example, Ferguson was convinced that we now have the original ancient manuscript from which the Book of Abraham purportedly derives and dismissed any contrary opinion as “a dodge” (p. 112). But this is, at best, disputed. Yet Larson picks up the same notion. “Now that all the Joseph Smith Egyptian

11. Bruce Warren, e-mail to Daniel C. Peterson, 7 May 1996.

papyri have been translated,” he reports, not “even the name of Abraham is found anywhere among the papyri” (p. 105). Consider, too, the following: “Disenchanted, he became a Mormon ‘closet doubter’”—that is, someone who “privately disbelieves some of the basic teachings of the Church but keeps that disbelief hidden from his/her public image. Typically this state of skepticism is preceded by an extended period of strong belief in those same tenets” (p. 134). What undergirds Larson’s judgment here? A survey? Personal experience? (Mark Hofmann might serve as a potential counterexample.) More importantly, after noting that Ferguson’s beliefs subsequent to the early 1960s can be known only from “his conversations and letters” (p. 135). Larson declares that the years 1969–70 “are a documentary blank with no known letters” (p. 136). Undeterred by this lacuna, though, he proceeds to tell us what happened during that time period: Ferguson went through “a period of soul-searching and reflection” and “agonized to find a spiritual meaning to his beliefs. He reexamined his assumptions about the Book of Abraham and even began to question the historicity of the Book of Mormon” (p. 136). Fawn Brodie herself could hardly have bettered this.¹²

Nevertheless, we are quite prepared to entertain the idea that Thomas Stuart Ferguson lost his faith. It seems the most plausible reading of some of the evidence. There are, however, several contrary indications that muddy the waters a bit. For instance, the 1975 symposium paper on which Larson places such weight can be read, in a few passages, as expressing at least a hope that the Book of Mormon *might* be true. And Thomas Ferguson’s son Larry recalls sitting on a patio with his father shortly after his father had returned from a trip to Mexico with Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. It was only one month before the senior Ferguson’s entirely unexpected death. “For no apparent reason, out of the blue,” Larry recalls, Thomas Stuart Ferguson turned to his son and bore his testi-

12. On her propensity to read Joseph Smith’s mind, see Hugh Nibley, “No, Ma’am, That’s Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie’s Reluctant Vindication of a Prophet She Seeks to Expose,” in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 1–45.

mony. “Larry,” he said, “the Book of Mormon is *exactly* what Joseph Smith said it is.” Sometime earlier, Ferguson had borne a similar testimony to his wife, Larry’s mother, and, during the year before he died, he had participated in an effort to distribute the Book of Mormon to non–Latter-day Saints.¹³ He included his photograph along with the following testimony in several copies of the book:

We have studied the Book of Mormon for 50 years. We can tell you that it follows only the New Testament as a written witness to the mission, divinity, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And it seems to us that there is no message that is needed by man and mankind more than the message of Christ. Millions of people have come to accept Jesus as the Messiah because of reading the Book of Mormon in a quest for truth. The book is the cornerstone of the Mormon Church.

The greatest witness to the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon is the book itself. But many are the external evidences that support it.¹⁴

Ferguson also called Robert and Rosemary Brown of Mesa, Arizona, and told them that, yes, the writings of the amateur Egyptologist Dee Jay Nelson had caused him a brief period of doubt about the Book of Abraham. But, he said, their devastating exposé of Nelson’s charlatanry had turned him right around.¹⁵ Shortly before his death, he also told the Browns that Jerald and Sandra Tanner had been publishing material from him without his permission and indicated that he was

13. Larry Ferguson, telephone conversation with Daniel C. Peterson, 15 April 2004; see Larry Ferguson, “The Most Powerful Book,” *Dialogue* 23/3 (1990): 9.

14. The statement is reproduced in Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, UT: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), 283. As can be seen from its publication date, this book appeared several years after Ferguson’s death. It is a reworking of Ferguson’s much earlier work *One Fold and One Shepherd* (San Francisco: Books of California, 1958).

15. See Robert L. Brown and Rosemary Brown, *They Lie in Wait to Deceive: “A Study of Anti-Mormon Deception,”* ed. Barbara Ellsworth (Mesa, AZ: Brownsworth, 1981). This hilarious and truly devastating book is now available online at www.fairlds.org/pubs/liw/liwv1.html (accessed 28 April 2004).

contemplating a lawsuit against them. He even declared that some of what had been published as coming from him was a forgery.¹⁶

Let us, however, accept the possibility that Ferguson may indeed have lost his faith in Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon for a time. We don't wish to seem callous. As believers, we care about the fate of Thomas Ferguson's soul. As human beings, we are concerned about the pain that a discussion like this might cause to members of his family, who are still very much alive. But having said that, the question that frankly comes to our minds when we consider the claim that Thomas Ferguson lost his faith is "So what?"

The apostasy of prominent religious figures is hardly a novelty. One thinks of the Talmudic sage Elisha Ben Abuyah, for example, or perhaps even of the spectacular instance of Sabbatai Zevi. The founder of Neoplatonism was an apostate Egyptian Christian by the name of Ammonius Saccas. St. Augustine apostatized from the anthropomorphizing Christianity in which he had been raised and became a Manichaeian. Then he apostatized from Manichaeism, converting to the Neoplatonized and anti-anthropomorphic Christianity of Bishop Ambrose of Milan. C. S. Lewis was an apostate from the atheistic naturalism that reigned almost unquestioned among Oxbridge intellectuals of the 1920s. Early Latter-day Saint history certainly has no lack of apostates, as even the most casual student of the subject knows. Every conversion is presumably an apostasy from *something*.

Individual apostasies have little or nothing to say, in themselves, about the truth claims of the systems that the apostates have left behind. We note this, once again, only because a considerable number of polemicists against the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have sought to use the case of Thomas Stuart Ferguson to score points against the church. We do not intend to take up this particular (and, in our opinion, largely illegitimate and irrelevant) issue any further, but only to suggest that every tradition (religious or nonreligious) has its apostates—emphatically including evangelical Protestantism. (One thinks of the many fundamentalists who shed their childhood

16. Robert Brown, telephone conversation with Daniel C. Peterson, 15 April 2004.

faith in liberal divinity schools, or of the recent and ongoing emigration of certain evangelical intellectuals to Rome, or Franky Schaeffer's recent, noisy defection to Eastern Orthodoxy. Ernest Hemingway was raised in an evangelical Protestant home.)

Still, Stan Larson apparently sees the doubting Thomas Stuart Ferguson as a significant harbinger, a role model, and wants his readers to see him in the same way. But is this justified? "The odyssey of Ferguson," wrote Larson in the earlier printed version of this work, "is a quest for religious certitude through archaeological evidences."¹⁷ Precisely. And there's the rub. Larson refers to Ferguson's growing conviction of his personal role to demonstrate to the world the authenticity of the Book of Mormon, "His major goal in life" was "proving that Jesus Christ really appeared in ancient Mexico after his crucifixion and resurrection" (p. 69). This sort of language, if it accurately reflects Ferguson's self-image, perhaps offers a clue to the reason for his possible loss of faith. He was distressed, for example, that inscriptions related to the Book of Mormon were not forthcoming. But it is only within the past few years that any inscriptional evidence even of the biblical "house of David" has been found. The earlier incarnation of Larson's book quotes a letter from Ferguson to his friend Wendell Phillips, telling about his plans for a trip to the Near East in April 1961. Ferguson intended to travel, among other destinations, to Oman, where, he said, he would "climb to the top of the mountain nearest the sea in Oman and look around for any inscriptions that might have been left on the mountain by Nephi, where he talked to the Lord."¹⁸ Was he *serious*? Ferguson's feeling that one of his early manuscripts "would be a powerful influence for world peace" (p. 16), if it is accurately reported, suggests some degree of estrangement from reality. Likewise, his prediction—following brief remarks about the problem of identifying the Preclassic inhabitants of the Upper Grijalva River basin—that "the solution may well have far-reaching implications and results for the general welfare of the present inhabitants

17. Larson, "Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson," 57.

18. *Ibid.*, 67; Larson, "Ferguson and Book of Mormon Archaeology," 255.

of the earth” clearly seems to ask of archaeology far more than it can ever possibly deliver.¹⁹

“My personal experience with Tom Ferguson and his evangelism,” recalls Professor John L. Sorenson,

crystallized in a period of 10 days that he and I spent in intensive archaeological survey in April 1953 in the Chiapas central depression. In the field, out of my academic training I saw a host of things which did not register with him. His primary concern was to ask wherever we went if anyone had seen “figurines of horses.” That epitomized his unsubtle concept of “proof.” I could only cringe at this jackpot-or-nothing view of archaeology. No wonder the man’s “quest” failed! He began with naive expectations and they served him right to the end.²⁰

“He wondered,” reports Larson, “why the evidence for the antiquity of the Book of Mormon was not coming forth as expected. He was genuinely disappointed that the archaeological support for the Book of Mormon was not being discovered at the rate he had anticipated” (p. 69). Again, though, progress in Mesoamerican archaeology did not destroy the testimony of M. Wells Jakeman. An interesting future question for research would center on why a professional expert in the field remained evidently undisturbed by matters that may have proved troubling to the faith of an amateur. Were Ferguson’s expectations unrealistic? As Sorenson said in 1996 of Professor Jakeman, whose Berkeley dissertation dealt with “the ethnic and political structure of Yucatan immediately preceding the Spanish conquest,” “he remained methodologically cautious his whole life regarding ‘proof’ of the Book of Mormon,” yet “he also still remains a believer in the Book of Mormon.”²¹ Are the two facts related?

19. Thomas Stuart Ferguson, “Introduction concerning the New World Archaeological Foundation,” *Papers of the New World Archaeological Foundation* 1 (Orinda, CA: NAAF, 1956), 6.

20. John Sorenson, e-mail to Daniel Peterson, 23 April 1996. Compare Sorenson, in addendum, 118 (see note 3 above).

21. Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

We argue that Thomas Ferguson was methodologically incautious in his believing days and that this continued into his apparent time of doubt. He was uncritical even as a critic. In 1970 and 1971, we are told, Ferguson was troubled by the “new data on the First Vision” (p. 119). In fact, Larson seems to buy into this when he tells us that “a forthright attitude by the LDS Church leaders about . . . the First Vision would radically alter the perceptions of most members” (p. 119). Ferguson seems to have been likewise troubled by evidence for Joseph Smith’s legal examination before a justice of the peace in South Bainbridge, New York, in 1826 (pp. 142–44). Yet subsequent research suggests that these may be nonissues.²²

The Book of Abraham

The Pearl of Great Price looms large in Ferguson’s story, as Larson tells it (pp. 85–132). Ferguson’s entire religious outlook changed, he says, “because of the rediscovery and translation of some of Joseph Smith’s original papyri of the Book of Abraham” (p. 85). But was it really so simple? Were there no other contributing factors? Larson himself may have unwittingly suggested one: “During the Civil Rights Movement,” he says of Ferguson, “he questioned the rightness of the Mormon Church’s ban on priesthood for the blacks, and due to that position he developed a quiet skepticism concerning the Book of Abraham, which speaks of someone being cursed ‘as pertaining to the Priesthood’ (Abr. 1:26). The stage was set for a radical change in his understanding of that Mormon scripture” (p. 70). While this alleged position of Ferguson’s does establish him on the side of the progressive angels, it also suggests that he may have been predisposed to reject the Book of Abraham. Sorenson says that Ferguson was “eventually trapped by his unjustified expectations, flawed logic, limited information, perhaps offended pride, and lack of faith in the tedious research that real scholarship requires.”²³

22. See, for example, Gordon A. Madsen, “Joseph Smith’s 1826 Trial: The Legal Setting,” *BYU Studies* 30/2 (1990): 91–108; Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision: Confirming Evidences and Contemporary Accounts*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980).

23. Sorenson, in addendum, 119 (see note 3 above).

Does the Book of Abraham controversy provide solid grounds for Ferguson's loss of faith? Larson seems to think so. We do not. Leonard Lesko and John A. Wilson told Ferguson that the standing figure in Facsimile 1 should have the head not of a man but of the jackal-god Anubis (pp. 95–99). But, as Professor John Gee has pointed out, the question is really moot: Whether the figure had a human head or an Anubis mask, it would still be a priest.²⁴

This leads to a broader critique of Larson's work: It is not balanced. He cites Stephen Thompson as a Latter-day Saint Egyptologist who rejects the Book of Abraham (pp. 98–99, 116, 121, 124, 125, 131, 194, 226), but he takes no account of John Gee, a Latter-day Saint Egyptologist who emphatically does not. He never confronts Gee's writing on the Pearl of Great Price.²⁵ Are Thompson's criticisms of the Book of Abraham fatal to its historical claims? Let's look at a couple: Thompson claims that religious persecution did not exist in the ancient world until the time of Antiochus Epiphanes IV in the second century BC; the Egyptians, he says, were remarkably tolerant religiously. And human sacrifice, he says, was never practiced by ancient Egyptians. However, Thompson seems to have missed a Thirteenth Dynasty text stipulating that unauthorized intruders into the temple should be burned alive. And he overlooks a Twelfth Dynasty execration ritual

24. John Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 79–82.

25. See, for example, John Gee, "Telling the Story of the Joseph Smith Papyri," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/2 (1996): 46–59; Gee, "Abracadabra, Isaac and Jacob," 19–84; Gee, "'Bird Island' Revisited, or the Book of Mormon through Pyramidal Kabbalistic Glasses," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 7/1 (1995): 219–28; Gee, "A Tragedy of Errors," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 4 (1992): 93–117; Gee, "Abraham in Ancient Egyptian Texts," *Ensign*, July 1992, 60–62; Gee, "Notes on the Sons of Horus" (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1991); and Gee, "References to Abraham Found in Two Egyptian Texts," *Insights* (September 1991): 1, 3. Also significant, but appearing after the publication of Larson's book, are John Gee, "Eyewitness, Hearsay, and Physical Evidence of the Joseph Smith Papyri," in *The Disciple as Witness: Essays on Latter-day Saint History and Doctrine in Honor of Richard Lloyd Anderson*, ed. Stephen D. Ricks, Donald W. Parry, and Andrew H. Hedges (Provo, UT: FARMS, 2000), 175–217; and John Gee and Stephen D. Ricks, "Historical Plausibility: The Historicity of the Book of Abraham as a Case Study," in *Historicity and the Latter-day Saint Scriptures*, ed. Paul Y. Hoskisson (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2001), 63–98.

that includes human sacrifice and was found at Mergissa, in Nubia, accompanied by a disarticulated skeleton with the skull upside down, smashed pottery, and the remnants of burnt red-wax figurines. But then, it is noteworthy (especially for an argument that relies heavily on charges of anachronism) that *all* of Thompson's evidence comes from the Egyptian New Kingdom, whereas Abraham almost certainly lived in the considerably earlier Middle Kingdom.²⁶

And this, in turn, suggests an even broader problem: Larson appears to be ignoring a sizeable body of positive evidence for the historicity of both the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham. What is more, the evidence continues to accumulate. Critics of the Book of Abraham have long claimed that there was no Egyptian cultic influence in Syria at the time of Abraham, as the book seems to suggest. But over the past fifty years, historians have come to recognize that Egypt "dominated" Syria and Palestine during the Middle Kingdom. Moreover, Gee and Ricks have located published evidence of the worship of Egyptian gods in the Middle Bronze II period at Ebla, in Syria.²⁷ This is the right time for Abraham, it is the right place, and it even includes (among others) the right god—the Fayyum crocodile god Sobek, who seems to appear in Facsimile 1. He has also identified a possible reference in Egyptian materials to the place-name *Olishem*, previously attested only in Abraham 1:10 and an ancient inscription near the site of Ebla.²⁸

Dr. Larson recounts Thomas Ferguson's encounters with Bay area Egyptologists Henry L. F. Lutz and Leonard Lesko, as related by Ferguson (pp. 92–99). Professor Lutz died in 1973. It would be useful, however, to have Professor Lesko's side of the story, if he still recalls it. A Latter-day Saint former graduate student and associate of Professor Lesko says that the subject of Joseph Smith and Mormonism had never come up in their exchanges until just after Ferguson's visit to Lesko in late 1967 or early 1968. But he recalls Lesko asking him, one day in his office, if he (the student) knew a Tom Ferguson. Was he a Mormon? Professor Lesko

26. Gee and Ricks, "Historical Plausibility," 80.

27. *Ibid.*, 78–80.

28. *Ibid.*, 75–76, 78–80.

explained that Ferguson had come into his office with some pictures and asked if he could identify them. Yes, he could. Do they have anything to do with Abraham? Ferguson asked. No. Whereupon Ferguson, still not identifying himself as a Latter-day Saint, left. But the encounter bothered Professor Lesko, whom his Mormon student remembered as being “virtually apologetic” as it dawned on him what the conversation had really been about. Lesko thought it was a setup. The student recalls that Lesko went to a file cabinet and got out a fat folder of materials about the Book of Abraham, which he showed to him. If Ferguson had been forthright, Lesko said, he could have told him a lot more. He would, he said, have referred him to Hugh Nibley. The student remembers Lesko as being at pains to tell him that he would never have said anything negative about Joseph Smith or Mormonism.²⁹

Larson devotes a considerable amount of space to citations of Egyptological opinions on the Book of Abraham and recent critiques of the Book of Mormon that have little or nothing to do with Thomas Stuart Ferguson. For this and other reasons, it is manifestly apparent that critiquing recent defenders of Latter-day Saint belief is the real purpose of his book and that its rather cursory biography of Thomas Stuart Ferguson is only a convenient (and largely neglected) vehicle for that critique. But how much value do non-Mormon critiques of the Book of Mormon really possess? Larson cites a very negative appraisal by Yale’s Michael Coe. Recently, however, Sorenson has taken Professor Coe to task for brushing aside the Book of Mormon “without studying it more than casually”—ironically doing to it what Coe had accused Sir J. E. S. Thompson of doing to the Grolier Codex, a document whose unorthodox discovery was allowed to stand in the way of recognition that it is, indeed, an ancient Mesoamerican book.³⁰

29. Incidentally, if the Egyptologists really said that the Book of Abraham papyri were just garden-variety pieces of the Book of the Dead, they were wrong. Perhaps Ferguson misunderstood them. For, at a very minimum, the papyri include materials from the Book of Breathing.

30. John L. Sorenson, “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Record,” in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins*, ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 391–521, especially 482–87.

Ferguson's 1975 Paper on Book of Mormon Geography

Larson calls Ferguson's 1975 paper, entitled "Written Symposium on Book of Mormon Geography," an "insightful document" that is still worth examining (pp. 177–78). Actually, though, what Ferguson had to say in 1975 was of little scholarly value, and the kindest and most appropriate response would be to politely ignore it. Unfortunately, though, some critics of the church continue to cite the paper with glee, praising it as an enlightened commentary on the imminent collapse of the Book of Mormon. "All the rest of us who participated in that exchange (not just me) were embarrassed by the utter naïveté of what Tom wrote," Sorenson has stated.

For example, in his list of "archaeological tests" for which he would expect to find American "evidence," he did not even distinguish between statements about the Old World (e.g., reference to "glass" and "grapes," in quotations from Isaiah) and statements about the Nephite setting in the New World. His whole dashed-off little "paper" was full of methodological and epistemological over-simplifications. It appeared that his mind was by then closed to "the search for truth," for he paid not the slightest attention to what other, better qualified LDS scholars said on the same occasion concerning what he considered the damning lack of "evidences."³¹

Warren recalls feeling "pleased that Tom was being more cautious with his statements about Book of Mormon geography but [sensed] that he was leaning over backwards toward the critical side of the issues involved."³² In his book, Larson focuses on four issues or "tests" mentioned by Ferguson that he feels are still relevant to the current discussion on the Book of Mormon: plants, animals, metals, and script and language (pp. 175–234). Since Larson's discussion represents an expansion on Ferguson's earlier criticisms as well as a partial critique of work by John Sorenson, we will examine each of these in turn.

31. Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

32. Warren to Peterson, 7 May 1996.

Plants

Much of Larson's discussion of "Archaeology and the Book of Mormon" (pp. 175–234) appears to be dependent on Deanne Matheny's 1993 critique of John Sorenson's book *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*.³³ Shortly after Matheny's critique appeared, however, it received a thoughtful and careful review and response by Sorenson.³⁴ In reading Larson's book, one comes away with the impression that Larson wrote much of this chapter under the influence of Matheny's critique, somewhat prematurely and without awareness of the fact that Sorenson's response would appear as soon as it did. The careful reader will find traces of hasty and superficial revision in this section, apparently made after the author encountered that response. In our view, though, Sorenson's critique seriously undermined many of Matheny's arguments, and Larson should have paid greater attention to it. While Larson occasionally gives grudging acknowledgment to some of Sorenson's points, his treatment overlooks other significant ones. This is evident in his discussion of plants as they may relate to the Book of Mormon (pp. 179–81).

Larson refers to Matheny's citation of a survey of pre-Columbian crops in Chiapas, Mexico (p. 180). Since few of the crops mentioned in the Book of Mormon text were identified in this survey, Larson, following Ferguson's lead, suggests that this poses a serious problem for the Book of Mormon. In his 1994 article, however, Sorenson addressed the inadequacy of this plant survey cited by Matheny and provided cogent reasons for believing that the botany of pre-Columbian Mesoamerica was probably far more diverse than is generally assumed.³⁵ Oddly, Larson simply cites the Matheny article; he does not address Sorenson's careful response.

Larson likewise neglects to address significant issues relating to Book of Mormon grains. For example, Sorenson showed in his 1994

33. Deanne G. Matheny, "Does the Shoe Fit? A Critique of the Limited Tehuantepec Geography," in *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*, ed. Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1993), 269–328.

34. John L. Sorenson, "Viva Zapato! Hurray for the Shoe!" *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 6/1 (1994): 297–361.

35. *Ibid.*, 339–40.

article that a variety of New World plants that would easily fit the ambiguous references to “grain” in the Book of Mormon were known in ancient Mesoamerica.³⁶ Two grains, however, which are mentioned by name—barley and wheat—suggest at least two possibilities: (1) Those terms could refer to New World grains that were identified by Old World names, even though they were not biologically the same, or (2) they could refer to genuine New World barley and wheat.

Sorenson suggested that edible New World seeds may have been labeled with names like *barley*, *wheat*, or *sheum*, and he proffered amaranth as one example of a New World grain that could potentially have been designated by any one of those names. Larson’s complaint that *amaranth* cannot refer to all three Book of Mormon terms (p. 221 n. 28) is a red herring since Sorenson was not claiming definitive identifications for any of these crops, but merely suggesting possibilities. In fact, Larson knows better because Sorenson has since documented at least seven possibilities—of which amaranth was only one. Why does Larson obscure this issue? It is a well-known fact that, when the Spaniards first encountered the New World, they often employed Old World terms to designate American crops, even though, botanically speaking, these were often of a different variety or species. It is neither unreasonable nor without historical parallel that Book of Mormon peoples from the Old World might have adopted a similar practice. In fact, the Book of Mormon text itself seems to provide evidence for such word borrowing at Mosiah 9:9, where *sheum* is said to have been cultivated by Zeniff’s people, *in addition to* barley and wheat. As Robert F. Smith first observed, *sheum* is a perfectly good Akkadian cereal name, dating to the third millennium BC, which in ancient Assyria referred to barley.³⁷ Regardless of its New World application, however, an obvious question arises: Just how did the author of the Book of Mormon happen to come

36. *Ibid.*, 338–39.

37. Robert F. Smith, “Some ‘Neologisms’ from the Mormon Canon,” in *Conference on the Language of the Mormons* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Language Research Center, 1973), 66. This point has been noted by John L. Sorenson in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1985), 185–86; Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!” 338.

up with a term like *sheum* for the Zeniffites and just happen to use it in an agricultural context? Was this simply a coincidence?

In addition to the suggestion that they may be loan words, Sorenson and others have argued that Book of Mormon references to “barley” and “wheat” may indeed refer to actual varieties of those species of grain that at one time existed in the New World but have not yet been identified by archaeologists. Sorenson, for example, cites the astonishing discovery of pre-Columbian domesticated barley at various North American sites in Arizona, Oklahoma, and Illinois.

So here was a domesticated barley in use in several parts of North America over a long period of time. Crop exchanges between North America and Mesoamerica have been documented by archaeology making it possible that this native barley was known in that tropical southland and conceivably was even cultivated there. The key point is that these unexpected results from botany are recent. More discoveries will surely be made as research continues.³⁸

In spite of this, Larson continues to insist that “the lack of evidence for the existence of wheat in the New World remains a major difficulty in verifying the antiquity of the Book of Mormon” (p. 181). We think, rather, that reference to *sheum* in an 1830 Book of Mormon, thirty-seven years before Akkadian could be deciphered, poses a greater “problem” for those who choose to view that text as nineteenth-century fiction. In fact, as we have noted already, reference to wheat may not pose a problem at all if, like *sheum*, that term was applied to some other New World crop—for which there are various plausible candidates. Still, doesn’t the case of pre-Columbian domesticated barley suggest the wisdom of a little patience and vindicate the reasonableness of a faith that similar evidence for wheat may one day be forthcoming as well?

It is vitally important that those seeking to draw broad conclusions from archaeology (whether regarding the Book of Mormon or with respect to other matters) understand the severe limitations of

38. Sorenson, “Viva Zapato!” 341–42.

currently available data and that they realize how much work remains to be done. Tentativeness and humility are very much in order. A recent article by Anthony P. Andrews and Fernando Robles Castellanos will serve to illustrate our point. Writing about a relatively small region, the northwestern portion of the Yucatan Peninsula between the coast and Merida, Andrews and Castellanos report:

To date, we have gathered data on 249 pre-Hispanic and 154 historic sites, and visited most of these in the field. When the project began in 1999, only 69 pre-Hispanic sites had been reported in our survey area. We have obtained surface collections from more than 220 localities, and sketch maps of approximately 50 sites, have made detailed maps of 39 sites, and have excavated 29 test pits at 15 sites.³⁹

Thus, according to Andrews and Castellanos, in 1999—just five years ago—only 69 of the 249 pre-Hispanic sites (28 percent) that they have now identified in this relatively small region were even known to archaeologists. Of the 249 pre-Hispanic sites mentioned in their article, 207 were from the Preclassic era (ca. 700 BC–AD 250), which is essentially the period of the Book of Mormon Nephites.⁴⁰ Their group prepared “sketch maps” of only one-fifth, or twenty percent, of the 249 sites, leaving the other eighty percent as yet unmapped. Those who insist that, if the Book of Mormon were true, we would have a museum full of artifactual evidence proving it, vastly overestimate the completeness of current archaeological knowledge about pre-Columbian Mesoamerica.

Animals

Elephants. Larson believes that the single reference to “elephants” in the Book of Mormon (at Ether 9:19) poses a problem for Latter-day

39. Anthony P. Andrews and Fernando Robles Castellanos, “An Archaeological Survey of Northwest Yucatan, Mexico,” *Mexicon* 26/1 (2004): 12. Our thanks to John A. Tvedtnes for bringing this article to our attention.

40. See the table at Andrews and Castellanos, “Archaeological Survey,” 8.

Saint belief (pp. 184–88). He cites the currently accepted view of scholars that elephants such as the mammoth and mastodon were extinct more than ten thousand years ago, long before even the Jaredite era (p. 187). A minority of scholars, however, have suggested that some few species of elephant may have survived in isolated regions of the Americas into later historical times. Larson’s argument here does not address much of the evidence supportive of this view.⁴¹

In 1934, W. D. Strong published a significant article summarizing numerous North American Indian traditions suggesting historical knowledge of the mammoth.⁴² Strong divided these traditions into two groups: (1) “myths of observation,” so called because they were based upon “the observation of fossil bones, objects which would appear to have always excited human interest,” and (2) actual “historical traditions,’ [which] seem to embody a former knowledge of the living animals in question, perhaps grown hazy through long oral transmission.”⁴³ It is this later group of traditions that tends to support the idea of late survival of the mammoth or mastodon. These traditions, which can be found among Native Americans from the Great Lakes region to the Gulf of Mexico, led Ludwell H. Johnson to conclude not only that man and elephant had coexisted, but that the mammoth and the mastodon may have survived until as late as 2000 BC in certain regions of North America.⁴⁴

Other scholars have discussed pictographic evidence of trunked animals found at several sites in North America and also in Mayan codices and other artistic representations found in Mesoamerica and Central America. Zoologist W. Stempel claimed on the basis of such a representation at Copan that these could not be tapirs, but that the

41. A good starting point would have been the annotated sources on elephants compiled in John L. Sorenson, “Animals in the Book of Mormon: An Annotated Bibliography” (FARMS paper, 1992).

42. W. D. Strong, “North American Indian Traditions Suggesting a Knowledge of the Mammoth,” *American Anthropologist* 36 (1934): 81–88.

43. *Ibid.*, 81.

44. Ludwell H. Johnson III, “Men and Elephants in America,” *Scientific Monthly* 75 (1952): 215–21.

images must represent mammoths.⁴⁵ No less an authority than Eric Thompson found some of these elephantine-like representations to be “a difficult thing to be explained away by non-believers.”⁴⁶ In 1930, an “elephant-like” stone statue was discovered near the Tonolá River on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec.⁴⁷ Although certainly not definitive, such evidence may be suggestive of the late survival of mammoths or mastodons into this tropical region of southern Mexico, for which Sorenson and others have suggested links between the Olmec cultural tradition and the Jaredites.

In 1993, three Russian archaeologists announced the discovery that a species of dwarf mammoth had survived until as recently as two thousand years ago on Wrangel Island in the Siberian Arctic.⁴⁸ Oddly, Larson feels that this remarkable discovery has no relevance to the question of the elephant in the Book of Mormon. Instead, he writes that “the evidence that neither the mammoth nor the mastodon of North America survived the last Ice Age is strong” (p. 188). But his statement misses the mark on several counts. Mammoths were not supposed to have survived so late *anywhere*, yet a minority of scholars have suggested that some few species of elephant may have survived in scattered or isolated regions into relatively recent historical times. As the Russian archaeologists noted in one report, “hardly anyone has doubted that mammoths had become extinct *everywhere* by around 9,500 years before present”; however, these new discoveries “force this view to be revised.”⁴⁹ And if the mastodon did survive into recent historical times in one place, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it might have survived, in at least limited numbers, in other regions as well.

45. W. Stempel, “Die Tierbilder der Mayahandschriften,” *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 40 (1908): 704–18.

46. Eric Thompson, “The ‘Children of the Sun’ and Central America,” *Antiquity* 2/6 (1928): 167.

47. Gladys Ayer Nomland, “Proboscis Statue from the Isthmus of Tehuantepec,” *American Anthropologist* 34 (1932): 591–93.

48. S. L. Vartanyan, V. E. Garutt, and A. V. Sher, “Holocene Dwarf Mammoths from Wrangel Island in the Siberian Arctic,” *Nature* 362 (25 March 1993): 337–40.

49. Vartanyan, Garutt, and Sher, “Holocene Dwarf Mammoths,” 337, emphasis added.

Larson's statement likewise shows unawareness that some American elephant remains have, in fact, been dated much later. The mastodon at Devil's Den, Florida, has been dated to 5000 BC⁵⁰ and, in the Great Lakes region, to 4000 BC.⁵¹ Jim Hester suggests that, while the general picture of late Pleistocene extinctions may be true, samples such as the above apparently reflect "lingering survival [of the mastodon] in isolated areas."⁵² Some time ago, Sorenson summarized similar evidence for survival of the mastodon as late as 4000 BC in southern Arizona. Sorenson makes the reasonable observation that "in the moist lands of Mesoamerica elephants and other large Pleistocene animals certainly lived later than in the drying Southwest."⁵³

Of course, the Book of Mormon only requires that some species of mammoth or mastodon survive into the middle of the third millennium BC, and nothing in the Book of Mormon text requires that Jaredite "elephants" were ever abundant or numerous. Latter-day Saints could reasonably hypothesize, based on current scientific evidence, that, shortly thereafter, during the great dearth in the reign of Heth (Ether 9:30–35), the small surviving population of the elephants finally became extinct. Be that as it may, the idea of late survival of the elephant does not now seem so unlikely as it once did.

Horses. An even better known Book of Mormon question involves the text's reference to "horses." According to Larson, the apparent absence of the horse from America during the Jaredite and Nephite periods poses a serious challenge for defenders of the historicity of the book (pp. 188–94). In his 1975 critique, Ferguson had stated, "That evidence of the ancient existence of these animals is not elusive is found

50. Robert A. Martin and S. David Webb, "Late Pleistocene Mammals from the Devil's Den Fauna, Levy County," in S. David Webb, *Pleistocene Mammals of Florida* (Gainesville: University Presses of Florida, 1974), 144.

51. Jim J. Hester, "Late Pleistocene Extinction and Radiocarbon Dating," *American Antiquity* 26/1 (1960): 71, 74.

52. *Ibid.*, 74.

53. John L. Sorenson, "The Elephant in Ancient America," in *Progress in Archaeology: An Anthology*, comp. and ed. Ross T. Christensen (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1963), 98.

in the fact that proof of their existence in the ancient Old World is abundant” (p. 246).

But this is extraordinarily naïve. Archaeology is a very chancy business at best. Most ancient artifacts, buildings, animal and human remains, and the like, are gone forever, leaving not a trace behind. Although the Bible, Crusader accounts, and other records as late as the sixteenth century mention lions in Israel, for example, it was not until 1983 that a single skeletal specimen dating to the biblical period was discovered.⁵⁴ Other large mammals that still survive in that land but were unattested until the 1960s and 1970s include the desert leopard and the oryx. “It is probable,” writes Jacques Soustelle, “that the Olmecs kept dogs and turkeys, animals domesticated in very early times on the American continent, *but the destruction of any sort of bone remains, both human and animal, by the dampness and the acidity of the soil keeps us from being certain of this.*”⁵⁵ Some years ago, Bruce Warren pointed out to one of us in conversation that, although hundreds of thousands of cattle were driven from Texas to Wyoming between 1870 and 1890, an archaeologist would be hard pressed to find even a trace of them. As Professor Edwin Yamauchi has remarked, in an aphorism that should preface every critique of the Book of Mormon on these grounds, “*The absence of archaeological evidence is not evidence of absence.*”⁵⁶ And even if artifacts do survive, the odds are that we either will not find them or will not know what to do with them or how to interpret them when we do. Professor John E. Clark, a well-respected field archaeologist, makes the practical limits of archaeological research painfully clear in a memorable image: “Suppose that the town of Provo, Utah, has been completely covered for many years,

54. Louise Martin, “The Faunal Remains from Tell Es-sa ‘Idiyeh,” *Levant* 20 (1988): 83.

55. Jacques Soustelle, *The Olmecs: The Oldest Civilization in Mexico* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 23, emphasis added.

56. Edwin Yamauchi, “The Current State of Old Testament Historiography,” in *Faith, Tradition, and History: Old Testament Historiography in Its Near Eastern Context*, ed. A. R. Millard, James K. Hoffmeier, and David W. Baker (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 34.

and long forgotten. Dig three excavations about the size of telephone booths. Now reconstruct the history of Provo.”⁵⁷

Consider the case of the Huns of central Asia and eastern Europe. They were a nomadic people for whom horses were a significant part of their power, wealth, and culture. It has been estimated that each Hun warrior may have owned as many as ten horses. Thus, during their two-century-long domination of the western steppes, the Huns must have had hundreds of thousands of horses. Yet, as the Hungarian researcher Sándor Bökönyi puts it with considerable understatement, “we know very little of the Huns’ horses. It is interesting that not a single usable horse bone has been found in the territory of the whole empire of the Huns. This is all the more deplorable as contemporary sources mention these horses with high appreciation.”⁵⁸

Accordingly, if Hunnic horse bones are so rare despite the vast herds of horses that undoubtedly once inhabited the steppes, why should we expect extensive evidence of the use of horses in Nephite Mesoamerica—especially considering how limited are the references to horses in the text of the Book of Mormon? Zoo-archaeologist Simon J. M. Davis notes that the majority of bones found in archaeological sites are those of animals that were killed for food or other slaughter products by ancient peoples. It is rare to find remains of other animals in such locations. “Animals exploited, say, for traction or riding [such as horses], may not necessarily have been consumed and may only be represented by an occasional bone introduced by scavenging dogs.” Thus, “the problem of correlating between excavated bones and the economic importance of the animals in antiquity is far from being resolved.”⁵⁹ In fact, “One sometimes wonders whether there is any similarity between a published bone report and the animals exploited by ancient humans.”⁶⁰

57. John E. Clark, conversation with Daniel C. Peterson, 26 May 2004.

58. Sándor Bökönyi, *History of Domestic Mammals in Central and Eastern Europe*, trans. Lili Halápy (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1974), 267.

59. Simon J. M. Davis, *The Archaeology of Animals* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 24. We would like to thank John A. Tvedtnes for providing this reference.

60. *Ibid.*, 23.

In his discussion of horses, Larson claims that Sorenson tried to buttress “his position that the horse might have survived into Book of Mormon times” (p. 190). He concludes that “Sorenson’s three arguments for a late survival of the horse do not hold up under scrutiny” (p. 192). And, in fact, one of the three propositions does indeed seem to be incorrect. After close study of the topic and discussion with Sorenson, we believe that it rests on a simple note-taking error. We are grateful to Larson for his careful proofreading, which will ensure that the error is not perpetuated. But what of his other objections?

Hester did report that horse remains from St. Petersburg, Florida, had been dated to 2040 BP (before present), or just before the time of Christ. While he calls this date “anomalous” and says that it is “suspect” because “the strata are unconsolidated and the fauna may have been redeposited,”⁶¹ it is difficult to see how stratigraphic uncertainties would affect radiocarbon dating.

Larson maintains, against Sorenson, that Ripley Bullen did not claim that horses could have survived until 3000 BC in Florida. Rather, he says, “Bullen spoke in general of the extinction of mammals in Florida” and, contrary to Sorenson’s assertion, “not specifically of the horse” (p. 191). We disagree. A careful reading of the document in question indicates that Bullen did include horses in his general statement about the possible survival of Pleistocene fauna. Sorenson never said that Bullen believes in such survival, merely that he allows that it might have occurred.

Larson claims that Sorenson takes Paul Martin’s statement about the theoretical possibility of horses and certain other Pleistocene fauna surviving to as late as 2000 BC out of context, since, in fact, Martin says that only extinct species of bison have been indisputably demonstrated to have survived into the postglacial period (p. 191). But Martin’s view of the current state of the empirical evidence (with which, by the way, Sorenson tells us he tends to agree) does not rule out (even for him) the theoretical possibility of future evidence that may mandate revision of current ideas. Dr. Sorenson is only saying

61. Hester, “Late Pleistocene Extinction,” 65; cf. 70.

that Martin did not regard the question as definitively closed. And his reading of Martin appears to us to be correct.⁶²

Although horses are generally thought to have been extinct by the Preclassic period, several Mesoamerican sites have yielded horse remains found in a context suggesting later survival. Mercer excavated horse remains that showed no signs of fossilization from several sites in southwest Yucatan.⁶³ Additional tooth and other bone fragments, heavily encrusted with lime, were discovered by Robert T. Hatt at another site in Yucatan that may have been pre-Columbian.⁶⁴

As his next target, Larson turns to a find of horse teeth from a site in the Yucatan called Mayapan (p. 192). Larson claims that Sorenson “misrepresented the evidence” (p. 192). The find is not really pre-Columbian, he says, but prehistoric Pleistocene. He points out that the horse teeth were “heavily mineralized [fossilized]” (p. 192) and were the only materials at the site showing that characteristic. He notes that “the reporting scholar did not suggest that the Maya people had ever seen a pre-Columbian horse, but that in Pleistocene times horses lived in Yucatán, and that ‘the tooth fragments reported here could have been transported in fossil condition’ by the Maya as curiosities” (p. 192). Thus, Larson concludes, Sorenson’s “assertion about pre-Columbian horses must be corrected to refer to ancient Pleistocene horses” (p. 192), which would put them thousands of years before the Jaredites (pp. 31–32).

We are at a loss, however, to see where the article “misrepresented the evidence.” Every item that Larson cites as a corrective to it is *men-*

62. On the issue of the horse, Sorenson states, “Larson’s premature certainty on questionable points recalls Ferguson’s own premature certainties. On [p. 190], Larson says, ‘No depictions of the horse occur in any pre-Columbian art.’ Maybe, and maybe not. There are those (non-Mormons) who believe there are such depictions. Larson just happens not to know enough about the matter. A great deal of care and effort deserves to be exercised in further research before the question can be settled. (‘Negative evidence’ is particularly problematic in any area of science.) Merely to quote some authority who agrees with one’s presupposition is not a substitute for the exhaustive study that still ought to be done.” Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

63. Henry C. Mercer, *The Hill-Caves of Yucatan: A Search for Evidence of Man’s Antiquity in the Caverns of Central America* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1896), 172.

64. Robert T. Hatt et al., “Faunal and Archeological Researches in Yucatan Caves,” *Cranbrook Institute of Science Bulletin* 33 (1953): 71–72.

tioned in it. (It is true that Sorenson was unimpressed with the idea of Pleistocene curios, for which, he says, the biologist proposing the idea can cite neither evidence nor precedents.) Furthermore, although Larson seems to be saying that Sorenson misapplied the term *pre-Columbian* to the Mayapan finds, the term comes from the original “reporting scholar” himself—Clayton Ray, of the Museum of Comparative Zoology in Cambridge, Massachusetts—who was using it to say, at a minimum, that the horse remains do not derive from the colonial or postcolonial period. The title of Ray’s article, from the *Journal of Mammalogy*, is “Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan,” and he applies the label “pre-Columbian” not only to the discoveries at Mayapan but to those made in three caves in southwestern Yucatan—excavated by H. C. Mercer and later studied by Hatt—in which horse material was found associated with pottery and showing no sign of fossilization. Ray concludes, “The [Mayapan] tooth fragments reported here could have been transported in fossil condition as curios by the Mayans, *but the more numerous horse remains reported by Hatt and Mercer (if truly pre-Columbian) could scarcely be explained in this manner.*”⁶⁵

Incidentally, horse bones were also found in association with cultural remains at Loltun Cave in northern Yucatan. There, archaeologists identified a sequence of sixteen layers numbered from the surface downward and obtained a radiocarbon date of about 1800 BC from charcoal fragments found between layers VIII and VII.⁶⁶ Significantly, forty-four fragments of horse remains were found in the layers VII, VI, V, and II—above all in association with pottery. But the earliest Maya ceramics in the region date no earlier than 900–400 BC.⁶⁷ Archaeologist Peter Schmidt notes,

What clearly results is that the presence of the horse, *Equus conversidens*, alone is not sufficient evidence to declare a stratum

65. Clayton E. Ray, “Pre-Columbian Horses from Yucatan,” *Journal of Mammalogy* 38/2 (1957): 278, emphasis added.

66. Peter J. Schmidt, “La entrada del hombre a la Península de Yucatán,” in *Orígenes del Hombre Americano (Seminario)*, comp. Alba González Jácome (Mexico: Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1988), 253. We would like to thank John L. Sorenson for providing us with a copy of this reference.

67. *Ibid.*

totally Pleistocene given the long series of combinations of this species with later materials in the collections of Mercer, Hatt and others. Something went on here that is difficult to explain. [Difficult to explain, that is, in light of current theories about the extinction of the pre-Columbian horse.] If a late survival of the horse and other Pleistocene animals is postulated as an explanation of the situation, it would have to be extended almost to the beginnings of the ceramic era, which will not please the paleontologists.⁶⁸

The point here is, simply, that the question of pre-Columbian horses is not closed. That's all. And it seems to us that Professor Sorenson's caution here is better grounded than Larson's certainty.⁶⁹

Tapir as "Horse." As Professor Sorenson and others have repeatedly pointed out, the practice of naming flora and fauna is far more complicated than critics of the Book of Mormon have been willing to admit. For instance, people typically give the names of familiar animals to animals that have newly come to their attention. Think, for instance, of sea lions, sea cows, and sea horses. When the Romans, confronting the army of Pyrrhus of Epirus in 280 BC, first encountered the elephant, they called it a *Lucca bos* or "Lucanian cow." The Greeks' naming of the hippopotamus (the word means "horse of the river" or "river horse") is also a good example. (Some will recall that the hippopotamus is called a *Nilpferd*, a "Nile horse," in German.)

68. Ibid., 255, translation by John L. Sorenson.

69. On this side issue, Sorenson claims: "Nowhere have I ever claimed that 'horses' in the sense of *Equus equus* (the horse as we know it colloquially) survived from the Pleistocene down to Book of Mormon times. My position has always been that other animals could have been termed 'horses' in the English translation of the Book of Mormon yet that perhaps a true *Equus* form survived down to 'historical' times. The FARMS Update of June 1984, 'Once More: The Horse,' ended with the appropriate qualification (penned by me) to which I still adhere: 'A careful study of the reported remains . . . ought to be done. Radiometric dating might also be worthwhile. Full references to related material will be furnished to any qualified person who desires to carry out such a study.' No such study has yet been done, regardless of the confidence with which establishment scholars may claim that late survivals were impossible. They have never examined the relevant scientific evidence." Sorenson to Peterson, 23 April 1996.

When the Spanish first arrived in Central America, the natives called their horses and donkeys *tzimin*, meaning “tapir.” The Arabs’ labeling of the turkey as an Ethiopian or Roman rooster (*dīk al-ḥabash* or *dīk rūmī*), the Conquistadors’ use of the terms *lion* and *tiger* to designate the jaguar, and the fact that several Amerindian groups called horses *deer* represent but a few more examples of a very well-attested global phenomenon. The Nephites too could easily have assigned familiar Old World names to the animals they discovered in the New.

Larson dismisses Sorenson’s suggestion that the Mesoamerican tapir may have been considered by some Book of Mormon writers to be a kind of “horse” or donkey, declaring that the tapir is much more like a pig (pp. 192–93). Here, though, it is important to remember that Sorenson was comparing the horse to the larger Mesoamerican tapir (*Tapiris bairdii*) and not one of the smaller species. It is also noteworthy that Sorenson is not the only scholar to suggest the similarity. Kamar Al-Shimas notes that in contrast to pigs, the tapir is one of the cleanest of animals.⁷⁰ Hans Krieg likewise feels that the comparison with the pig is unfortunate.

Whenever I saw a tapir, it reminded me of an animal similar to a *horse* or a *donkey*. The movements as well as the shape of the animal, especially the high neck with the small brush mane, even the expression on the face is much more like a horse’s than a pig’s. When watching a tapir on the alert, . . . as he picks himself up when recognizing danger, taking off in a gallop, almost nothing remains of the similarity to a pig.⁷¹

“At first glance,” note Hans Frädriich and Erich Thenius, “the tapirs’ movements also are not similar to those of their relatives, the rhinoceros and the horses. In a slow walk, they usually keep the head lowered.” When one observes them running, however, this changes:

70. Kamar Al-Shimas, *The Mexican Southland* (Fowler, IN: Benton Review Shop, 1922), 112.

71. Hans Krieg, cited by Hans Frädriich and Erich Thenius, “Tapirs,” in *Grzimek’s Animal Life Encyclopedia*, ed. Bernhard Grzimek (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1972–75), 13:19–20, emphasis added.

In a trot, they lift their heads and move their legs in an elastic manner. The amazingly fast gallop is seen only when the animals are in flight, playing, or when they are extremely excited. The tapirs can also climb quite well, even though one would not expect this because of their bulky figure. Even steep slopes do not present obstacles. They jump vertical fences or walls, rising on their hindlegs and leaping up.⁷²

While most species of tapir are much smaller, Baird's tapir, the Mesoamerican species native to Mexico and Guatemala, is rather large. Adult tapirs of this species are about a meter high, nearly two meters in length, and can weigh over 300 kilograms.⁷³ As one authority notes, "This is the largest of the Tapirs, *equaling a small donkey in bulk and sometimes almost so in size.*"⁷⁴ Likewise, A. Starker Leopold describes Baird's tapir as "the *size of a pony* but chunkier and with much shorter legs."⁷⁵ Ernest P. Walker describes them as "about the size of a *donkey.*"⁷⁶ Tapirs can also be domesticated quite easily if they are captured when young.⁷⁷ Young tapirs who have lost their mothers are easily tamed and will eat from a bowl. They like to be petted and will often allow children to ride on their backs.⁷⁸ "Ordinarily, the tapir makes no vocal sound, although when alarmed or excited it emits a sharp squeal *like that of a horse.*"⁷⁹ Since many authorities on animals have compared the tapirs to horses or donkeys, one cannot so easily dismiss the suggestion that Nephi and others might have as well.

72. Ibid., 20.

73. Ibid., 18–19.

74. Ivan T. Sanderson, *Living Mammals of the World* (Garden City, NY: Hanover House, [1955]), 224, emphasis added.

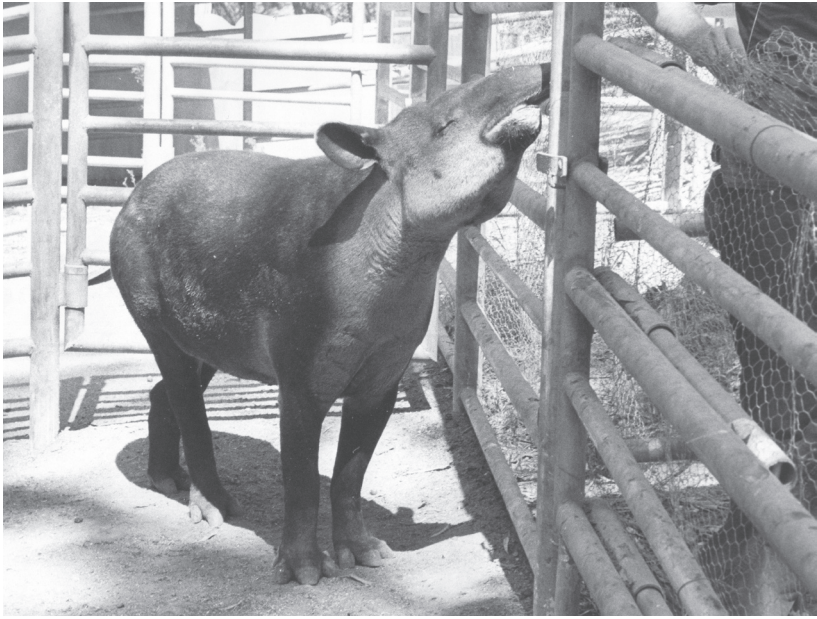
75. A. Starker Leopold, *Wildlife of Mexico: The Game Birds and Mammals* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 488, emphasis added.

76. Ernest P. Walker, *Mammals of the World* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1964), 2:1347, emphasis added.

77. Al-Shimas, *Mexican Southland*, 112.

78. Frädriich and Thenius, "Tapirs," 28–29.

79. Leopold, *Wildlife of Mexico*, 491, emphasis added.



Baird's tapir at the fence. Robert A. Wilson/Tapir Preservation Fund.

Metals

Following and expanding upon Ferguson's critique, Larson discusses the issue of metals in the Book of Mormon (pp. 195–204). The conventional view, which Larson accepts, is that metallurgy was unknown in Mesoamerica until about AD 900. In several publications, however, Sorenson has questioned the adequacy of this opinion for explaining Mesoamerican culture.⁸⁰

"The reconciliation of archaeological evidence with ancient written sources," notes Miriam Balmuth, "is one of the more frustrating and, at the same time, tantalizing exercises both for the historian and

80. John L. Sorenson, "Preclassic Metal?" *American Antiquity* 20/1 (1954): 64; Sorenson, "Indications of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Bulletin of the University Archaeological Society* 5 (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1954): 1–15; Sorenson, "A Reconsideration of Early Metal in Mesoamerica," *Katunob* 9/1 (1976): 1–21; Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 278–88; Sorenson, "Metals and Metallurgy relating to the Book of Mormon Text" (FARMS paper, 1992).

for the classical archaeologist.”⁸¹ Take, for example, the question of tin. Ancient Near Eastern documents seem to refer to tin, yet, because no archaeological specimens have been found, some scholars argue that tin was not really known. “If Assyriologists were asked to confine their translations to the material culture recovered through excavation,” observe J. D. Muhly and T. A. Wertime, “they would be in serious trouble.” The written record refers to tin, but archaeology has apparently not caught up with the historical sources. Consequently, “The absence of actual objects made of metallic tin from excavations in Mesopotamia is a problem, but not a serious one.” They further note that since tin was considered a precious metal, it was frequently controlled by rulers and recycled by being melted down for reuse.⁸² Similarly, P. R. S. Moorey reiterates that, in societies like ancient Mesopotamia where metals were imported, they were often recycled. He also observes that metal finds tend to be rare in settlement and temple excavations anyway. “What evidence there is, is primarily mortuary. When an archaeological period is ill-represented in the mortuary record its metalworking is likely to be more than even obscure.” “Consequently the actual amount of metal recovered through excavation at any period is no guide to the scale of contemporary use nor to the full range of techniques and the repertory of forms.”⁸³

The observation that the discovery of metal artifacts is often rare even when historical sources indicate their use in a particular site or region is equally true of pre-Columbian America. “The chroniclers give the impression that in many parts of America metal objects were in common circulation at the time of the Conquest, and the detailed inventories of the loot sent back to Spain during the conquests of Mexico and Peru emphasize how inadequately the archaeological

81. Miriam S. Balmuth, “Remarks on the Appearance of the Earliest Coins,” in *Studies Presented to George M. A. Hanfmann*, ed. David G. Mitten, John G. Pedley, and Jane A. Scott (Mainz: Von Zabern, 1971), 1.

82. J. D. Muhly and T. A. Wertime, “Evidence for the Sources and Use of Tin during the Bronze Age of the Near East: A Reply to J. E. Dayton,” *World Archaeology* 5/1 (1973): 117.

83. P. R. S. Moorey, “The Archaeological Evidence for Metallurgy and Related Technologies in Mesopotamia, c. 5500–2100 BC,” *Iraq* 44/1 (1982): 14.

discoveries reflect the actual situation.”⁸⁴ “At the time of the Spanish Conquest, the Totonac had a certain amount of precious metals. . . . Nevertheless, as far as we know, metal artifacts have not appeared in archaeological sites definitely identified as Totonac.”⁸⁵ “Mayapan, as the result of looting, is so poor in objects of metal that it is difficult to say that the few objects that remain really give an adequate picture of what was once to be found there.”⁸⁶ “The total absence of metal during the Toltec period [i.e., at Tula] is inexplicable, since this was already in the full epoch of the use of gold, silver and copper. This presents a mystery that up to now none have been able to explain; was the use of metal much later or have the archaeologists not had the luck to find it? The only two objects which have been found correspond undoubtedly to the Aztec Horizon.”⁸⁷ “The Aztec testimony that the Toltecs were mastercraftsmen has not yet been confirmed by archaeology. . . . Tula has yielded no metal of any kind, neither copper nor gold, but this need scarcely surprise us, for as yet no fine tombs, where one would expect such treasures, have been located there. On the other hand, many of the ornaments portrayed in stone are painted yellow, a color reserved for gold in the Mexican canon.”⁸⁸

Larson argues that the lack of evidence for metallurgy in ancient Mesoamerica during Book of Mormon times “constitute[s] a major problem for the historicity of the Book of Mormon” (p. 204), yet there are likewise substantial intellectual challenges in accepting the currently prevailing scholarly view at face value.⁸⁹ Metals were known

84. Warwick Bray, “Ancient American Metal-Smiths,” *Proceedings of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland for 1971* (London: The Institute, 1971), 32.

85. Isabel Kelly and Angel Palerm, *The Tajin Totonac: Part I. History, Subsistence, Shelter and Technology*, Smithsonian Institution Institute of Social Anthropology Publication 13 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1952–), 245.

86. William C. Root, “Report on Metal Objects from Mayapan,” in *Mayapan, Yucatan, Mexico*, ed. H. E. D. Pollock et al., Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 619 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1952), 399.

87. Jorge R. Acosta, “Los Toltecas,” in *Los Señorías y Estados Militaristas* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1976), 158.

88. Michael D. Coe, *Mexico: From the Olmecs to the Aztecs*, 4th ed. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1994), 141, 142.

89. “It is surprising that contacts which may have spread new types of maize, peanuts, etc., about 1450 B.P. did not also spread metal artifacts as curiosities or trade pieces.”

and worked in northwestern South America from at least 1500 BC.⁹⁰ It is also well established that there was regular maritime trade between Ecuador and West Mexico from at least 1500 BC.⁹¹ This and other evidence has led some Mesoamerican scholars to question the currently accepted picture that ancient Mesoamericans had no knowledge of or interest in metals until AD 900.

At Nayarit in western Mexico, Chinesca earrings have been found that date to between 100 BC and AD 250. “Carelessly rendered open-work ear ornaments curiously suggest multiple metal rings,” although so far “no metal from the Protoclassic period has been found.”⁹² These and similar clay ornaments are in a style commonly found in northern South America, where similar figurines have earrings of the same style in metal. As one scholar explains:

The earrings may have been made of perishable material such as fiber or cordage, but this seems unlikely. An interesting possibility is that some of these multiple earrings might have been metal. We know of no metal objects of the antiquity we ascribe to the West Mexican shaft-chamber tomb figures, though metal was in common use in South America by

Barbara Pickersgill and Charles B. Heiser Jr., “Origins and Distribution of Plants Domesticated in the New World Tropics,” in *Origins of Agriculture*, ed. Charles A. Reed (The Hague: Mouton, 1977), 826. “The majority of scholars,” notes Dudley Easby, an authority on Mesoamerican metallurgy, “relying on circumstantial evidence, believe that fine metallurgy in ancient Mexico was limited to a few centuries before the arrival of the Spaniards. Perhaps they are right, but it seems to me that their theory leaves much to be explained. I daresay the historical aspect of the problem merits more investigation.” Dudley T. Easby Jr., “Aspectos técnicos de la orfebrería de la Tumba 7 de Monte Albán,” in *El Tesoro de Monte Alban* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1969), 393–94, translation by Matthew Roper.

90. Dorothy Hosler, “Ancient West Mexican Metallurgy: South and Central American Origins and West Mexican Transformations,” *American Anthropologist* 90/4 (1988): 835.

91. Allison C. Paulson, “Patterns of Maritime Trade between South Coastal Ecuador and Western Mesoamerica, 1500 BC–AD 600,” in *The Sea in the Pre-Columbian World: A Conference at Dumbarton Oaks, October 26th and 27th, 1974*, ed. Elizabeth P. Benson (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collections, 1977), 141–60.

92. Elizabeth K. Easby and John F. Scott, *Before Cortés, Sculpture of Middle America: A Centennial Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1970), fig. 99.

that time. The oldest dated metal objects in West Mexico are placed at about A.D. 600–700, three to five centuries later than the dated shaft-chamber tomb figures, and a great abundance of metal artifacts is characteristic of the Postclassic after A.D. 900. Nevertheless the oldest metallurgy in Mesoamerica appears to occur in West Mexico, and this is one of the features convincingly attributed to an introduction from South America by sea. Furthermore, later contexts do yield a considerable number of small rings made of copper wire.

Given that metal is the most obvious material to use for the earrings portrayed and that nothing else in the archaeological record could represent such earrings, the multiple earrings shown on West Mexican shaft-chamber tomb figures are intriguing indications of some interesting possibilities. First, the use of metal may be older in West Mexico than is now known. Second, some of the tomb figures may continue later than our present dating evidence would indicate. Neither possibility is proven; however, it would not be surprising to find one or both borne out when fuller information is acquired.⁹³

Ferguson and Larson suggest that Book of Mormon references to “chains” pose a problem for the Book of Mormon (p. 195). Of course, chains were known at a late period in pre-Columbian times. Some of these seem to have been associated with Mesoamerican elite. “When the king went to war, he wore besides his armour, particular badges of distinction,” which included such ornaments as “a necklace, or chain of gold and gems.”⁹⁴ Ixtlilxochitl, brother of the king of Texcoco, is said to have given Cortés “a golden chain as a sign of peace.”⁹⁵ Obviously, in Aztec times, a metal chain of gold and gems was part of the royal

93. Michael Kan, Clement Meighan, H. B. Nicholson, *Sculpture of Ancient West Mexico: Nayarit, Jalisco, Colima* (Albuquerque: Los Angeles County Museum of Art in association with University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 65.

94. Abbé D. Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, trans. Charles Culen (London: Robinson, 1787), 2:365.

95. Hugh Thomas, *Conquest: Montezuma, Cortés, and the Fall of Old Mexico* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), 458.

regalia. Actual links from chains that appear to date to AD 1100–1550 have been unearthed in west Mexico.⁹⁶ Were chains known in ancient Mesoamerica before AD 900? According to the standard view, no, but enigmatic references in the literature dealing with pre-Columbian art describe representations of “chains” on Classic and Preclassic monuments.⁹⁷ Perhaps the earliest known example can be found at Abaj Takalik in Guatemala. “A feature of the individual on this stela [Stela 2], as well as that on Stela 1, is a chain which hangs diagonally to the rear from the belt.”⁹⁸ Were these chains of precious metal and gems similar to those worn by later Aztec rulers? This seems a reasonable interpretation.⁹⁹

Specimens of metal bells are well known in late pre-Columbian history after AD 900. In some places where metals were scarce, Mesoamericans sometimes made artistic imitations of such objects in clay and sculpture. At Chachalcas and Zempoala in Central Veracruz, Mexico, at the time of the Spanish Conquest, “they had so little copper that they imitated metal bells in pottery.”¹⁰⁰ Such imitations of metal bells show a knowledge of metal bells even if the artists themselves did not possess any metal. Similar clay bells known from some Toltec sites have been said to “tantalizingly suggest metal prototypes.”¹⁰¹ Other

96. Mountjoy and Torres, “Production and Use of Prehispanic Metal Artifacts,” 138, 141.

97. Tatiana Proskouriakoff, *A Study of Classic Maya Sculpture*, Carnegie Institution of Washington Publication 593 (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1950): 65, 70, 154–55.

98. J. Eric S. Thompson, “Some Sculptures from Southeastern Quezaltenango, Guatemala,” *Notes on Middle American Archaeology and Ethnology* 17 (30 March 1943): 103.

99. For example, representations of chains in art from the arctic Ipiutak culture have been taken to be “imitations of similar metal objects.” Helge Larson, “The Ipiutak Culture: Its Origin and Relationships,” in *Indian Tribes of Aboriginal America*, ed. Sol Tax (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 26; likewise Froelich Rainey states that such ivory carvings of chains were clear indications that the Ipiutak “had been in touch with metal working people.” See Rainey, “The Ipiutak Culture: Excavations at Point Hope, Alaska,” *Current Topics in Anthropology* 2 (1971): 26.

100. José García Payón, “Archaeology of Central Veracruz,” in *Handbook of Middle American Indians* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964–76), 11:542.

101. George C. Vaillant, *The Aztecs of Mexico: Origin, Rise and Fall of the Aztec Nation* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1950), 149.

specimens are known from North America dating from AD 900 to the 1500s.¹⁰² Similar clay bells are also known in Mexico from the Post-classic period.¹⁰³ Nine pottery bells, part of a lavish mortuary offering, were found in a tomb near the town of Columba, Guatemala, and date to the Late Classic.¹⁰⁴ Additional specimens from Mexico date to the Preclassic period.¹⁰⁵ A small ceramic vase “in the form of an acrobat or juggler wearing bells attached to his ankles” was found at Monte Alban and dates to the Monte Alban II period (100 BC–AD 300).¹⁰⁶ During excavations at Gualupita near Cuernavaca, Morelos, Mexico, archaeologists discovered a “carefully grooved pendant perforated at the neck” in the manner of a metal bell. The archaeologists who excavated the find argued that the object was “probably of Gualupita II date,” around 400–100 BC.¹⁰⁷ Other archaeologists have discussed a stone pectoral found in the Maya lowlands. Carved on the pectoral is a seated figure attired in elaborate regalia of the Izapan style. Joined to the left armband is an elongated object to which are “attached bell-shaped objects with pendant beads.” On stylistic grounds, Coe dates the piece to 300 BC.¹⁰⁸ Significantly, there was a word for bell in the Proto-Mixe-Zoquean language as early as 1500 BC.¹⁰⁹

One aspect of the issue of Mesoamerican metallurgy that was unknown to Ferguson and is still often ignored is the question of linguistic evidence. In 1985 Sorenson cited an early study by Robert E. Longacre and René Millon indicating that there were words for metal

102. Nathaniel Spear Jr., *A Treasury of Archaeological Bells* (New York: Hastings House, 1978), 203–5.

103. *Ibid.*, 227.

104. Alfred V. Kidder and Edwin M. Shook, “A Unique Ancient Maya Sweathouse, Guatemala,” in *Amerikanistische Miscellen*, *Mitteilungen aus dem Museum für Völkerkunde in Hamburg* 25 (Hamburg: Appel, 1959), 70.

105. Spear, *Treasury of Archaeological Bells*, 206–7.

106. Frank H. Boos, *The Ceramic Sculptures of Ancient Oaxaca* (South Brunswick, NJ: Barnes, 1966), 466 fig. 435.

107. Suzannah B. Vaillant and George C. Vaillant, *Excavations at Gualupita* (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1934), 98, 99 fig. 29.

108. Michael D. Coe, *An Early Stone Pectoral from Southeastern Mexico*, *Studies in Pre-Columbian Art and Archaeology* 1 (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 1966), 11, 14, 17.

109. Robert E. Longacre and René Millon, “Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies,” *Anthropological Linguistics* 3/4 (1961): 29.

in Proto-Mixtecan.¹¹⁰ “In identifying terms that must have been in use before the descendant tongues split apart,” he wrote, summarizing their article, “the researchers were puzzled by the fact that a word for ‘metal’ seemed to have existed in the proto-language at about 1000 BC. Of course metalworking is not supposed to have been going on then.”¹¹¹ Larson claims, however, that Sorenson’s statement that the researchers were “puzzled” misrepresents his source (p. 197), but we do not see any evidence of misrepresentation. Longacre and Millon found that the linguistic evidence for these terms was considered “solid” (p. 197).¹¹² As far as we can see, the only reason they questioned it was on the basis of the apparent absence of archaeological evidence for metals at so early a period. Unwilling to grant that metals could have been known so early, they suggested that the original meaning of the terms for *bell* may have been *rattle*, but they note that this possibility is remote and that “it is impossible to be certain of this.”¹¹³ This suggests not only puzzlement but also discomfort at countering the accepted paradigm. More recent linguistic research, however, has yielded additional evidence that Larson has chosen to ignore. Since Longacre and Millon’s study was published, Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman have found words for metal in Proto-Mixe-Zoquean, which is thought to have been the language of the Olmecs.¹¹⁴ Roberto Escalante has also discovered words for metal in Proto-Mayan, Proto-Proto-Huaven, and Proto-Otomanguan.¹¹⁵ In short, there is now solid linguistic evidence that all of the major proto-languages of Meso-

110. Ibid., 22, 29.

111. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 279.

112. Larson’s quotation of Longacre and Millon is taken from “Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies,” 22.

113. Longacre and Millon, “Proto-Mixtecan and Proto-Amuzgo-Mixtecan Vocabularies,” 22.

114. Lyle Campbell and Terrence Kaufman, “A Linguistic Look at the Olmecs,” *American Antiquity* 41/1 (1976): 80–89.

115. Roberto Escalante, “El vocabulario cultural de las lenguas de Mesoamérica,” in *La Validez Teórica del Concepto Mesoamérica: XIX Mesa Redonda de la Sociedad Mexicana de Antropología* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1990), 155–65.

america had words for metal. This evidence should be confronted and not ignored.¹¹⁶

Larson complains about the complete absence of iron in ancient Mesoamerica (p. 197). Yet he does not appear to have addressed all of the evidence. In 1938, for example, archaeologist Sigvald Linné found a tomb that included an “iron plate.” According to Linné, “The iron plate is no doubt to be counted among the most remarkable objects that have at any time been discovered in Mexico seeing there is nothing to indicate that it is of post-Columbian origin.”¹¹⁷ In another find, which dates before AD 400, Linné found more iron artifacts in another tomb—including an iron pyrite mirror and a “metal-resembling substance,” in “small, irregular shaped pieces. Analysis has shown them to contain copper and iron.”¹¹⁸ René Rebetez noted several pre-Columbian artifacts such as mirrors, necklaces, and a pendant from the Tarascan region, which consisted of iron stuck to slate stone. It is not yet understood how the artificial bonding was done, but the presence of iron in the find is noteworthy. Some nineteen other similar objects are in private collections.¹¹⁹ Edwin M. Shook and Alfred V. Kidder reported an interesting find—three lumps of iron oxide, “moulded to conical form”—from a tomb at Kaminaljuyú, which dates to the Miraflores period (100–200 BC).¹²⁰ A companion tomb in the same

116. Hosler, an authority on metals in pre-Columbian west Mexico, cites this same linguistic evidence for metals in Mesoamerica but fails to note the antiquity of these terms in “Ancient West Mexican Metallurgy,” 833.

117. Sigvald Linné, *Zapotecan Antiquities and the Paulson Collection in the Ethnographical Museum of Sweden*, Ethnographical Museum of Sweden (n.s.) 4 (Stockholm: Bokförlags Aktiebolaget Thule, 1938), 53; cf. 75. See Alfonso Caso and D. F. Rubín de la Borbolla, *Exploraciones en Mitla, 1934–1935* (Mexico: Instituto Panamericano de Geografía e Historia, 1936), 10, 34, translation by John L. Sorenson.

118. Sigvald Linné, *Mexican Highland Cultures*, Ethnographical Museum of Sweden Publication 7 (Lund, Sweden: Ohlssons, 1942), 132.

119. René Rebetez, *Objetos Prehispánicas de Hierro y Piedra* (Mexico: Librería Anticuaria, n.d.), 6–8, 14–15.

120. Edwin M. Shook and Alfred V. Kidder, *Mound E-III-3, Kaminaljuyu, Guatemala*, Contributions to American Anthropology and History 53 (Washington DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1952), 33.

structure contained two or three other “cones” of a similar nature.¹²¹ Since molding iron oxide to a particular form would be exceedingly difficult, the lumps are almost certainly oxidized iron objects. Significantly, Kaminaljuyú is considered by Book of Mormon students to be the most likely candidate for the immediate land of Nephi,¹²² the only region for which the Book of Mormon states that iron technology was known to the Nephites.

Iron was probably also used in the weaponry of the Mesoamerican elite. Ixtlilxochitl states that the Toltecs had “clubs studded with iron.”¹²³ Another tradition relates that Cuaomoat and Ceutarit, the ancestral heroes of several west Mexican tribes, “taught them to make fire and gave them also machetes or cutlasses of iron.”¹²⁴ The question of Mesoamerican swords has, of course, been discussed elsewhere.¹²⁵ Larson dogmatically insists that the blades encountered by Limhi’s party had to have been similar to Europeans ones, but they could just as easily have been macuahuitl or cimete-like weapons inset with blades of iron—meteoric or otherwise.

Larson’s suggestion that Book of Mormon references to metalurgy imply some kind of massive “ferrous industry” is totally unjustified (p. 196).¹²⁶ The text implies nothing of the kind. “The Book of Mormon does specify the practice of smelting [iron into steel] among the Jaredites” (p. 196). True enough, but the practice is only mentioned once in early Jaredite history—where it was considered one of the notable deeds of Shule, who is described as “mighty in judgment” (Ether 7:8). “Wherefore, he came to the hill Ephraim, and he did molten out

121. *Ibid.*, 118.

122. Sorenson, *Ancient American Setting*, 141–46, 167–75.

123. Alfredo Chavero, *Obras Históricas de Don Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl* (Mexico: Editora Nacional, 1952), 1:56, translation by Matthew Roper.

124. Robert H. Barlow, “Straw Hats,” *Tlalocan: A Journal of Source Materials on the Native Cultures of Mexico* 2/1 (1945): 94.

125. Matthew Roper, “Swords and ‘Cimeters’ in the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/1 (1999): 34–43.

126. Quotation from Ray T. Matheny, “Book of Mormon Archaeology: Sunstone Symposium #6, Salt Lake Sheraton Hotel, August 25, 1984,” typescript, 1984, David J. Buerger Collection, MS 622, box 33, fol. 17, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

of the hill, and made swords out of steel for those whom he had drawn away with him; and after he had armed them with swords he returned to the city Nehor, and gave battle unto his brother Corihor” (Ether 7:9). In spite of this great achievement by Shule, there is no subsequent mention of steel among the Jaredites (Ether 9:17). Perhaps the skill of making steel may not have been passed down to later generations.

Nephi’s metallurgical skills included the ability to make some form of steel, a skill already known in the ancient Near East. He indicates that he taught these and other skills to some of his people shortly after his arrival in the land of promise, yet there is no further mention of steel after the time of Jarom (Jarom 1:8). When the Zeniffite colony returned to the land of Nephi, they are said to have used iron and some other metals for decorative purposes, but not steel (Mosiah 11:8). What this may suggest is that the ability to make steel among Book of Mormon peoples was limited to a few individuals or lineage groups and that it could have been lost after only a few generations.

In many African villages, for example, one family of artisans might supply the metallurgical needs of thousands, yet the ferrous skills possessed by those few could easily be lost in just one raid. It seems reasonable to suggest that a similar situation occurred among the early Jaredites and Nephites in ancient Mesoamerica. In a recent study of North American copper pan pipes, one scholar attempted to explain why certain copper technologies, if once available in North American Middle Woodland cultures, were not passed down to subsequent groups. She reasoned, “The technological information must have been restricted to a limited number of individuals and artisans. Following the disruption of the interaction sphere, this information in the hands of so few artificers and entrepreneurs was not passed on and was consequently lost. There was no retention of that knowledge and when, half a millennium later new societies developed, it was with new copper techniques and new artifact styles.”¹²⁷

127. Claire G. Goodman, *Copper Artifacts in Late Eastern Woodlands Prehistory*, ed. Anne-Marie Cantwell (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Center for American Archaeology, 1984), 73, quoting Anne-Marie Cantwell, “Pan Pipes in Eastern North America” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology, Minneapolis, 1982).

Script and Language

Following Ferguson's critique, Larson conjectures why no pre-Columbian Hebrew or Egyptian scripts have yet been uncovered in Mesoamerica and suggests that this poses a major problem for the historicity of the Book of Mormon (pp. 204–6). Still, while it would certainly be interesting to find examples of such scripts, it is hardly surprising that we have not. Surviving examples of Mesoamerican writing from the Preclassic period are extremely rare, even though it is believed that such records were at one time numerous, and it is not difficult to catalog reasons why this should be so. Records written on perishable materials would not be expected to survive. Mormon indicates that the Nephites' enemies systematically tried to destroy any records possessed by the Nephites (Mormon 6:6), and the deliberate mutilation and destruction of records for political and ideological purposes is well known in Mesoamerican history.¹²⁸ In reference to an inscribed stela in a hitherto unknown script recently found in a river in Veracruz, distinguished Mayanist Linda Schele suggests, "There may, in fact, have been many such writing systems that for one reason or another, did not survive."¹²⁹

The issue of potential influences of Old World Semitic languages upon Mesoamerica is an interesting one that has yet to receive serious scholarly attention by Mesoamerican scholars. In a preliminary study made over thirty years ago, Pierre Agrinier, a non-Mormon Mesoamerican archaeologist, compiled evidence suggesting a potential relationship between Zapotec and Hebrew.¹³⁰ In 1964, Professor William Shipley, a linguist at the University of California at Berkeley, reviewed Agrinier's work, which had been forwarded to him by Thomas Stuart Ferguson. In a letter written that year, Shipley stated:

128. For historical examples from recent pre-Columbian history, see Joyce Marcus, *Mesoamerican Writing Systems: Propaganda, Myth, and History in Four Ancient Civilizations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 146–52, 265–66, 269, 351.

129. "Stone Slab in Mexico Reveals Ancient Writing System," *New York Times*, 8 March 1988.

130. Pierre Agrinier, "Memorandum on Linguistic Evidence for the Presence of Israelites in Mexico," unpublished paper in possession of Matthew Roper.

The evidence presented in the report, particularly that having to do with possible indications of common origin for Hebrew and Zapotec, are certainly adequate to demonstrate the desirability of further research in this same, and other similar, directions. The recurrence of certain consonants in the two languages, notably the highly stable bilabial series, is suggestive of some historical relationship or other meaningful tie. The general technique so far used may certainly be refined as work progresses, yielding ever more dependable results.

I should say that this research points to possible results of a highly important and dramatic nature. If valid evidence of the type sought could be found, then, certainly, a major reorganization of the history of the Old World–New World relationships would be necessary. Current general research in historical linguistics is consonant with the methods and aims of your work—its value cannot be overestimated.¹³¹

Agrinier published a brief synopsis of his preliminary studies in 1969.¹³² Following up on that report, Robert F. Smith uncovered even closer correspondences between Zapotec and Egyptian.¹³³ Unfortunately, these preliminary studies did not receive wide circulation and are not yet well known. More recently, anthropologist Mary Foster, apparently independent of the earlier work by Agrinier and Smith, has compiled extensive linguistic evidence suggesting similar influences upon New World languages. According to Foster,

Linguistic reconstruction across hitherto postulated genetic boundaries demonstrates that Afro-Asiatic languages, and in particular ancient Egyptian, are genetically close, and possibly ancestral, to a group of geographically distant languages in

131. William Shipley to Thomas S. Ferguson, 24 June 1964, Berkeley, California, copy in possession of Matthew Roper.

132. Pierre Agrinier, "Linguistic Evidence for the Presence of Israelites in Mexico," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the SEHA* 112 (28 February 1969): 4–5.

133. Robert F. Smith, "Report on the Sawi-Zaa Linguistic Memorandum of Pierre Agrinier" (unpublished manuscript, 13 March 1969); Smith, "Sawi-Zaa Word Comparisons" (unpublished manuscript, September 1977).

both the Old and New Worlds. In the Old World these include Dravidian of southern India, Chinese, Malayo-Polynesian; and in the New World, Quechua of the Southern American Andes, and such Mesoamerican languages as Zoquean, Mayan, Zapotec, and Mixtec.¹³⁴

Apparent connections with certain pre-Columbian New World languages are of particular interest. “Specifically, the Mixe-Zoque languages of southern Mexico, hypothesized to derive from the language spoken by the Olmec peoples, as well as the Mayan languages of Mexico and Central America, are demonstrably closely related to, and probably descended from, ancient Egyptian.”¹³⁵ “Because some connections between Old and New World languages are so close as to throw doubt on an exclusive scenario of ancient Bering Straits crossings, migration theories will need revision.”¹³⁶ Based upon her own analysis of these languages, Foster believes that “a wider Egyptian influence in the New World is very probable, with languages both splitting off from an Olmec prototype, or perhaps introduced through successive oceanic crossings.”¹³⁷ Brian D. Stubbs has also marshalled substantial evidence of a Semitic influence on Uto-Aztec languages.¹³⁸

It has been observed that the past is, in a very real sense, “another country.” Moreover, it is a foreign country that we cannot visit. We

134. Mary L. Foster, “Old World Language in the Americas: 1” (unpublished paper prepared for the George F. Carter honorary session, Pre-Columbian Transoceanic Transfers, Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, San Diego, California, 20 April 1992), 1.

135. Mary L. Foster, “Old World Language in the Americas: 2” (unpublished paper delivered at the annual Meeting of the Language Origins Society, Cambridge University, England, September 1992), 2.

136. *Ibid.*, 3. See also her article, “The Transoceanic Trail: The Proto-Pelagian Language Phylum,” *Pre-Columbiana* 1/1–2 (1998): 88–113. The hypothesis that early America was populated entirely by migrations of prehistoric hunter-gatherers across a land bridge that once spanned the Bering Strait is itself coming under fire. See Michael W. Robbins and Jeffrey Winters, “Land Bridge Theory Tested,” *Discover* 25/1 (2004): 32.

137. Foster, “Old World Language in the Americas: 2,” 3.

138. See “Was There Hebrew Language in Ancient America? An Interview with Brian Stubbs,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000): 54–63; and Stubbs, “Looking Over vs. Overlooking Native American Languages: Let’s Void the Void,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1995): 1–49.

must rely, for our knowledge of it, on scattered surviving documents written by a tiny minority of those who lived there—in pre-Columbian America, by and large, we must do without even such meager documentary resources—as well as a more or less random collection of tangible but mute souvenirs. And we are all too prone to imagine that foreign country in terms mistakenly borrowed from our own. Clearly, attempts to reconstruct the past, and particularly the distant past, must be undertaken with considerable caution, circumspection, even humility. In historiography as in travel, dogmatism interferes with appreciation; openness to even surprising differences is vitally important.

If Thomas Stuart Ferguson really lost his faith in the Book of Mormon, even temporarily, he appears to have done so too hastily, on the basis of a small and inadequate collection of often fuzzy snapshots—some of which don't even pertain to the right country. Ferguson's doubts are not a reliable guide, and Stan Larson's biographical polemic, based on and seeking to amplify those doubts, is not a trustworthy guidebook.