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Author(s) Brant A. Gardner

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Abstract Review of *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?* (2007), by John L. Lund.

“WITH WHAT MEASURE”?

Brant A. Gardner

Review of John L. Lund. *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?* Orem, UT: Granite, 2007. xvi + 286 pp. \$20.00.

If any man have ears to hear, let him hear. And he said unto them, Take heed what ye hear: with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given. (Mark 4:23–24)

When I bought my copy of *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon: Is This the Place?* I believe it was still warm from the presses. The author had brought some newly printed copies with him for a presentation he gave in 2007. He was fun to listen to, perhaps the most frenetic speaker I have heard. His book continues the friendly and faithful tone of his oral presentation, though we may be thankful that we can peruse the book at a more leisurely pace.

John Lund has conducted several tours to Mesoamerica, the area that he believes encompasses the lands of the Book of Mormon. Various statements in the book suggest that his impetus for writing may partly have been to provide the tour groups with something heavier than photographs with which to remember their tour.¹ The tone in places

1. His first chapter, “The Spirit of Place,” suggests the value of walking in historic places. Later he notes that “there are people in nearly every LDS stake in the United States especially that have traveled to Mesoamerica on a Book of Mormon cruise or land tour” (p. 257). While an orientation to tours is detectable in his book, it is not obtrusive.

also suggests that the book freezes in print some of the oral presentations he has given many times to tour groups. *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon* is an easy read and is entirely designed to bolster one's faith in the Book of Mormon. For the nonspecialist believer, "proofs" of the Book of Mormon come on virtually every page.²

If I have written the previous paragraph well enough, a reader should now expect a sentence that begins with "But . . ." That *but* is the difficult part of reviewing the work of any faithful Latter-day Saint who writes about the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica. I am also a believer who would like to have proofs of the Book of Mormon jump out at me, and Lund clearly shares my belief in the historicity as well as the spiritual power of the Book of Mormon.³

This personal conflict between admiration for his desires and my familiarity with his subject is the reason I began with the scripture from Mark, whose version of this saying is slightly different from the more familiar one in Matthew 7:1–2 (also 3 Nephi 14:1–2): "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." Matthew's version seems to come as a warning: If I review harshly, I deserve a harsh review of what I have written (I am likening scriptures here). I see Mark's version of the saying as a little more positive because the context is not judging but rather accepting knowledge. Matthew seems to play it safe while Mark says to drink deep and learn new things. However, Mark also tells us to make sure that what we learn is of sufficient quality that it serves as a foundation on which we can learn more. I like Mark better—at least I like the way I read Mark better. In my reading, we measure not with fear of how we are to be measured, but we measure as part of the process of making sure that what we hear is worth learning.

Is *Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon* a book for which we should have ears to hear? Is it one from which we can drink deeply and

2. While he does not express his aim as "proving" the Book of Mormon, Lund nevertheless implies that it is part of his intent: "Another purpose in writing this book is to examine some key historical claims of the Book of Mormon" (p. 3).

3. Lund makes his testimony explicit on pp. 267–68. Even without that explicit statement, this is a book of testimony. On that level it meets its goals.

learn? Or is it a shallow sip? If we are truly interested in understanding the real people who lived the stories contained in the cornerstone of our religion, we need, and deserve, strong stuff.

The Measure with Which I Mete

In judging attempts to compare the text of the Book of Mormon to a real-world time and place, I draw on those scholarly disciplines that provide tools designed for that purpose: history, anthropology, archaeology, and linguistics. Those are the disciplines that arm us to discover, analyze, and make sense of the data pertaining to peoples of the past. They are the tools that help us understand how texts relate to the real-world remains of the people who produced them. It is because I desire to measure with the tools of academia that I have difficulties with Lund's book.

Lund judges and dismisses the tools I hold invaluable—or, perhaps more accurately, the scholars who use them. An antagonism for the world of scholarship is a leitmotif in Lund's book.⁴ This disdain for academia is so strong that near the end of the book there is actually a section entitled "Academic Arrogance" (pp. 238–41). One statement in that section reads as follows: "This would be laughable except for the arrogant mentalities which still persist in the large and spacious buildings we call institutions of higher education" (p. 239). I cannot

4. Following are a few of the sentences exhibiting disdain for scholarship. Admittedly, they are shorn of context, but I believe they portray the feeling of that context. They might describe a few scholars, but the sweeping generalization certainly overstates the case. "There are those in academia who would have you believe that you are not sophisticated enough to recognize the similarities or differences between ancient scripts" (p. 73). "This idea will be scoffed at and ridiculed by the same arrogant group of dogmatic scholars who maintained for a hundred years that there were no pre-Columbian maritime crossings and who now finally admit to it" (p. 81). "Once a scientist sells his soul for a particular hypothesis and refuses to be open to contrary information, he is no longer committed to the truth and becomes a dogmatist" (p. 218). "Why is it that the most dogmatic seem to be those who are the least scientific? Of all the sciences, the fields of anthropology, archaeology, religion and history are the least scientific and can scarcely be called a science because they cannot field test or laboratory test their hypotheses" (p. 220). "Passionate assertion is a poor substitute for good science. This is another problem that afflicts many in all the sciences, and, in particular, archaeologists, historians, and anthropologists" (p. 244).

conceive even attempting a correlation between the Book of Mormon and Mesoamerica without a firm grounding in the accumulated knowledge those institutions of higher education have collected. Such an opinion creates a tension in his analysis when he uses some of those same scholars' work to build his own case.⁵

Lund, describing his understanding of the legendary and mythological material surrounding the Aztec deity Quetzalcoatl, prefaces his discussion by saying, "Many in the scholarly community see the native records of Mesoamerica as tainted by the Christian priests and therefore of little value" (p. 181). Then, referring to the *Popol Vuh* and *Title of the Lords of Totonicapán*, he says, "A disservice and a great injustice have been done to the Quiché in being discounted so whimsically by the scientific community" (p. 196). This is an issue with which I have some experience. I have written an examination of how the native lore was altered by the presence and interests of the Christian Spaniards—or, in Lund's words, "tainted by the Christian priests."⁶ I have also written a much longer analysis specifically addressing the problems with the Christian-seeming elements of the Quetzalcoatl material.⁷ Having been through the evidence, I believe that these texts must be used with caution and that much of the Christianlike content in them is the result of post-Conquest cultural contamination. This may place me in the category of scholars for whom Lund has little use. I can state with confidence that this does not mean that we see the documents as having little value or that they are discounted whimsically. What Lund disparages is the result of careful examination of a wide range of evidence.

5. For example, Michael Coe has been quite vocal about not seeing a case for the Book of Mormon in Mesoamerica. The transcript of an interview with him for the television production of *The Mormons* is found at <http://www.pbs.org/mormons/interviews/coe.html> (accessed 14 August 2009). Yet Lund quotes him eleven times (pp. 69, 97, 98, 104 [twice], 120, 141, 155, 158, 169, 227) from two different books.

6. Brant A. Gardner, "The Impact of the Spanish upon the Record of Native Oral Tradition Among the Nahua," *Aztlan E-Journal*, <http://web.ku.edu/~hoopes/aztlan/> (accessed August 2009). The link is currently broken; a copy of the paper is in my possession.

7. Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: An Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2008), 5:353–95.

Good Beginnings: Unfulfilled Expectations

Mesoamerica and the Book of Mormon begins well. Lund introduces his theme by pointing out that “the First Presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has not taken a position at this time regarding the geography of the Book of Mormon. The absence of a position should not be interpreted as support for, or opposition to, any other statement made by Church members” (p. xv). This is the right way to situate a search into the historical setting of the Book of Mormon. It is a task to be guided by the text and the best of our understanding. Our quest has not been decided by revelation.

The first four chapters (pp. 1–64) contain Lund’s argument for a Mesoamerican location for Book of Mormon events. In addition to proposing a Mesoamerican geography, he explains why that particular geographic correlation is superior to alternatives that have been proposed for South America and the Great Lakes Region (see pp. 9–17). One of the underpinnings of Lund’s take on a Mesoamerican location for the Book of Mormon is his insistence that he is following Joseph Smith’s geographical correlation. This is curious in light of his introductory statement that there is no defined position on Book of Mormon geography. He lays out his perspective:

There are and will be sincere LDS scholars who disagree with the basic premise that Joseph Smith is an unimpeachable source. Some have taken a point of view that a prophet is only a prophet when he is speaking as a prophet. And unless he says, “thus saith the Lord,” his words, though respected, are nonetheless his opinion. Relegating Joseph’s statements to opinion gives them permission to pursue their own theories about the geography of the Book of Mormon. Also, since the Church has no official position on the subject, they are free to speculate. Obviously, I have taken a different stance in regards to the statements of Joseph Smith. Without declaring every word that Joseph wrote or spoke as revelation, there is still merit in sustaining Joseph’s opinion over that of someone less acquainted with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon. (p. 11)

This literalism dictates some of the specific features of Lund's geography. He takes as a prophetic utterance the statement that Lehi landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien (p. 23), and he insists that Joseph Smith unequivocally declared the location of Zarahemla (p. 26). Of course, other comments by Joseph Smith have been used to support a completely different geography, an issue Lund does not discuss.⁸

Latter-day Saint archaeologist John E. Clark wrote the article on Book of Mormon geography for the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. He provides an important context for using Joseph Smith as an authority on Book of Mormon geography:

Three statements sometimes attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith are often cited as evidence of an official Church position. An 1836 statement asserts that "Lehi and his company . . . landed on the continent of South America, in Chili [*sic*], thirty degrees, south latitude." This view was accepted by Orson Pratt and printed in the footnotes to the 1879 edition of the Book of Mormon, but insufficient evidence exists to clearly attribute it to Joseph Smith.

In 1842 an editorial in the Church newspaper claimed that "Lehi . . . landed a little south of the Isthmus of Darien [Panama]." This would move the location of Lehi's land-

8. In a fascinating subplot of the quest to claim Joseph Smith's prophetic statements as firm support for a particular geography, we have the recent DVD published by Rod Meldrum that posits Joseph Smith as an unimpeachable source but disagrees on which of his statements are authoritative. Meldrum questions the very quotations upon which Lund rests his case. See Rod Meldrum, "What Did the Prophet, Joseph Smith, Know about Book of Mormon Geography?" <http://www.bookofmormonevidence.org/FAQ.php> (accessed 14 October 2009).

It is an ideological tug-of-war that is best resolved by understanding that Joseph Smith did not receive revelation on the subject but developed his understanding as he gained knowledge of the world. This is the reason that church authorities have no official position on Book of Mormon geography, as Lund points out in the introduction to this book, cited above. This view is delineated in Kenneth W. Godfrey, "What Is the Significance of Zeph in the Study of Book of Mormon Geography?" *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8/2 (1999): 75–76. See also John L. Sorenson and Matthew Roper, "Before DNA," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 11–13; and John A. Widstoe, "Is Book of Mormon Geography Known?" in *A Book of Mormon Treasury: Selections from the Pages of the Improvement Era* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1959), 127–30.

ing some 3,000 miles north of the proposed site in Chile. Although Joseph Smith had assumed editorial responsibility for the paper by this time, it is not known whether this statement originated with him or even represented his views. Two weeks later, another editorial appeared in the *Times and Seasons* that, in effect, constituted a book review of *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatan*, by John Lloyd Stephens. This was the first accessible book in English containing detailed descriptions and drawings of ancient Mayan ruins. Excerpts from it were included in the *Times and Seasons*, along with the comment that “it will not be a bad plan to compare Mr. Stephens’ ruined cities with those in the Book of Mormon: light cleaves to light, and facts are supported by facts. The truth injures no one.”⁹

Lund accepts the second two statements, but not the first. He does not tell us why. Even with the second, however, he accepts it only as the landing place, reconciling the *landing* a little south of the Isthmus of Darien with the Central American location of the ruins that Joseph identified by having Lehi’s clan move through the Isthmus of Panama (historically Darien) and into Central America after at least one planting season but prior to the Lehi’s death (pp. 23–25). That is a journey of 1,100 miles. There is nothing that really recommends this reading save for the desire to follow Joseph’s declarations. Lund understands the conceptual problem of landing 1,100 miles away from where the Lord eventually wanted to locate them. “I have often wondered why they didn’t settle where they first landed near Panama, and why the Lord did not have them sail directly to the Land of First Inheritance? Did they need more trials in a wilderness or was the Lord teaching them how to survive in the New World? We may never know, and it may not matter” (p. 25).

Lund continues to follow Joseph’s identification of not only the Central American region in general that Stephens described but also

9. John E. Clark, “Book of Mormon Geography,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 1:178. In the quotation, internal references have been removed.

some of the specific cities in that region. For example, Lund tells us that “Joseph Smith named Palenque and Quiriguá as Book of Mormon cities” (section heading, p. 27). He neglects to mention that the *Times and Seasons* editor specifically said, “We are not going to declare positively that the ruins of Quirigua are those of Zarahemla, but when the land and the stones, and the books tell the story so plain, we are of opinion, that it would require more proof than the Jews could bring to prove the disciples stole the body of Jesus from the tomb, to prove that the ruins of the city in question, are not one of those referred to in the Book of Mormon.”¹⁰ This is certainly a strong claim, but it falls short of declaring the matter to be prophetically revealed. Perhaps because I agree with Lund’s selection of Mesoamerica as a plausible location for the Book of Mormon, I find the first sixty-four pages the best of the book. I disagree with several of the specifics, but then I am no geographer.

The next phase of the book is where I want Lund to provide information that will support the geography he favors—data about the historical and cultural time and place that will put flesh on the people mentioned in the Book of Mormon. I want him to fulfill the promise of his early statement that “geography helps in understanding history” (p. 2). I fully agree with that sentiment. Once we have a geographic location, we can compare the text to known cultural and historical details. Done well, such grounding should teach us things that we otherwise would not know.

Unfortunately, it is precisely at this point that I have problems with Lund’s book. There are at least two categories of problems. The first is that he is simply wrong in some of the information he presents. The second is that he often presents unwarranted conclusions from the data, sometimes because the data is questionable and sometimes because the conclusions are a distortion of the underlying data. I will provide a few representative examples.

10. “Zarahemla,” *Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1842 (November 1841–October 1842), vol. 3, no. 23, p. 927, retrieved from *GospelLink 2001 CD* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000).

Measured Accuracy

Lund has led numerous tours to Mesoamerica, and one would expect him to be familiar with at least the major Mesoamerican cultures. Yet he gets basic facts wrong. For example, he provides a drawing of a “thin gold plate’ with hieroglyphic writing” (p. 83), which is reproduced with a similar caption on the back cover. The original is certainly a thin gold plate, although it is too late to have any relevance for the Book of Mormon. The larger issue is the suggestion that this artifact supports the Book of Mormon. This view may explain why Lund says the gold plate has hieroglyphic writing around the edges, though there is no writing on the piece at all.¹¹ Instead, there is art around the rim (compare this with the writing on the rim of the stone piece on p. 163). Unfortunately, there will be readers who, unfamiliar with Maya glyphs, will assume that the art on the gold plate is writing.

Regarding a drawing of two men from the Codex Nuttall (p. 150), the caption tells us that they are in “Fattening Pens from Codex Nuttall.” The figures are certainly from Codex Nuttall, but they are not in “fattening pens.” Rather, the men are dead.¹² That error in visual identification suggests that Mesoamerican human sacrifice was motivated by a desire for better meals rather than religious feeling. Lund asserts that another scene from the Codex Nuttall represents slaves, but the image is upside down and does not depict slaves at all (p. 169). “Right side up,” explains Diane Wirth, “it is a representation of supernatural beings descending from the night sky, holding weapons. For example, the Mixtec, who painted the Codex Nuttall, believed that shooting stars were supernaturals shooting their arrows at the earth.”¹³

Lund makes similar errors in handling the textual data. Mesoamericanists would not conflate the Aztec deities Tezcatlipoca and Huitzilopochtli as he does: “Tezcatlipoca’s other title was Huitzilopochtli

11. Diane Wirth called this example to my attention. Personal communication, 17 August 2009. E-mail and document in my possession.

12. Diane Wirth recognized the convention and noted the problem in her 17 August 2009 communication with me.

13. Wirth, personal communication, 17 August 2009.

or Hummingbird of the Left, a blood thirsty war god” (p. 183). Huitzilopochtli is not a name for Tezcatlipoca.¹⁴

A zeal to emphasize the deity Quetzalcoatl seems to have led to this statement: “The greatest temples in Mesoamerica were dedicated to Quetzalcoatl. Cholula was the city of Quetzalcoatl” (p. 187). Lund is correct that Quetzalcoatl was the patron god of Cholula and that his temple in Cholula was the most impressive of the city. However, that is probably the only time that a temple of Quetzalcoatl was the “greatest” in any Mesoamerican city. Teotihuacan has a Temple of the Feathered Serpent, but it is much smaller than the impressive temples we call the Temple of the Sun and the Temple of the Moon, both of which occupy not only more visual space but also more important locations. Among the Aztecs, the temple to Quetzalcoatl was dwarfed by the dual-shrined temple to Tlaloc and Huitzilopochtli. These examples represent basic information. They are the kind of mistakes that should not be made regarding the cultures and history of Mesoamerica.

Measured Interpretations

Lund does not adequately qualify some of the data he uses, and sometimes he misuses such data. After mentioning Edward Herbert Thompson’s discussion of “light-skinned, blue-eyed Chanes, People of the Serpent” (pp. 111–13), he arranges quotations from Thompson in parallel with quotations from the Book of Mormon (pp. 113–16). Lund assumes that this story corroborates the Book of Mormon. It does not. Thompson is relating a story that he wrote down in 1932, at the very beginnings of modern archaeology. Data from those early efforts must be carefully considered. Subsequent work with native legends and the ways they have been altered by the extreme cultural impact of the

14. Wirth, personal communication, 17 August 2009. Perhaps Lund remembers that in *Historia de los Mexicanos por sus pinturas*, in *Teogonía e Historia de los Mexicanos*, ed. Ángel María Garibay Kintana (Mexico City: Editorial Porrúa, 1973), 23–24, *Huitzilopochtli* is listed as a name for one of the four Tezcatlipocas. There is no indication that he is familiar with this particular source. My analysis of the comparative material strongly suggests that Huitzilopochtli’s name is intrusive in the story and represents a late development. It represents Huitzilopochtli in the place of a Tezcatlipoca image, but not as being the same as Tezcatlipoca.

Conquest shows that Thompson's piece is a very late amalgamation of stories.¹⁵ This information should not be used in a discussion of the ancient Maya.¹⁶

Lund adapts information in his effort to corroborate the Book of Mormon. This is evident in his use of DNA studies. The back cover states, "A DNA study by Emory University, accepted by the Smithsonian, acknowledges that some Native Americans have ancestry in common with peoples in modern Israel and the Mediterranean area." These sentiments seem to reflect Lund's views and are the kind of thing some believing Saints want to hear. Lund seems to promise that DNA studies, which cannot be shown to disprove the Book of Mormon,¹⁷ actually demonstrate its truth. DNA studies, correctly understood, do not pose the problem that some have suggested.¹⁸

15. Lund may accept this source because he rejects the position that there have been corruptions of native legends.

16. Lund seems to believe that there was a pigmentation difference between light-skinned and dark-skinned peoples in the Book of Mormon. My own investigation of what the Book of Mormon actually says on this subject suggests that it is rather a religious metaphor for righteousness and unrighteousness and has nothing to do with pigmentation. See Gardner, *Second Witness*, 2:108–22.

17. The current contention that DNA studies disprove the Book of Mormon began with Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," in *American Apocrypha: Essays on the Book of Mormon*, ed. Dan Vogel and Brent Lee Metcalfe (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002), 47–77. It has been continued in Simon G. Southerton, *Losing a Lost Tribe: Native Americans, DNA, and the Mormon Church* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004).

The responses of Latter-day Saint scholars have been consistent in clarifying the issues and underlining the fact that DNA cannot be used against the Book of Mormon (or, at least at present, for it). See John M. Butler, "A Few Thoughts from a Believing DNA Scientist," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 12/1 (2003): 36–37; Butler, "Addressing Questions Surrounding the Book of Mormon and DNA Research," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): 101–8; David A. McClellan, "Detecting Lehi's Genetic Signature: Possible, Probable, or Not?" *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 35–90; Matthew Roper, "Swimming in the Gene Pool: Israelite Kinship Relations, Genes, and Genealogy," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 129–64; and Brian D. Stubbs, "Elusive Israel and the Numerical Dynamics of Population Mixing," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 165–82. These studies and related ones have been reprinted in Daniel C. Peterson, ed., *The Book of Mormon and DNA Research: Essays from the FARMS Review and the Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2008).

18. Accurate information about the claims made for and against the Book of Mormon with respect to DNA may be found at <http://en.fairmormon.org/DNA> (accessed

Lund's use of certain data is problematic because that data comes from the wrong time and wrong place. The marker he mentions is found in the north-central United States, not in Mesoamerica. The data also indicates that the marker arrived far too early to have anything to do with the Book of Mormon. But Lund downplays this fact: "The Brown study has a time reference of 9,500 years ago. From the Bible's point of view the tribes of Israel came from Abraham, and Abraham came through the lineage of Shem, who was Noah's son. Semite is the term used to describe the descendants of Shem. Were there Semites in America thousands of years ago? If Semites found their way to America around 7,500 BC, could they also have found their way later around 600 BC?" (p. 232). But geneticists have not come to the conclusion that there was a migration of Semites to America either 9,500 years ago or more recently. Lund's discussion obscures this fact and introduces his own desired interpretation of data to suit his purpose. Latter-day Saints, of course, believe that a group from Israel did migrate to the Americas in 600 BC. The evidence is in the Book of Mormon. The evidence is not, however, in DNA.

Another statement on the back cover asserts, "Scientists now agree with accounts in the Book of Mormon that the Americas were settled by multiple maritime crossings of the Pacific and Atlantic oceans; not by the Siberian Land Bridge only." In the book Lund makes a similar claim: "No single event in the last hundred years may yet prove to be as significant for scholars as the demise of the 'Siberian Land Bridge Only' theory. It was not until his 6th edition of *The Maya* in 1999 that Michael Coe admitted that the Americas may have been settled by maritime crossings of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. He confessed 'the first Americans may well have taken a maritime route'" (p. 227). Lund's selective quoting here underlines the distance between his source and his conclusion. Here is the longer text from which he quotes:

In spite of over six decades of research there is little agreement among archaeologists as to when the first settlement of

14 October 2009). This includes the information on haplotype X that Lund and others have used to suggest that DNA supports the Book of Mormon.

the New World took place. Some geologists have held that the initial colonization of this hemisphere must have been made by Siberian peoples crossing over the Bering Strait land bridge at about 14,000 years ago, during the last maximum of the Pleistocene when sea level was far lower than it is today. Yet long before this, boats must have been available to the peoples of Eurasia, for recent evidence shows that Australia, which was never connected to Asia by a land bridge, was settled as far back as 50,000 years ago. The presence or absence of a land bridge from Siberia to Alaska is thus not necessarily relevant to the problem, for the first Americans may well have taken a maritime route.¹⁹

The sentence Lund quotes is certainly contained in that paragraph. He uses it to support an acceptance of transoceanic contacts during Book of Mormon times, but Coe indicates that the possibility is relevant to the earliest colonization of the Americas rather than later. Coe also indicates that there is “little agreement,” while Lund declares a victory for the idea of multiple transoceanic voyages. Coe appears to highlight the word *may* in his statement, while Lund recasts the explicit *may* into a “confession.”

The idea of the diffusion of cultural content is still a battleground. In January 2000, Marc K. Stengel wrote a piece for the *Atlantic Monthly* entitled “The Diffusionists Have Landed.”²⁰ Robert R. Fox

19. Michael D. Coe, *The Maya*, 6th ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1999), 41. See D. Andrew Merriwether, “A Mitochondrial Perspective on the Peopling of the New World,” in *The First Americans: The Pleistocene Colonization of the New World*, ed. Nina G. Jablonski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 295, for a short overview of seven different views of how the peopling of the Americas may be explained.

20. Marc K. Stengel, “The Diffusionists Have Landed,” *Atlantic Monthly* (January 2000), <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/01/001stengel.htm> (accessed 14 October 2009). Lund sees diffusion as an issue related to the Book of Mormon. “There is a one hundred and fifty year old battle between diffusionists and evolutionists, and the Book of Mormon is in the middle of it” (p. 225). “Like it or not, when it comes to ancient American cultures, Mormons are diffusionists” (p. 225). Concerning this last statement, I firmly believe in the Book of Mormon’s place in the real world. I also believe that place was in Mesoamerica. I am not, however, a diffusionist. The issue is not simply one of contact between the Old and New Worlds, but the nature of the cultural communication. Diffusionists assume that cultural content of the Old World informed (and often believe

wrote a letter to the magazine to clarify the position of the diffusionists among the academic community:

As the moderator of a recent museum symposium on diffusionism, I took particular interest in Marc K. Stengel's article "The Diffusionists Have Landed" (January *Atlantic*). The symposium, held at the Johnson-Humrickhouse Museum, in Coshocton, Ohio, focused on the Newark Holy Stones, a collection of stone tablets bearing Hebrew inscriptions which were found in Ohio in 1860. The symposium featured professional and avocational speakers on both sides of the issue, including J. Huston McCulloch, who was mentioned in Stengel's article.

Many diffusionist scholars continue to allege that their evidence simply does not get a fair hearing from archaeologists in the academic mainstream. Some even allege a conspiracy on the part of the academic mainstream to maintain the status quo (the motives for this, though, remain unclear). It is true that in some fields certain individuals and institutions have held undue influence that has served to stifle new interpretations and paradigms. On the other hand, I know of no practicing archaeologist who would not love to uncover convincing evidence of pre-Columbian Old World contact in a firm archaeological context. This is the major difference between many avocational diffusionists and mainstream scholars: the use of scientific methods and archaeological context. Most diffusionists have run roughshod over scientific method in making their claims. The accusation that mainstream scholars are hidebound by narrow-minded world views is in itself narrow-minded. Many diffusionists are themselves guilty of failing to consider alternative explanations. An old sword with a short Welsh inscription found in a Kentucky cave without controlled excavation or archaeological context is insuffi-

that it heavily informed) New World culture. I do not see that transference of cultural content. Personally, I see Book of Mormon peoples receiving more than they contributed.

cient evidence from which to conclude that King Arthur and his court emigrated to North America.²¹

According to Lund, “only among the diehards who have made their science into a religion does the ‘Siberian Land Bridge Only’ theory continue to thrive” (p. 227). This misrepresents the evidence and the academic climate concerning possible cultural contacts that might have occurred after the first prehistoric immigration of humans into the Americas. It appears that Lund himself is among those who Fox indicates have “run roughshod over scientific method in making their claims.”

Measured Conclusion

I advise those interested in finding Mesoamerica in the Book of Mormon to follow Mark’s admonition to “take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24). We are, of course, interested in learning more about the Book of Mormon. We really want to hear that there is strong evidence that supports our belief. If readers are not familiar with Mesoamerican culture and history, they will find Lund’s book faith-promoting. If they are familiar with Mesoamerica, it will be disappointing. Mark tells us that if we hear well, we will receive more (v. 24). Thus, if we hear solid information about the Book of Mormon, we have a firm foundation on which to expand our understanding. On the contrary, if those whose faith is already on a shaky foundation hear and accept conclusions from less-than-adequate evidence, their faith may slide away completely when those ideas are shown to be confused.

Listen carefully. Measure with appropriate standards. If we are careful and build the case for the Book of Mormon on the best evidence and with the best available scholarly standards, we can augment our spiritual understanding of the Book of Mormon with a human understanding of the people whose history is chronicled therein.

21. Robert R. Fox, “Letters,” *Atlantic Monthly*, May 2000, www.theatlantic.com/issues/2000/05/letters.htm#diffusion (accessed 6 October 2009).