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Brief Notices

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Brief Notices

*Ancient American Inscriptions:
Plow Marks or History?*

by William R. McGlone and others
(Early Sites Research Society, 1993)

The authors of this book have been actively studying for a decade and a half the apparent inscriptions throughout North America claimed by some (notably Barry Fell; see *BYU Studies* 17 [Spring 1977]: 373-75) to be in pre-Columbian scripts and languages from Europe and Africa. This "American epigraphy" and resulting purported decipherments have been condemned as fraudulent or ignorantly self-deceptive by conventional archaeologists. However, these archaeologists have not put forth serious effort to research the material firsthand.

These five authors (scientists in fields other than archaeology) have produced a genuinely critical book about American epigraphy as a basis for reliable investigation to replace past name-calling. They summarize what is known about scores of purported inscriptions, point out weaknesses in the arguments of the proponents, and make clear how baseless are many of the counterclaims of establishment experts. Despite serious problems they see with the evidence, they conclude it "is sufficiently strong to justify formal evalua-

tion . . . by conventional scholarship" (339). To that end, they make systematic, operational suggestions about methods for further study that could break the impasse.

Chapter 12 may be of particular interest to Utahns since it discusses an inscription panel from Rochester Creek in central Utah which includes "Egyptian"-looking elements. (The second of the authors is a Utahn but not a Mormon.)

—John L. Sorenson

The Quality of Mercy

by Eugene England (Bookcraft, 1992)

If there exists one quality at once capable of both bringing about world peace and enhancing individual spirituality, that quality is surely mercy, which England equates to charity. England's book is a collection of twelve personal essays on mercy tied together by the author's commentary every three chapters. The essays explore many facets of mercy, including the dichotomy between mercy and justice and Christ as our model of mercy.

In one essay, England challenges us to end world hunger by the year 2000, calling that goal our "primary human task" (120). He makes "two simple, if rather dramatic, proposals" for fulfilling this

goal: divert a percentage of existing arms budgets “to meet the third world’s basic needs” (131) with the hope that the money thus spent on food would be an investment in peace and would preclude the necessity to sustain large arsenals; and have those of us who live in earth’s wealthier nations make fast-offering-like contributions to people in impoverished nations, with the understanding that *any* effort is infinitely superior to *no* effort.

The book is weakened somewhat by too much emphasis on anecdotal information; the many resultant diversions from the topic of mercy might be distracting to some readers. Nevertheless, the book contains many nuggets of wisdom and is ultimately strengthened both by its organization and by a reasonable balance between descriptions of mercy and explanations of how to live a merciful life.

—Bruce R. Gelder

Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900

by Leonard J. Arrington (Reprint, University of Utah Press, 1993)

The University of Utah Press and Tanner Trust Fund deserve commendation for issuing an attractive reprint edition in paperback of *Great Basin Kingdom*, printed in a welcome, larger type size. A new preface by Arrington recounts the circumstances surrounding the writing of this book and places the book within the context of contemporary scholarship. Although

thirty-five years have passed since the original publication of *Great Basin Kingdom*, it remains the preeminent work in Mormon economic history and one of the best studies in western American economic history.

As Arrington notes in his preface, *Great Basin Kingdom* “anticipated some of the interests and concerns of the New Western History” (xvii). Important differences, however, separate this volume from most of the New Western History. *Great Basin Kingdom* is primarily a study of Mormon economic institutions and policies, and it was written largely—although not exclusively—from the top down. While most works within the New Western History place environmental degradation and conflict between ethnic and racial groups at the center of their analysis, such issues surface only fleetingly in Arrington’s work.

This book remains valuable for new generations of scholars not so much because it addresses issues at the forefront of fashionable, contemporary scholarly analysis, but because of its encyclopedic coverage and invigorating interpretation of Mormon economic history to 1900. Arrington’s riveting, near-tragic account of the “great capitulation”—the Mormon retreat from distinctive economic institutions and cooperative policies to economic individualism and private enterprise—remains essential reading for Mormons seeking to understand the values embedded in their religious heritage and culture.

—Brian Q. Cannon