

Introduction

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Latter-day Saints cannot know enough about antiquity. But they cannot by searching find it out completely: they cannot know it all by any means available to them, nor can they learn what may be known of it by surfing electromagnetic info-waves or surveying public beaches of mass communication. They also cannot trust “modern” research to supply detailed information about the ancient world because in the end no one—not even the scholarly genius who studies it night and day—knows very much about it. The celebrated and unabashedly commercialized Internet, Web pages and all, which thus far, at least, leads to virtually every destination in the modern world, goes almost nowhere in the ancient world.

A case in point. I’ve recently learned through FARMS of parents in the Midwest who have been caught in the cross fire between their Mormon daughter and their Baptist daughter over the issue of metallic documents in antiquity. Their Mormon daughter taught them the gospel from the Book of Mormon in Illinois, and they were receptive to it—until they moved to Missouri, where their Baptist daughter began to unteach everything related to the Book of Mormon ideas her parents were taught by her Mormon sister. A major part of their Baptist daughter’s attack on their Mormon daughter, accordingly, was the hypothesis that no one in antiquity has ever written anything at all on metals of any kind.¹ As might be expected, moreover, the father of these disputatious sisters, an eminently fair man concerned for both his daughters, tried to prove this assumption true or false via the Internet—only to find, after countless hours of fruitless searching, insufficient evidence to test it. Shortly after that, his Mormon daughter happened to read an article in the initial twenty-first-century issue of the *Ensign*, where she learned that a few Brigham Young University professors associated with FARMS knew something about ancient writings on metal surfaces. She contacted FARMS immediately, FARMS contacted me, and I sent her a large package of scholarly evidence, which included a fifty-four-page bibliography of learned writings about ancient metallic epigraphy that document the actual existence of literally thousands of metal documents all over the ancient world. And if this book by John Tvedtnes (which deals with ancient inscriptions and much else) had already been published, I would have sent it, too. Happily for all of us, the Latter-day Saints include researchers like Tvedtnes, who are absolutely determined to learn everything they can about antiquity, not in order to prove the gospel—for nothing short of an actual revealed witness communicated by God to an individual person can do that—but in order to prevent rejections of the gospel based on false or uninformed assertions.

Something of the ancient world is known, of course, through written texts and the detritus of obscured and forgotten civilizations. What that world was like, however, can only be discovered; it cannot be anticipated, for it is wildly unpredictable and strangely unlike our world. That is why God, who not only knows the past but knows it perfectly, always startles “modern” thinkers, whatever and whenever their cultural milieus, by revealing things about the past that they don’t know and therefore reject out of hand because they find them strange, foreign, absurd, antiquated, ridiculous, and generally repulsive to their “modern” mind-sets. That is where this book comes in.

If it existed in only one ancient copy, says Tvedtnes, the Book of Mormon may have been unique. But in virtually every other way it resembles many ancient books. In this present volume, Tvedtnes shows perhaps fifty things about ancient records that must have been hilarious in 1830 but make perfect sense today: the ubiquity of intentionally hiding books in all kinds of ingenious containers made of many materials, including stone boxes and ceramic jars; books incised on obdurate surfaces, like metals, bones, and ivory; inked papyri and parchments

treated with swaddling cloths soaked in cedar and citrus oils to prevent decay; many sealed and open records; waterproofing sealants like bitumen and white lime mortar; caves serving as repositories of treasures buried in many sacred mountains; the ancient perception of permanence and eternalism associated with the preservative functions of writing; and numerous ancient traditions of angels as writers and guardians of written records. Many twentieth-century discoveries of ancient documents have made all of this visible, as has the restoration of lost scriptures by actual revelation from God to Ezra and Jeremiah. Steven Booras's appendix on the *Apocalypse of Paul* (Paul reportedly wrote and sealed up his vision of the third heaven in a stone box and buried it underneath his house) also sheds light on these ancient practices.

I shall say no more, lest I spill all the beans about this book and leave nothing to the imagination of its potential readers. That would be a mistake; but if I can interest them in actually reading it, I will have done my job.

Note

1. See chapter 8, where John Tvedtnes has disclosed, almost casually and perhaps without realizing it, the origin of this spurious assumption in Baptist lectures against Mormonism delivered at Salt Lake City in 1885, reworked as a book published in 1886 and 1887, and republished without change in 1965 and 1980. See Martin Thomas Lamb, *The Golden Bible; or, the Book of Mormon: Is It From God?* (New York: Ward and Drummond, 1886). Critics of Mormonism, it goes without saying, should have better sources than that for their knowledge of antiquity; and perhaps they do. But if they don't, they must realize that Mormon scholars like Tvedtnes will not hesitate to point it out.