

May 24, 1982

Dr. John L. Sorensen
Chairman, Department of Anthropology
Brigham Young University
Provo, Utah 84602

Dear Dr. Sorensen:

Some months ago two missionaries came to visit me to give me information about the Mormon Church. They told me of some recent archeological research that was being done by the Mormon Church which proved the authenticity of the Book of Mormon. This evidence was found in Central America, South America and the Middle East.

Because I was interested in this information, they brought a filmstrip to my house the following week by Mr. Jack West. In this presentation, Mr. West made some claims that I wanted to confirm;

1. That Hebrew writing had been found on buildings located in Central and South America.
2. That temples found in Central and South America were built as Christian places of worship by the Nephites.
3. That cities named in the Book of Mormon have been identified and located.
4. That the ancient Americans built roads and made extensive use of the wheel.
5. That elephants existed on this continent and were used by the nephites as beasts of burden.
6. That Quetzalcoatl, the Aztec feathered serpent god was really Jesus Christ who appeared to the Indians after his crucifixion.

I also have some questions about some of the statements made by Mr. Matson, and I was wondering if you could confirm the following:

7. That the Nag Hammadi manuscripts show that Christianity was practiced before the birth of Christ.
8. That the Nag Hammadi manuscripts teach the same church organization as exists today in the LDS church.

The missionaries also stated that the hand written copy of the Book of Mormon was used in making a Hebrew translation. They also stated that a Hebrew translation could not be made of the published edition.

I would appreciate if you could comment on this information, since it is contrary to other things which I have read about the history of the Native Americans. Because I am not an Anthropologist or an Archeologist, but just an interested investigator, I am looking forward to your information on these claims.

Sincerely

James S. Lindberg
7344 Filbert Ave.
Orangevale, Ca. 95662



Brigham Young University

Department of Anthropology

27 May 1982

James S. Lindberg
7344 Filbert Ave.
Orangevale, CA 95662

Dear Mr. Lindberg:

I have your letter of the 24th. It is unfortunate that ignorance and zeal too often combine to muddy truth's waters. Mr. West is incompetent to discuss the subjects he has talked about. The missionaries would do truth, the church and their purpose (all are the same in my view) good service by never showing the West filmstrip again. It is completely without merit.

Hebrew writing has not been found anywhere in Central or South America under circumstances which permit us to be confident that that writing system was used anciently in America. It might have been, of course, but there is no reliable evidence of the fact.

"Temples" were built of course, and there are notable similarities in form and function between those in Mexico and Guatemala and those in ancient civilizations of the Old World, but it is pure speculation to suppose that these were built as "Christian places of worship." It is not even clear to me what such an expression would mean (I know of "Christian" groups who worship in lodge halls, dance halls, store front buildings, private residences, etc.). Again, there could be a connection as West says, but evidence is lacking to confirm the speculation, and I cannot even imagine what confirming evidence would be like.

No cities named in the Book of Mormon have been identified. I am personally convinced that I have plausibly identified certain archaeological centers as having been particular cities mentioned in the Book of Mormon, but the evidence is not conclusive. In fact I want more evidence myself to be firmly convinced of those identifications; so far the level of evidence is short of conviction. However, I am very confident that some of the Book of Mormon cities have been located; the problem is to know what they were anciently called (that is, to "identify" them, as in the previous sentence.) As a matter of fact scientists are uncertain of the ancient names of any cities they have uncovered. All the archaeologists do is give a convenient identifying name to a site in current terms. So the problem for the archaeologist and the Mormon interpreter is the same one. There is no current solution for either one.

The construction of roads is well evidenced for Peru and now also for Mexico and Guatemala in both the documentary descriptions provided by the Spaniards and in the archaeological remains. There is no solid evidence of practical use of the wheel, although a paper I recently

wrote shows that the principle of the wheel was known in Mesoamerica (Mexico and Guatemala) from at least the time of Christ. All the examples known (now in the hundreds) have this wheel on small cult figurines (which are matched in many striking features by cult figurines in the Old World). But one, at least, of the figurines also represents a man sitting on a large-scale wheeled platform much bigger than the man, thus it is clear that the technology was there to build wheeled vehicles and that they may have been used, but we have no actual examples recovered yet by archaeologists.

Elephants (actually mastodons and mammoths, New World equivalents) did exist, however the question is whether they became extinct prior to the appearance of New World civilization. Significant evidence now exists that these creatures did endure in certain spots in the western hemisphere down into early Book of Mormon times. The only mention in the book of "elephants" occurs soon after the Jaredites arrived in the Americas, which is well over 2000 years before the time of Christ. Apparently they became extinct not long afterward, since they are not mentioned subsequently. This is not in conflict with the scientific evidence. However the idea that they were used as beasts of burden is nonsense. The Book of Mormon neither says nor implies anything of the kind.

A substantial body of varied evidence has been published supporting the identification of the traditional Mesoamerican god Quetzalcoatl with Jesus Christ. A good deal of nonsense has also been said about this subject. Part of the problem is that there were a number of persons named Quetzalcoatl, some much later than others. The traditions, largely as recorded by the Spaniards, are often less than clear.

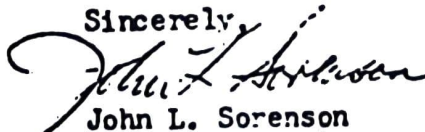
I am not well acquainted either with Mr. Matson's claims nor the Nag Hammadi material in detail. I should say that Nag Hammadi shows that certain practices and beliefs quite like those (or some of those) manifested among the early Christians did exist prior to the time of Christ. That is not the same as saying that "Christianity" was "practiced" then. Similarly the manuscripts refer to certain offices and functions among the Nag Hammadi people which appear to be equivalent to some in the LDS church. I should think it exaggerated to refer sweepingly to "the same church organization," but then I do not know either what Matson said or what the manuscripts say, in detail.

The business about the Hebrew translation makes no sense to me. The printed volume was translated quite a few years ago, but not published. I can't imagine what having the "hand written copy" could possibly have to do with translating.

I am enclosing two items which may be of interest and value to you.

Please listen carefully to the missionaries for the truths they do carry, even though they may be over-enthusiastic about certain of these minor things of little importance and on which they cannot know much. The Book of Mormon is an ancient ^{document} and is what it says it is.

Sincerely,


John L. Sorenson
Chairman