

# The Odyssey of Thomas Stuart Ferguson

*Stan Larson*

WITH A KEEN EYE TO THE LDS BOOK MARKET during the 1987 and 1988 Christmas and conference seasons, various Utah radio stations aired this dramatic radio commercial:

In 1949 [1946] California lawyer, Tom Ferguson, rolled up his sleeves, threw a shovel over his shoulder, and marched into the remote jungles of southern Mexico. Armed with a quote by Joseph Smith that the Lord had "a hand in proving the Book of Mormon true in the eyes of all the people," Ferguson's goal was: Shut the mouths of the critics who said such evidence did not exist. Ferguson began an odyssey that included twenty-four trips to Central America, eventually resulting in a mountain of evidence supporting Book of Mormon claims. (Johnson 1988; cf. Warren and Ferguson 1987, vi)

The book advertised was *The Messiah in Ancient America*, and the authors were listed as Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson. The main point of the commercial, taking into consideration the hyperbole of paid advertising, was that Ferguson had amassed evidence so overwhelming that any fair-minded person would have no alternative but to accept the historical claims of the Book of Mormon.

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STAN LARSON is religion archives specialist, Special Collections, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

Although Warren's preface to the book refers to the late Tom Ferguson's "abiding testimony of the Book of Mormon" (Warren and Ferguson 1987, xiii), a completely different image of Ferguson has been presented recently by Jerald and Sandra Tanner, anti-Mormon publishers in Salt Lake City.

The Tanners first printed a paper on problems in Book of Mormon geography that Ferguson had prepared for a written symposium on the subject. The paper was published as *Ferguson's Manuscript Unveiled*, the title itself alluding to the genre of anti-Mormon exposé (Tanner and Tanner 1988a). The Tanners next published an article sensationally entitled "Ferguson's Two Faces: Mormon Scholar's 'Spoof' Lives on after His Death" in the September 1988 issue of their *Salt Lake City Messenger*. The article briefly reviews Ferguson's early association with the New World Archaeological Foundation, but the Tanners' principal interest is in documenting his disillusionment and loss of faith by recounting his visit to them in December 1970 and by quoting from seven letters Ferguson wrote from 1968 to 1979. The letters record his disappointment at his failure to identify any Book of Mormon cities, his conviction that the Book of Mormon is a work of fiction by Joseph Smith, his loss of faith in Joseph Smith as a prophet, and his conclusion that Joseph Smith had "spoofed" people. Ferguson compliments the Tanners for publishing the truth about the Book of Abraham, and he characterizes the Church as a great myth-fraternity. According to the Tanners, Ferguson had decided that Joseph Smith could not translate Egyptian and that Hugh Nibley's articles on the Book of Abraham are worthless. The Tanners conclude, somewhat overstating their case, that "Ferguson believed that archaeology *disproved* the Book of Mormon" (Tanner and Tanner 1988b, 7, emphasis in original; cf. Cerchione 1976).

Thus, two radically different pictures of Thomas Stuart Ferguson are being promulgated. On the one hand, Warren's version of Ferguson in *The Messiah in Ancient America* entertains only traditional beliefs about the Book of Mormon. On the other hand, the Tanners present a man who has lost his faith and rejected his former convictions. Warren is no more interested in a testimony that didn't abide Ferguson's scrutiny of the evidence than the Tanners are interested in how Ferguson resolved his problems by finding positive values within the framework of Mormon culture. Where then does the truth lie? As is frequently (but not always) the case, somewhere between the extremes. One needs to examine all the available evidence in order to have as well-rounded a picture of Ferguson as possible. Consequently, the documents spanning 1937 to 1983 which come directly from Ferguson must be examined to determine if, when, and how his ideas developed. Then the reader can

better judge which of these opposing views of Tom Ferguson more closely approaches the truth.

The odyssey of Ferguson is a quest for religious certitude through archaeological evidences, an attempt at scholarly verification of theological claims. Early in his career, Thomas Stuart Ferguson was instrumental in reducing our conception of the geography of the Book of Mormon from nearly the whole of both North and South America to the more limited area of southern Mexico and Central America. In the middle years of his career, he organized archaeological reconnaissance and fieldwork in the area of Mesoamerica. But in the last years of his career, he concluded that the archaeological evidence did not substantiate the Book of Mormon, and so he reduced (in his mind) the geography of the book to nothing at all in the real world.

Ferguson's odyssey did not follow a straight course. He had lived his life as a Latter-day Saint expecting to be the instrument of verification, believing that he would find the physical proof that would not only justify his faith in the Book of Mormon but that would convince the world as well. This outlook left him vulnerable to disappointment when the evidences and proofs were not to be found where and when he thought they should be. In the end, he was theologically shipwrecked less by his failure to find persuasive archaeological support for the Book of Mormon than by his encounter with translations of the newly discovered Joseph Smith Egyptian papyri. But though his ship ran aground and floundered, it did not sink, and he managed to salvage what he felt were worthwhile essentials. Ferguson himself used nautical imagery, saying in 1976 that he wanted "to stay aboard the good ship, Mormonism—for various reasons that I think valid" (Ferguson 1976a). Ferguson's odyssey is one of firm conviction, disappointment, change, and peaceful resolution.

#### EARLY BOOK OF MORMON STUDIES

Born in Pocatello, Idaho, on 21 May 1915, Thomas Stuart Ferguson by 1933 was an eighteen-year-old freshman at the University of California at Berkeley. At a time when a university education was still the privilege of the few, Berkeley was a place where an earnest student could be exposed to the passionate political causes and lively intellectual currents of the 1930s. Due to the influence of M. Wells Jakeman, a fellow LDS student at Berkeley, Ferguson developed a keen interest in Mesoamerican history, culture, and archaeology, especially as these studies were believed to be related to the unique historical claims of the Book of Mormon. But in spite of what was to be a lifelong fascination

with the field, he did not pursue a degree in history, archaeology, anthropology, or linguistics. His years of university study culminated in an A.B. degree in political science in 1937 and an LL.B. degree in 1942. Perhaps, considering the uncertainties of the times, he decided he could better finance his avocation as an attorney than if he had chosen to make it his vocation. As a result, he remained an amateur in archaeology, with Mormon studies being a thread woven through his whole life.

After receiving his A.B., Ferguson took a trip to Salt Lake City. While there he was able to meet with Antoine R. Ivins of the First Council of Seventy. "I enjoyed our discussion of the Book of Mormon and the Mayas very much," he wrote in his earliest extant letter, adding a hope that "some good may come as a result of the conversation" (Ferguson 1937a). Ferguson's next letter specified four topics they had discussed: the problem of identifying the Lamanites, the Mayas as direct descendants of the Lamanites, a survey of the Mayan people to consider possible missionary work, and the Book of Mormon research of Ferguson's friend, M. Wells Jakeman. Elder Ivins must have encouraged Ferguson, for less than three months later, he wrote requesting a meeting with President Heber J. Grant. Ferguson promised that he would come to Salt Lake City with specific information from Jakeman's studies, which he described as "wonderful and faith promoting beyond words" (Ferguson 1937b). President Grant's busy schedule did not allow time for the hope-for meeting.

Ferguson's first effort at writing, completed in 1939, was a ninety-seven-page study, "Most Ancient Mexico: (A Comparative Study of the Book of Mormon and the Writings of Ixtlilxochitl)," which M. Wells Jakeman revised (Ferguson and Jakeman 1939). It utilized for the first time the writings of the sixteenth-century historian, Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, which Ferguson and Jakeman had had translated from Spanish into English at their own expense. Much of this material would later be incorporated in the book *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon* (Hunter and Ferguson 1950).<sup>1</sup>

Ferguson believed Church members entertained certain misconceptions about the Book of Mormon, and in 1941 he wrote an article, "Some Important Book of Mormon Questions," which was published by *The Improvement Era*. In a letter to Richard L. Evans, Ferguson wrote of his firm convictions concerning the Book of Mormon and proclaimed

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<sup>1</sup> Ferguson felt such an emotional attachment to Ixtlilxochitl and the publisher of the first Spanish edition of his words, Lord Kingsborough, that in 1957 he asked President David O. McKay for permission to perform baptisms for the dead in their behalf (Ferguson 1957b).

that “for many years I have been actively interested in the Book of Mormon, and I believe I have an unusually strong testimony of its divinity” (Ferguson 1941a).

In the article, Ferguson tackled the problem of the geographic area encompassed by the events described in the Book of Mormon. As to the question of whether the Book of Mormon peoples occupied most of the western hemisphere or whether they occupied a limited area, Ferguson concluded that since a group including women and children (mentioned in Mosiah 23-24) traveled from one place to the other in only twenty-one days, the distance from Nephi to Zarahemla was most likely only 200 to 300 miles (Ferguson 1941b).

To illustrate his article, Ferguson used a map which had been prepared by Jakeman. Ferguson discussed the estimated boundaries of two general geographical solutions. The South American or Panama theory, which is the traditional view held by most believers in the Book of Mormon, identified North America and South America as the land northward and the land southward and the Isthmus of Panama as the “narrow neck” of land (Alma 22:31-33; 63:5). The Middle American or Tehuantepec theory, a new view held by some students of the Book of Mormon, was based on the conclusion that the peoples of the Book of Mormon occupied a limited area in Mesoamerica and that the “narrow neck of land” was therefore the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Ferguson supported the latter. Although most competent students of the problem would look to Mesoamerica in general, the question of the implied geography of the Book of Mormon is far from settled; the diversity of opinions correlating the internal geographical requirements with the external world extends to the present (Hauck 1988; Priddis 1975; Sorenson 1985; Cheesman 1974, 159-77).

Filled with confidence and fired with enthusiasm, Ferguson embarked on a real-life odyssey in search of the origins of the high civilizations of Mesoamerica, firmly believing that such investigations would bring forth incontrovertible evidence supporting the historical claims of the Book of Mormon (Ferguson 1946a). His mission of discovery began 1 February 1946 with his first trip to Mexico, and he was to make many more trips in pursuit of his goal.

In Mexico City, he was joined by businessman J. Willard Marriott, who accompanied him on this two-week trip to Mexico and Guatemala. At the Museo Nacional de Mexico in Mexico City, Ferguson made an exciting discovery, a small wheeled dog made of pottery, possibly a child’s toy. Ferguson went on to write another article for *The Improvement Era*, “The Wheel in Ancient America,” which correlated the archaeological discovery of several wheeled toys with the use of a

chariot (and by implication, wheels) in the Book of Mormon. In it, Ferguson discussed the charge raised by critics of the Book of Mormon to the effect that although the Book of Mormon mentioned the use of a chariot, the wheel was unknown in pre-Columbian America. Ferguson proclaimed that “Joseph Smith has been vindicated on this technicality” (Ferguson 1946b, 785). Having leaped to conclusions of vindication on such slender evidence, Ferguson left himself vulnerable. Others have maintained that the existence of wheeled toys is not significant, since, as Ferguson himself conceded almost three decades later, there is still no pre-Columbian evidence of carts, chariots, or utilitarian wheels (Green 1969, 78; Ferguson 1975a, 28).

The party also visited an area which later figured in one of Ferguson’s controversial identifications: “We took the unimproved road which leads directly over the high pass between the magnificent mountain, Popocatepetl and Ixtacchihuatl. . . . We were interested in going over this pass and in being near these two great mountains inasmuch as it has been suggested that one or the other may have been the battle area for some of the important Nephite-Lamanite clashes” (Ferguson 1946a, 2).

Ferguson published his first book, *Cumorah—Where?*, late in 1947. In it, he again investigated the internal requirements of Book of Mormon geography and how these related to the real world in the Americas. Although he presented the evidence for both positions, he again favored the limited Mesoamerican setting. However, he was faced with the Hill Cumorah in New York State. Rather than to accommodate this traditional identification in his hypothesis, Ferguson proposed as the Hill Ramah-Cumorah the 17,887-foot Popocatepetl (Ferguson 1947b, 43, 46-48; cf. Palmer 1981, 91). In fact Ferguson prided himself that he had concluded quite independently of Jakeman that the Hill Cumorah was in Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Ferguson was perturbed that Deseret Book Company would not sell *Cumorah—Where?* because his discussion of Book of Mormon geography was considered too controversial (Ferguson 1948c).

In January 1948 Ferguson, along with Jakeman and W. Glenn Harmon, departed on a BYU Archaeological Expedition to explore the Xicalango area of western Campeche in southeastern Mexico. Lying in his jungle hammock at the site of Aguacatal during a heavy tropical rain, Ferguson wrote the following by the light of a small flashlight: “We have discovered a very great city here in the heart of ‘Bountiful’ land. Hundreds and possibly several thousand people must have lived here anciently. This site has never been explored before. . . . I’m the

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<sup>2</sup> According to Ferguson, Jakeman had originally placed Cumorah in its traditional location in the state of New York (Ferguson 1947a).

only white man to have seen one large pyramid here” (Ferguson 1948a).

Having made prior arrangements, on 3 April 1948 Ferguson showed films of both the 1946 trip and the 1948 expedition to Elder Ezra Taft Benson, then of the Quorum of the Twelve. Five days later, he showed the same films to the General Authorities and their wives at their annual party. He explained to them why investigations of Book of Mormon lands were concentrated on Mesoamerica and not the whole hemisphere (Ferguson 1948d).

During 1948-50 Milton R. Hunter, who had become a member of the First Council of Seventy in 1945, joined Ferguson in writing a book, *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*. Since Jakeman had worked with Ferguson so closely on much of the material during the 1930s and early 1940s, Ferguson expressed to Hunter his concern that if they delayed telling Jakeman about their project until the book was published, Jakeman would “think it a complete breach of faith on my part” (Ferguson 1949). After the book was published Jakeman told Hunter that some people who asked him about the new book were “somewhat puzzled by the sudden appearance of these findings [of Jakeman] in a publication not my own” (Jakeman 1951).

The book, published in November 1950, presented for the first time in English a translation of the sixteenth-century historical account of Ixtlilxochitl and how this material related to the claims of the Book of Mormon (Hunter and Ferguson 1950; cf. Ferguson and Jakeman 1939). Ferguson felt that this account seemed “to sustain the existence of the Book of Mormon in rather direct fashion—a knowledge of the ancient 4th-century sacred compilation was known in 16th-century Mexico” (Ferguson 1952a).

At least one scholar had offered the caution that Ixtlilxochitl was “doubtless strongly influenced by Christian instruction, which would have tinged his stories of Indian creation, the flood, the ark, a Babel-type tower, and a confusion of tongues with subsequent scattering of populations” (Wauchope 1962, 63). J. Reuben Clark, Jr., second counselor in the First Presidency, also warned that one must “be most careful to see that these traditions of the Indians are not the result of the early teachings of the Catholic priests” (Clark 1957).<sup>3</sup>

In the book, Hunter and Ferguson proposed several identifications of Book of Mormon places with Mesoamerican locations. For example, they tentatively advanced either the Usumacinta or the Grijalva rivers as the River Sidon (1950, 168, 171). Hunter feared ecclesiastical oppo-

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<sup>3</sup> Of course, the same problem of the influence of Spanish Catholicism exists with respect to the traditions about Quetzalcoatl (Green 1972, 117; Gardner 1986).

sition to their geographical statements and hoped to convert Church leaders to their views (Hunter 1950). Their geographical correlations did not go unchallenged. In 1954 Joseph Fielding Smith, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve, attacked in the *Church News* the “modernist theory” that confined Book of Mormon activities to southern Mexico and Central America (Smith 1954, 2). Nevertheless, the book was very popular and went through numerous reprints.

Based on the research published in *Ancient America and the Book of Mormon*, Ferguson prepared a paper, “Joseph Smith, Mormon Prophet, and American Archaeology,” which he presented at the 1953 annual meeting of the Society for American Archaeology. While it had little effect on professional archaeologists, Ferguson was pleased with the response to his paper.

#### THE NEW WORLD ARCHAEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Because Ferguson was aware that the documentary support for the Book of Mormon from the sixteenth-century chronicles, primarily those of Ixtlilxochitl, was insufficient without independent confirmation, he wanted to carry out professional archaeological work in Mesoamerica. Impartiality was necessary if the Book of Mormon was to be vindicated. Ferguson remarked in 1951 to the non-Mormon Alfred V. Kidder of the Carnegie Institution of Washington, D.C.: “Let the evidence from the ground speak for itself and let the chips fall where they may.”

In April 1951 Ferguson and Kidder presented a formal plan to the General Authorities of the Church for “proposed explorations and excavations in the Tehuantepec area” and asked that the Church provide financial support in the amount of \$150,000 (Ferguson 1951a; Kidder and Ferguson 1951). The plan outlined an ambitious project of archaeological exploration and excavation in Mesoamerica. Elder Benson told Ferguson that he was sympathetic to the archaeological proposal but had reservations about the Church funding it (Benson 1951).

Several months later, in an inquiry to President David O. McKay as to the status of the proposal, Ferguson affirmed that the forthcoming “artifacts will speak eloquently from the dust” in support of the Book of Mormon and bring worldwide publicity to the Church (Ferguson 1951c). But the Church rejected the proposal and offered no financial assistance (Anderson 1951). In spite of his disappointment, Ferguson began to raise funds privately. He had great faith in the Book of Mormon, and it was this deep conviction that gave him the drive to continue on his own. In October 1952, he organized the New World Archaeological Foundation (hereafter NWAf), with himself as president (serving from 1952 to 1961), Kidder as the first vice-president,

Milton R. Hunter as another vice-president, and Elder John A. Widtsoe of the Quorum of the Twelve as a member of the board of directors.

In 1952 Kidder mapped the objectives of the NWAFF by delineating the three main views of the origin of the high civilization of Mesoamerica that were to be tested by archaeological investigations:

The purpose of the Foundation is to carry on explorations and excavations to add to knowledge of Mesoamerican archaeology and to test the several theories as to the origin of the high civilizations of the Americas: 1) That they were autochthonous; 2) That, as set forth in the Book of Mormon, they were derived from ancient Israel; 3) That their rise was due to stimuli from some Asiatic source.

Mr. Ferguson is an advocate of the second of these theories; Dr. Ekholm... views with some favor the third; I feel that, although the problem is *still unsolved*, these civilizations were essentially the product of native American Indian creativeness. So all shades of opinion are represented! (Ferguson 1956d, emphasis in original)

This important NWAFF project would acquire archaeological evidence using scientifically controlled procedures and would, they hoped, provide a positive answer to one of the three main theories about the origin of Mesoamerican civilization. While preparing to go to southern Mexico to begin archaeological exploration, Ferguson expressed his own opinion concerning these three theories: "I feel the Mormon theory is the strongest of the three propounded explanations of the origin of the great cultures of Middle America" (Ferguson 1952b).

In December 1952 the first NWAFF exploratory team cleared pristine jungle and looked for ruins in Huimanguillo, Tabasco, an area Ferguson described as being "in the very area which we think to be the land of Zarahemla" (Ferguson 1952c). Although Ferguson did not expect to "dig up a dead Nephite with a Book-of-Mormon name carved on a bone," he hoped to discover a striking artifact during this initial archaeological season. Noteworthy finds would also make it much easier to raise funds for the project the next year (Ferguson 1953a).

Ferguson had raised \$22,000 for the 1952-53 season on his own. Then on 9 April 1953, through the influence of J. Willard Marriott, he met with the First Presidency and other invited General Authorities. He appealed to them for Church funds to continue the work of NWAFF, \$15,000 to finish out the current year and \$120,000 to cover the next four years (Ferguson 1953g). Near the end of the presentation, Ferguson told the assembled Church leaders that he "had prayed to [the] Lord & asked him to stop me if it weren't his will that we go forward." At this point President David O. McKay replied with a smile, "Brother Ferguson, you're a hard man to stop" (Ferguson 1953c, 1953e).

The next day Ferguson wrote a letter to the First Presidency reminding them that "the priceless artifacts of Book of Mormon people" would

assist in the missionary program and would publicize the Book of Mormon to the world (Ferguson 1953d). A week later, President Clark replied with a partially favorable decision: the Church would contribute \$15,000 to Ferguson for the present year only, with the condition that “no publicity whatever in any way or at any time” be given to this private donation (Clark 1953).

In May Ferguson went to Mexico to join the NWAFF exploratory group in Tabasco. Since John L. Sorenson, a graduate student working for NWAFF, had suggested that Zarahemla was likely in Chiapas, Ferguson took him there on a jeep reconnaissance of the upper Grijalva River area. At Acala they found thousands of potsherds and several figurines dating to the B.C. time period in the preclassic era. Ferguson now enthusiastically accepted Sorenson’s notion for the location of Zarahemla and felt that they had “now located the great center of Nephite activity—the Zarahemla area” (Ferguson 1953f). Ferguson was confident that within a few years positive identifications of Nephite cities would be made, for he was convinced that the May 1953 discoveries were “definitely Nephite” (Ferguson 1955a, 1954a, 4).

Due to the lack of funds, no archeological work was done during the 1954 season (Ferguson 1954b). The First Presidency again told Ferguson that no Church financial assistance would be forthcoming (McKay, Richards, and Clark 1954). Providing archaeological support for the historicity of the Book of Mormon, Ferguson wrote, was his own “magnificent obsession” in life (Ferguson 1954c). In January of 1955, Ferguson again pled for support in an emotion-packed letter to the First Presidency:

I know beyond a shadow of a doubt that certain of the locations discovered [in 1953] were occupied by Nephites during Book of Mormon times. The importance of the work cannot be over-estimated.

After many years of careful study, the real importance of Book of Mormon archaeology has dawned on me. It will take but a moment to explain. The Book of Mormon is the only revelation from God in the history of the world that can possibly be tested by scientific physical evidence. . . . To find the city of Jericho is merely to confirm a point of history. To find the city of Zarahemla is to confirm a point of history but it is also to confirm, through tangible physical evidence, divine revelation to the modern world through Joseph Smith, Moroni, and the Urim and Thummim. Thus, Book of Mormon history is revelation that can be tested by archaeology. (Ferguson 1955b)

Apparently this argument was persuasive, for in March 1955 Ferguson received a commitment for \$200,000 from the Church, enough for four seasons of archaeological excavations (Ferguson 1955c; Richards and Clark 1955).

One year later, Ferguson excitedly reported to the First Presidency that an NWAFF reconnaissance party had discovered ancient potsherds extending for ten miles along the west bank of the upper Grijalva River. Pleased about how rapidly things were developing, Ferguson felt that soon they would have "vital news for the world concerning the Book of Mormon and the divine calling of Joseph Smith" (Ferguson 1956a). He was "thrilled beyond measure at the wonderful Nephite sites" found on the Grijalva and thought that Santa Rosa was "a wonderful candidate for Zarahemla" (Ferguson 1956c; cf. Ferguson 1956d, 6).

In February 1956 Ferguson published an article in the *Millennial Star*, "The World's Strangest Book," which discussed the unique position of the Book of Mormon as a modern revelation of an ancient historical document. Ferguson reviewed recently developed evidences that seemed to sustain the Book of Mormon, including the English translations of the writings of Ixtlilxochitl and Sahagun, as well as the *Title of the Lords of Totonicapan*. He also cited linguistic parallels to certain proper names in the Book of Mormon, the existence of wheeled toys, stela 5 at Izapa (which Jakeman, in a controversial identification, portrayed as a representation of Lehi's dream in 1 Nephi), and bearded men with aquiline noses. To his credit, Ferguson was always able to accept counter evidence; he also pointed out that evidence of metallurgy and writing in the preclassic period was lacking.

Ferguson considered his work in life to be the providing, by means of archaeological excavations in Mesoamerica, indisputable evidence confirming the reality of Book of Mormon peoples. He most wanted to discover a decipherable inscription that would identify a Book of Mormon person, place, or event. If one could be found, competent scholars and professional archaeologists might be convinced of the book's historicity. Even the discovery of a script fitting the writing system described in 1 Nephi would be very persuasive, since a writing system is a most complex aspect of culture. Ferguson reminded his readers of what he believed would constitute the ultimate confirmation of the Book of Mormon: "The discovery in Mexico or Central America of an ancient writing in one of the early scripts of the Near East and actually mentioning a people, city, person or event of the Book of Mormon, would of course constitute final and complete vindication of the American prophet, Joseph Smith" (Ferguson 1956b, 42-46; cf. Ferguson 1962b, 263).

Similarly, Hugh Nibley, professor of history and religion at Brigham Young University, while not an enthusiast for archaeological apologetics, emphasized the value of documentary confirmation of the Book of Mormon: "Nothing short of an inscription which could be read and roughly dated could bridge the gap between what might be called a pre-

actualistic archaeology and contact with the realities of Nephite civilization" (Nibley 1967, 243).

Ferguson knew that it was impossible to verify miracles and spiritual experiences, but he strongly felt that confirmation of the physical reality of the Book of Mormon civilization would be forthcoming. In March 1958 he expressed to the First Presidency his fervent beliefs and the unique position of the Book of Mormon as a historical document subject to scientific verification:

One cannot fake over 3000 years . . . of history and have the fake hold water under the scrutiny given the Book of Mormon. The Book of Mormon is either fake or fact. If fake, the cities described in it are non-existent. If fact—as we know it to be—the cities will be there. If the cities exist, and they do, they constitute tangible, physical, enduring, unimpeachable evidence that Joseph Smith was a true prophet of God and that Jesus Christ lives. (Ferguson 1958a)

That same year, Ferguson published *One Fold and One Shepherd* to present evidence supporting the historicity of the Book of Mormon, such as the sixteenth-century chronicles and the available archaeological data (including that discovered by the NWAFA).

An important report in the book was the discovery in October 1957 of a cylinder seal at Chiapa de Corzo. In May 1958, William F. Albright, professor of Semitic languages at Johns Hopkins University, asserted that it contained several Egyptian hieroglyphs (Ferguson 1958b, 22, 25). Others have not agreed with this identification. Matthew Stirling of the Bureau of American Ethnology in Washington, D.C., stated that Ferguson had made too much of the fact that "a simple design on a Chiapas stamp" resembled a hieroglyph (Stirling 1960, 229). Since consideration of the entire seal as Egyptian does not produce a plausible translation, David H. Kelley of the University of Nebraska concluded that the simple elements do not constitute "presumptive evidence of Egyptian influences by themselves" (Kelley 1966, 745). Ferguson considered the discovery of this cylinder seal to be the significant find up to that time and wanted an increased effort to discover more inscriptions dating to Book of Mormon times.

In the book, Ferguson listed 298 cultural parallels (the list expanded to 311 in 1962) between the Near East and Mesoamerica. Listing parallels, however, has been called a "shopping list fallacy." Parallels in and of themselves are not significant unless they are either very complex or uniquely found in the two cultures being compared (Raish 1981, 13; Green 1969, 74). Michael D. Coe, professor of anthropology at Yale University, in his review of the book for *American Antiquity*, said that Ferguson relied "on a

vast quantity of archaeological and documentary data, some sound, some poor, and some really unreliable" (Coe 1959, 290).

At the end of his book, Ferguson affirmed that the situation reduced itself into a simple either/or explanation: either the Book of Mormon is a fake in which the various peoples, cities, and towns mentioned in the book "being fictitious under this choice, should never be found," or it is a divinely revealed history in which the same items "being truly historical, can be and will be found—NOW if we look" (Ferguson 1958b, 350-51, emphasis in original).

After the first four years of Church funding ran out in the fall of 1959, Ferguson was assured that NWAFF would continue to receive funds through Brigham Young University. In June 1960 a delegation of Church officials went to Mexico to observe the NWAFF operations. Ferguson felt they were impressed with what they saw, but he was uncertain about NWAFF's future and waited for a final decision from BYU (Ferguson 1960). He wrote Elder LeGrand Richards of the Quorum of the Twelve: "I burn with a desire to see the work expanded and pushed forward with zeal" (Ferguson 1961a).

Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Quorum of the Twelve was designated as chairman of the new Book of Mormon Archaeology Committee (which was essentially taking over NWAFF), and Ferguson was demoted to the position of secretary. Despite the blow to his pride, Ferguson kept a brave face and told Hunter that he would be "content to eat whatever piece of pie is thrown my way, however small or humble" (Ferguson 1961b). From this time until his death, Ferguson served in this comparatively minor role of secretary to the reorganized NWAFF, which was renamed BYU-NWAFF.

In April 1961, Ferguson took a trip to visit important sites in the Near East. As part of the itinerary, Ferguson intended to travel to Oman. He wrote his friend Wendell Phillips that he planned to "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" (Ferguson 1961c; cf. 1 Nephi 17:7). Perhaps this was a naive intention on Ferguson's part, but it illustrates both his conviction that Nephi existed and his determination to discover historical substantiation of that existence.

During the trip Ferguson viewed in Iran two recently discovered gold plates inscribed with cuneiform. This led to an article in the *Improvement Era*, "Gold Plates and the Book of Mormon," in which Ferguson counted them as being as stunning a discovery as the identification of Lehi and the Tree of Life on stela 5 at Izapa. He concluded that "powerful evidences sustaining the book [of Mormon] are accumulating" (Ferguson 1962a, 171).

This article was followed later in 1962 with the second edition of *One Fold and One Shepherd*, which added documentation to his list of trait comparisons, various updates in the intervening four years, and a new color photo of one of the gold plates found in Iran (Ferguson 1962b).

Scattered comments surface in Ferguson's letters of the early 1960s wondering why the expected evidence was not coming forth. By the mid-1960s hope of finding translatable inscriptions still persisted, but it had become more distant. His major goal in life—of proving that Jesus Christ really appeared in ancient Mexico after his crucifixion and resurrection—would never “be achieved,” he wrote, “until significant ancient manuscript discoveries are made. I hope it happens during our lifetime. It could” (Ferguson 1966). Though NWFAC accumulated mountains of material and information about the important preclassic era and gained the respect of scholars, after years of excavation by NWFAC there was still no specific archaeological or inscriptional verification of any of the Book of Mormon peoples or places. Anthropologist Michael D. Coe's view of the situation was that “nothing, absolutely nothing, has ever shown up in any New World excavation which would suggest to a dispassionate observer” that the Book of Mormon was a genuine historical document providing information about early peoples of America (Coe 1973, 46).

#### THE REDISCOVERY OF THE JOSEPH SMITH EGYPTIAN PAPYRI

It is ironic that Ferguson spent the greater part of his life studying the implied geography and material culture of the Book of Mormon, but what appeared to him as clear and decisive evidence against the Book of Abraham was the catalyst to the abrupt change in his views. On 27 November 1967 the *Deseret News* announced that a portion of the Egyptian papyri once owned by Joseph Smith had been discovered. They had been brought to the attention of Aziz S. Atiya, professor of Middle Eastern studies at the University of Utah, while he was researching at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City in May 1966; he arranged for them to be donated to the Church.

The public announcement mentioned eleven papyrus pieces and an 1856 certificate of sale signed by Emma Smith Bidamon, Joseph Smith's widow (Wade 1967, 51-53; Jarrard 1967a). By far the most significant item was the original papyrus of Facsimile No. 1, which Joseph Smith interpreted in the Book of Abraham, now part of the Pearl of Great Price. This discovery would seemingly allow a test of the accuracy of Joseph Smith's interpretation. Ferguson considered this to be the acid test of Joseph Smith's ability to translate ancient documents, and he seized the opportunity to verify the translation of the Book of Abraham.

Three days after the announcement, Ferguson wrote to Milton R. Hunter, asking him to tell him anything he could and inquiring whether the Church would release information about the papyri. He also specifically asked Hunter whether any non-Mormon scholar had translated the papyri, and if so, whether there was “resemblance with the Book of Abraham as found in the P of GP” (Ferguson 1967a). Hunter answered that Hugh Nibley had told him that “the scholars wouldn’t touch them [the papyri] with a ten foot pole.” As to whether the Church would release information about the papyri, Hunter said that “it seems as if it will when they are translated” (Hunter 1967). Hunter then added that he had told N. Eldon Tanner, second counselor in the First Presidency, that at least one page of the papyri seemed to be from the Book of Joseph, a document which Joseph Smith had identified as being among the papyri as well as the Book of Abraham. Hunter explained that an 1835 letter written by Oliver Cowdery affirmed that “the Book of Joseph told the best story of the creation that he had ever seen and that it depicted the serpent walking on its legs before it had to crawl on its belly.” However, when Hunter said this, Tanner is reported to have replied that “he didn’t want that suggestion made and that information to get out” (Hunter 1967; cf. Cowdery 1835; Todd 1969, 194). Consequently, in 1967 there was an awareness of the purported relationship of both the Book of Abraham and the Book of Joseph to the newly discovered Egyptian papyri.

Because no Egyptologist had yet studied the papyri, Ferguson made his own arrangements to have the papyri examined and translated. The day after Christmas, Ferguson unsuccessfully tried to contact Leonard H. Lesko, an instructor in Egyptology at the University of California at Berkeley (Ferguson 1967b). The next day he met Henry L. F. Lutz, professor of Egyptology at the University of California at Berkeley. Ferguson asked him to examine some Egyptian hieroglyphs he had clipped from the “Church Section” of the 2 December 1967 *Deseret News*. They spent one and a half hours together, and Ferguson, being careful not to influence his opinion in any way, did not indicate where the hieroglyphs “came from or that they had any significance to the LDS people. He gave me a perfectly candid and honest opinion, that all are from the Book of the Dead” (Ferguson 1967c; cf. Jarrard 1967b).

Not content with just one Egyptologist’s opinion, Ferguson approached Lesko to translate the Egyptian hieroglyphs. Newspaper photos were unsatisfactory, so Ferguson contacted Hugh B. Brown, first counselor in the First Presidency, and received from him enlarged photos of the papyri (Ferguson 1971b). Ferguson sent these photos to Lesko with instructions to translate them and to estimate the approxi-

mate century when they were written (Ferguson 1968a). After having the material for a month, Lesko sent Ferguson a preliminary report expressing his opinion that “all of these are spells [magical incantations] from the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*.” He also indicated that “the texts date probably from the first millennium B.C. and the forms of hieratic appear more similar to Ptolemaic documents than to any other” (Lesko 1968). Ferguson had expressed a particular interest in the papyrus original of Facsimile No. 1, without indicating “any relationship of the manuscript material to the Mormon Church, Joseph Smith, Book of Abraham—or whatever” (Ferguson 1971b). In response to this, Lesko said that the lion-couch vignette was a very late copy from the *Book of the Dead* and depicted “the deceased on a bier on whom Anubis lays hands.” He also noted that the restoration was incorrect since the embalming god, Anubis, was jackel-headed (Lesko 1968).

In November 1968, Ferguson had ordered a copy of “The Joseph Smith Papyri.” He complimented the “gentlemen” at Modern Microfilm Company of Salt Lake City for “doing a great thing—getting out some truth on the Book of Abraham.” At this point Ferguson did not seem to know that Modern Microfilm was run by a husband and wife team, Jerald and Sandra Tanner, local anti-Mormon publishers (Ferguson 1968b).

Other than the two Egyptologists whom Ferguson contacted directly, he studied the publications of two others who translated the Joseph Smith Egyptian papyri: Klaus Baer, professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, and Dee Jay Nelson of Billings, Montana, who years later falsely claimed to have a Ph.D. degree (Ferguson 1971b; cf. Baer 1968; D. Nelson 1968a, b, c, and 1969).

In his book, *The Sage of the Book of Abraham*, Jay M. Todd, associate editor of the *Improvement Era*, quoted Baer’s conclusion that Facsimile No. 1 and the *Breathing Permit of Hor* were adjoining parts of the same scroll and then remarked that “if this report by Dr. Baer is accurate, it suggests more than ever that either the papyrus ‘translated’ by the Prophet is still unavailable or that the seer stone provided the actual text of which only a shadow and much corrupted version might have been on the papyri fragments” (Todd 1969, 377; cf. Rhodes 1988, 51-52). A third, unstated possibility was that the actual papyrus had been found, but that Joseph Smith’s interpretation had no relationship at all to the Egyptian text. Ferguson, the lawyer, decided that the third possibility was the correct explanation, since four witnesses “all agree that the original manuscript Egyptian text translates into the *Breathing Permit of Hor*” (Ferguson 1971b).

When asked if it was true that most Egyptologists “agree that a correct translation of the ancient papyri owned by Joseph Smith has abso-

lutely no connection or similarity” to the Book of Abraham, Ferguson answered succinctly, “Yes” (Cerchione 1976). Ferguson concluded that Facsimile No. 1 was not Abraham being sacrificed on an altar by the idolatrous priest of Elkenah but rather Osiris being embalmed by Anubis for the next life. The Joseph Smith papyri were merely various kinds of Egyptian “funeral texts” (Barney 1984). This precipitated Ferguson into the last major period of his life.

#### BECOMING A CLOSET DOUBTER

One researcher, the anti-Mormon Wesley P. Walters, obtained Ferguson’s permission to describe his disillusionment concerning Joseph Smith and the Book of Abraham but was not allowed to specify his name: “One life-long defender of Joseph Smith made his own independent investigation of Joseph’s ability as a translator of Egyptian records, utilizing recognized Egyptologists without telling them a word about the issues that were at stake. Their verdict agreed with the findings of Mr. Nelson and Dr. Baer. Consequently, he came to reject the Book of Abraham and the claims put forth by Joseph Smith as a translator of ancient languages” (Walters 1973, 45; cf. Walters 1971).

Ferguson’s excitement about authenticating the Book of Abraham turned into a nightmare. His former belief system could not withstand the shock of this disillusionment. Not only did Ferguson’s views of the Book of Abraham radically change, but also, domino-like, his belief in the prophetic status of Joseph Smith and the historicity of the Book of Mormon. Though this kind of chain reaction often occurs, it could be asked if Ferguson was justified in making this jump, that because the Book of Abraham cannot be considered a translation of any of the rediscovered papyri that, therefore, the Book of Mormon also was not an inspired translation of an ancient document.

Church members who privately disbelieve fundamental tenets of the Church, but who remain actively involved have been labeled “closet doubters” (Burton 1982, 35; Burton 1986, 2). Typically this state of skepticism is preceded by an extended period of strong belief in those same tenets. Ferguson’s doubts during the last fifteen years of his life have been difficult to document with the evidence at hand. When the Thomas Stuart Ferguson papers arrived at the Lee Library at Brigham Young University after his death, they contained absolutely no letters after 1967 that indicate his views on the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, or Joseph Smith. Eight innocuous Ferguson letters written after November 1967 were included in his papers because they were intermingled in folders on NWAFF matters. As far as the present collection at BYU is concerned, the fifteen-year period before his death

is a blank. In contrast with his publication record in the 1940s, 1950s, and early 1960s, Ferguson published no new articles or books after 1967, nor did he reprint any of his previous work. If it were not for letters he wrote, the last years of his life would remain unknown. Some of these letters have been collected and are available in the H. Michael Marquardt collection in the Marriott Library at the University of Utah.

The years 1969 and 1970 are a documentary blank with no known letters by Ferguson. Perhaps these two years were a period of reflection and soul-searching. His crisis of faith must have been intense, for what emerged was a different Tom Ferguson.

Early in December 1970, near the end of this two-year period, Ferguson visited Salt Lake City. As if to dramatize torn feelings, Ferguson bared his soul to people at opposing ends of the theological spectrum—on the one hand, the liberal apostle, Hugh B. Brown, and on the other hand, the anti-Mormons, Jerald and Sandra Tanner. Precisely what was said between Brown and Ferguson cannot be determined. Ferguson's story is consistent, but it does not correspond exactly with a statement by Brown. According to Ferguson, he visited Brown at Church headquarters and reviewed the translations the Egyptologists had done of the Joseph Smith papyri. In this private conversation, Ferguson offered his conclusion that Joseph Smith did not have "the remotest skill" in translating Egyptian hieroglyphs. Ferguson reported Brown's unexpected response: "To my surprise, one of the highest officials in the Mormon Church agreed with that conclusion when I made that very statement to him" (Ferguson 1971b).

In another account Ferguson reported the following: "After reviewing the evidence with Brother Brown he said that Brother Brown agreed with him that it was not scripture. He did not say or infer [imply] that it was his evidence that convinced Brother Brown of this conclusion. But nevertheless, he did say that Hugh B. Brown did not believe the Book of Abraham was what the church said it was" (Barney 1984).

The Hugh B. Brown papers in the Church archives are restricted, so no light is forthcoming from that source. The following is the only available paragraph of a partial photocopy of a letter purportedly dictated by Brown and sent to Robert Hancock four years after the event: "I do not

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<sup>4</sup> Every available expression from Ferguson himself should be utilized to understand his thinking during this period. At present twenty-three letters and a 1975 study indicate Ferguson's feelings about the Book of Mormon, the Book of Abraham, or Joseph Smith. His firsthand writings provide the best avenue to determine what Ferguson actually believed, and they elucidate the radical change in his thinking. Limitations of space preclude quoting all of the material, but the whole of each letter is available in the Marquardt collection.

recall ever having said anything to Mr. Ferguson which would have led him to think I do not believe the Book of Abraham to be true. This is certainly not the case, for I know, even as I live that Christ is directing this Church and that Joseph Smith was His prophet chosen to restore His Church in its fullness" (Brown 1974). It should be noted that Brown does not address the central question of whether he and Ferguson discussed Joseph Smith's inability to translate Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Later that same day in December 1970 Ferguson went to the home of Jerald and Sandra Tanner in Salt Lake City (Ferguson 1971a). According to their report, he discussed with them his repudiation of the Book of Abraham and his rejection of the authenticity of the Book of Mormon and stated that he had "spent 25 years trying to prove Mormonism, but now finds his work to have been in vain" (Tanner 1970). The twenty-five years mentioned would encompass the period from his first trip to Mexico in 1946 through 1970. This would indicate that Ferguson continued to struggle during the last three years to prove Mormonism.

Ferguson's skepticism became public a year and eight months later when the Tanners published an account of his visit with them in the revised edition of *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality*:

At that time [2 December 1970], Thomas Stuart Ferguson told us frankly that he had not only given up the Book of Abraham, but that he had come to the conclusion that Joseph Smith was not a prophet and the [sic] Mormonism was not true. He told us that he had spent 25 years trying to prove Mormonism, but had finally come to the conclusion that his work had been in vain. He said that his training in law had taught him how to weigh evidence and that the case against Joseph Smith was absolutely devastating and could not be explained away. (Tanner and Tanner 1972, 103)

Ferguson never issued any kind of retraction or revision to this account. He frankly discussed his new views in answer both to letters sent to him and to direct questions. However, Ferguson did not promulgate his ideas aggressively, and he sometimes remarked that he wanted to keep his views confidential. Tom Ferguson, in a sense, identified himself as a closet doubter—though one who was willing to write letters from his closet.

#### THE LETTER-WRITING CLOSET DOUBTER<sup>4</sup>

Direct knowledge of the changed Ferguson dates from a 13 March 1971 letter to James Boyack of Lexington, Massachusetts. In answer to Boyack's questions, Ferguson wrote the following about Hugh Nibley's work on the Book of Abraham: "Nibley's *Era* articles on the Book of Abraham aren't worth a tinker—first, because he is not impartial, being

the commissioned and paid defender of the faith. Second, because he could not, he dared not, he did not, face the true issue: ‘Could Joseph Smith translate Egyptian?’ I clipped every one of his articles, and have them in a single file—and I have reviewed them—looking in vain for that issue” (Ferguson 1971b; cf. Nibley 1968-70).

Ferguson felt that Nibley’s attempt “to explain away and dodge the trap into which Joseph Smith fell” was absurd. He also suggested to Boyack that he read the *Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar*, which was made by Joseph Smith “during his struggle with the Egyptian papyrus” (Ferguson 1971b). He suggested that by study of the *Egyptian Alphabet and Grammar* and the recently discovered papyri “it is perfectly obvious that we now have the original manuscript material used by Jos. Smith in working up the Book of Abraham.” Then, summarizing the disparity between Joseph Smith and the four Egyptologists, Ferguson discussed the problem from the standpoint of a lawyer examining the credibility of evidence and witnesses:

Joseph Smith announced, in print (*History of the Church*, Vol. II, page 236) that “one of the rolls contained the writings of Abraham, another the writings of Joseph of Egypt. . . .” Since 4 scholars, who have established that they can read Egyptian, say that the manuscripts deal with neither Abraham nor Joseph—and since the 4 reputable men tell us exactly what the manuscripts do say—I must conclude that Joseph Smith had not the remotest skill in things Egyptian-hieroglyphics. (Ferguson 1971b; cf. Nibley 1975, 2)

To Ferguson another critical issue in Church history was Joseph Smith’s first vision and the recent studies of Dean C. Jessee and Paul R. Cheesman. He recommended to Boyack that “if you haven’t done so, I suggest you read, analyse, and even chart the very important data” published in Jessee’s article on “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith’s First Vision” (Ferguson 1971b; cf. Jessee 1969). Three months earlier Ferguson is reported to have said that, when “the strange accounts” of the first vision were published by Jessee and Cheesman, his faith was devastated, for “they had plucked all the feathers out of the bird and shot it, and there it lies ‘dead and naked on the ground’” (Tanner 1970; cf. Cheesman 1965).

Ferguson also told Boyack that he had tried unsuccessfully to locate a photocopy of a recently discovered article published in the *Evangelical Magazine and Gospel Advocate*, which provided contemporary details of Joseph Smith’s March 1826 examination before a justice of the peace. He explained: “In [March] 1826 Joseph Smith was 21 [20] and at this point was midway between the FIRST VISION and 1830. What a strange time to be convicted of fraud—fraudulently getting money after

convincing the victim that he could detect the whereabouts of hidden treasure on the victim's land. Wow. . . . It is as genuine and sound as can be—published right in Joseph Smith's own camp" (Ferguson 1971b, emphasis in original).

Ferguson told Boyack that he also was "maintaining membership because of the many fine things the Church offers. But the facts speak for themselves. I offered the data available to my Stake Pres. [Joseph R. Hilton] recently and he walked away without it—saying he didn't want to read it. They can hardly excommunicate us when they won't look at the evidence" (Ferguson 1971b). Ferguson ended his letter, observing that naturally "the dodge as to the Book of Abraham must be: 'WE DON'T HAVE THE ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPT FROM WHICH THE BOOK OF ABRAHAM WAS TRANSLATED,'" but Ferguson insisted that the original papyri had been found and competent translations were now available (Ferguson 1971b, emphasis in original).

Ferguson also wrote to Jerald and Sandra Tanner the same day, telling them that he enjoyed his previous visit with them and intended to be in Salt Lake City in June, and if so, he would visit them again. He expressed his admiration to the Tanners and continued:

In writing to Boyack, I want to send him a photo copy of the newspaper article (1830—I think) which was published in the Palmyra area, giving a detailed report on the Josiah Stool [Stowell] charges and trial of JS [Joseph Smith] in connection with those charges. You provided me with a copy of that news article—which is one of the most damning things turned up yet. I can't find it—someone probably ran off with it. Please send me another. (Ferguson 1971c)

The article, written by Abram W. Benton, was published in 1831. Ferguson's reaction to the Benton article was that it was "one of the most damning things turned up yet." Hugh Nibley's assertion was similar: "If this court record is authentic it is the most damning evidence in existence against Joseph Smith" (Nibley 1961, 142, emphasis in original). The original of Justice Albert Neely's bill concerning "Joseph Smith The Glass Looker" and constable Philip M. De Zeng's bill concerning his arrest was discovered in July 1971, and they establish the existence of the examination before Neely and the essentials of the published court record (Walters 1974, 124, 129-30; cf. Hedengren 1985, 195-234).

In answer to a letter from Wesley P. Walters of Marissa, Illinois, Ferguson replied on 6 July 1971 that he had not decided whether the bad in the Church outweighed the good and, consequently, he was not prepared to engage in "open warfare" (Ferguson 1971d; cf. Walters 1971). He explained to Walters his current view about prophets:

Right now I am inclined to think that all of those who claim to be “prophets,” including Moses, were without a means of communicating with deity—I’m inclined to think that when Moses was on top of the mount, he was talking to himself and decided that the only way he could get the motley crowd at the bottom of the slope to come to order and to listen to him and to heed him was to tell them that he had talked to God on the mount. If this view is correct, then prophets are nothing more than mortal men like the rest of us, except they saw a great need for change and had the courage to say they had communicated with God and had received a message for man, and were believed (though false in the basic claim that the message came from God and not from man). (Ferguson 1971d)

After asking if Walters had read Eric Hoffer’s *True Believer*, Ferguson continued: “Right now I think Hoffer comes very close to the truth about the prophets and organized religions. Right now I am inclined to think that all who believe in ‘prophets’ as true agents of God are being spoofed—but perhaps for their own good and welfare. When Joseph Smith crash-landed, a lot came down with him, as I see it” (Ferguson 1971d; cf. Hoffer 1951). The vivid imagery of an airplane’s crash landing is not further explained by Ferguson.

Ferguson did not want to be associated with an attack on anyone’s religious beliefs. Attacking Mormonism, in his opinion, would very likely produce more harm than good. Harold H. Hougey of Concord, California, wrote to Ferguson in May 1972, reminding Ferguson that he had predicted in a 1961 letter that Book of Mormon cities would be positively identified within ten years. Since ten years had passed, Hougey was inquiring as to the present state of archaeological confirmation of the Book of Mormon (Hougey 1972). Ferguson’s answer was succinct: “Time has proved me wrong in my anticipation. No such identification can yet be made” (Ferguson 1972). Hougey later asked Ferguson’s permission to quote this statement (Hougey 1975). Denying Hougey’s request, Ferguson said:

All elements of religion that are supernatural (including the endless string of miracles in the New Testament) are fabrications of men like Joseph Smith. . . . Further, I presently believe that Mormonism is as good a brand of supernatural religion (which sells well) as any other—including Protestantism. At the present time I am inclined to believe that supernatural religion, selling as it does, does more good than it does harm (although this is highly debatable). . . . In my opinion the average Protestant and the average Catholic is as blind to basic truths as is the average Mormon. If I were going to attack Joseph Smith, I would want to attack your beliefs, involving the supernatural, as well as the Mormon beliefs. (Ferguson 1975b)

Ferguson told Hougey that he admired his search for the truth but admonished him to work just as hard in searching for problems in Protestantism as he was in looking for difficulties in Mormonism.

Ferguson felt that if Hougey would do this, he would either reject them both or “come to the point of view to which I have come—even though untrue, they [Protestant Christianity and Mormonism] do more good than harm” (Ferguson 1975b).

#### FERGUSON'S 1975 ARCHAEOLOGICAL PAPER

Early in 1975 David A. Palmer organized a symposium on Book of Mormon geography in which selected LDS scholars could discuss and criticize the geographical theories of V. Garth Norman and John L. Sorenson (cf. Sorenson 1985). Ferguson was invited to participate and prepared a twenty-nine-page response dated 12 March 1975. This document reveals Ferguson's perception of “the big weak spots” involved in archaeologically authenticating the Book of Mormon (Ferguson 1967a). To Ferguson the four “most demanding and exacting tests” were the existence of appropriate plant life, animal life, metals, and scripts. Ferguson stated that his major criticism of the Norman and Sorenson papers on Book of Mormon geography was that neither of them applied “any of these more significant and truth-testing factors to their hypotheses” (Ferguson 1975a, 2).

In what he called the “Plant-Life Test,” Ferguson presented quotations from the Book of Mormon mentioning barley, figs, grapes, and wheat, then repeated the same list and attached the word “none” to each to indicate that no known evidence supports the existence of these plants in Mesoamerica.

Ferguson then continued:

This negative score on the plant-life test should not be treated too lightly. An abundance of evidence supporting the existence of these plants has been found in other parts of the world of antiquity. The existence of numerous non-Book-of-Mormon plants (maize, lima beans, tomatoes, squash etc.) has been supported by abundant archaeological findings. . . . Art portrayals in ceramics, murals and sculptured works—of ancient plant life—are fairly commonplace. (Ferguson 1975a, 6-7)

Ferguson was less than fair to the Book of Mormon, since neither “figs” nor “grapes” are found other than in biblical quotations—Isaiah 5:2-4 at 2 Nephi 15:2-4 and Matthew 7:16 at 3 Nephi 14:16. Ferguson assumed that since the terms were used by Nephi and Jesus, the people must have known the meaning of the terms. The lack of evidence supporting the existence of wheat is still a major difficulty, but there is a single report of barley (Sorenson 1985, 184; cf. Matheny 1984).

In the “Animal-Life Test” Ferguson presented Book of Mormon quotations for the ass, bull, calf, cattle, cow, goat, horse, ox, sheep, sow

(swine), and elephant, then repeated the same list, emphatically adding with each of the items the word “none.” He qualified the verdict on elephants because there is no evidence contemporary with the time indicated in the Book of Mormon.

Ferguson then commented:

Evidence of the foregoing animals has not appeared in any form—ceramic representations, bones or skeletal remains, mural art, sculptured art or any other form. However, in the regions proposed by Norman and Sorenson, evidence has been found in several forms of the presence in Book-of-Mormon times of other animals—deer, jaguars, dogs, turkeys etc. The zero score presents a problem that will not go away with the ignoring of it. Non-LDS scholars of first magnitude, some who want to be our friends, think we have real trouble here. That evidence of the ancient existence of these animals is not elusive is found in the fact that proof of their existence in the ancient old-world is abundant. The absence of such evidence in the area proposed for our consideration in this symposium is distressing and significant, in my view. (Ferguson 1975a, 12-13)

In the “Metallurgy Test” Ferguson quoted passages from the Book of Mormon that refer to bellows, brass, breast-plates, chains, copper, gold, iron, ore, plow-shares, silver, swords, hilts, engraving, and steel, and then repeated each metal, metallurgical skill, or product, and added that there is no evidence for that item.

Ferguson then remarked:

Metallurgy does not appear in the region under discussion until about the 9th century A.D. None of the foregoing technical demands are met by the archaeology of the region proposed as Book-of-Mormon lands and places. I regard this as a major weakness in the armor of our proponents and friends. (It is just as troublesome to the authors of the other correlations—those [who] have gone before—including Tom Ferguson.)

I doubt that the proponents will be very convincing if they contend that evidence of metallurgy is difficult to find and a rarity in archaeology. Where mining was practiced—as in the Old Testament world, mountains of ore and tailings have been found. Artifacts of metal have been found. Art portrays the existence of metallurgical products. Again, the score is zero. (Ferguson 1975a, 20-21)

The last test—the “Script Test”—is the most important because it involves the identification of the translatable inscriptions of a people. Ferguson suggested that inscriptions ought to be found in cuneiform (for the Jaredites) and Hebrew and Egyptian (for the Nephites). Since no cuneiform inscriptions have ever been discovered, Ferguson discussed the evidence for Hebrew in a letter from George F. Carter, professor of geography at Texas A&M University: “A seal found at Tlatilco (suburb of Mexico City) bears the Hebrew name, *Hiram*, apparently in Egyptian script! . . . A cylinder seal found at Tlatilco,

Mexico, bearing a Hebrew name, *Hiram!* Wow!” (Ferguson 1975a, 24, emphasis in original).

In Carter’s letter he quoted the entire translation of the Tlatilco seal as made by the maverick scholar, Barry Fell: “Seal of King Shishak Hiram. Forgers will be decapitated” (Carter 1975). Fell’s identification and translation have not passed the scrutiny of other scholars, and so the purported evidence from Tlatilco must be ignored.

Ferguson next discussed Egyptian inscriptions:

Egyptian: 3 glyphs on a 3-inch cylinder seal, found at Chiapa de Corzo, State of Chiapas, Mexico, by the New World Archaeological Foundation. Identified as Egyptian by only one great scholar, William Foxwell Albright (now deceased). Identification seriously questioned by other great scholars—because of the limited number of glyphs in the find. (Probably the biggest strike so far in support of our proponents—and the *only one* in this technical and demanding testing of their hypotheses). (Ferguson 1975a, 24, emphasis in original)

Ferguson admitted that the identification of Egyptian hieroglyphs is strongly questioned by other scholars, but he uncritically accepted the identification of the Chiapa de Corzo seal and the translation of the Tlatilco seal.

Ferguson concluded with the remark that the meager amount of specific support for the Book of Mormon left him in a dilemma and referred to Dee Green’s statement that it is a myth to think that Book of Mormon geography is known, since “*no Book of Mormon location is known with reference to modern topography*” (Green 1969, 77, emphasis in original). A year later Ferguson described his own paper as being a study “pointing up Book-of-Mormon problems raised by archaeology” (Cerchione 1976; cf. Ferguson 1976d). Ferguson explained that “the real implication of the paper is that you can’t set Book of Mormon geography down anywhere—because it is fictional and will never meet the requirements of the dirt-archaeology” (Ferguson 1976b). In Ferguson’s view the Book of Mormon does not relate to the real world.

Ferguson told LDS Church employee Ronald Barney about the following episode which occurred during an NWAf meeting sometime after 1967, and probably after he had prepared his 1975 study:

Ferguson felt that he really made a point in telling me about his experience with the New World Archaeological Foundation after rejecting the Book of Mormon. He said that at one of their professional meetings he presented a list of some claims that the Book of Mormon made concerning the material culture that

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<sup>5</sup> Elsewhere he used the terminology “myth-fraternity” and “great fraternity” in referring to the LDS church (Ferguson 1976a; Barney 1984).

ought to have remained if there really was a Book of Mormon people in Central or South America. . . . He said that the leading men there could offer no explanation as to why these things did not exist in archaeological digs. The lack of these artifacts was a very important evidence to him that the Book of Mormon was a fanciful attempt at creating the divine here on the earth. (Barney 1984)

In 1984 Ray T. Matheny, professor of anthropology at Brigham Young University, summarized the state of the problem in a way very similar to Ferguson by saying that “all these paint a scene that seem[s] to be quite foreign to what I am familiar with in the archaeological record of the new world” and the Book of Mormon exhibits “19th century literary concepts and cultural experiences one would expect Joseph Smith and his colleagues would experience” (Matheny 1984, 25, 31; cf. Sorenson 1985).

#### MORE LETTERS BY THE CLOSET DOUBTER

Ferguson was sympathetic with the role of religious myth in people’s lives. In a 9 February 1976 reply to a letter from Mr. and Mrs. Harold W. Lawrence of Providence, Utah, Ferguson wrote that individuals need to believe in something, for “otherwise we face the abyss of death and extinction. . . . Joseph Smith tried so hard he put himself out on a limb with the Book of Abraham, and also with the Book of Mormon. He can be refuted—but why bother when all religion is based on myth, and when man must have them, and his is one of the very best” (Ferguson 1976a).

Ferguson compared the refuting of religious myths to abolishing medical placebos. He was convinced that overall both placebos and religious myths do much more good than harm. Ferguson then advised the Lawrences: “Why not say the right things and keep your membership in the great fraternity, enjoying the good things you like and discarding the ones you can’t swallow (and keeping your mouths shut)? Hypocritical? Maybe. But perhaps a realistic way of dealing with a very difficult problem. There is lots left in the Church to enjoy—and thousands of members have done, and are doing, what I suggest you consider doing” (Ferguson 1976a).

Ferguson pointed out that throughout recorded history political leaders have “used” religion for the good results that it produces—personal peace and orderliness in family and national affairs. He attributed one of the main factors for the high crime rate in modern society to the breakdown of religious mythologies. Ferguson saw no value in fighting religious myths—either the Mormon myths or any others that produce more good than bad. Since he felt he had been deceived by the Church through Joseph Smith, he advocated counter-deception: “Perhaps you

and I have been spoofed by Joseph Smith. Now that we have the inside dope—why not spoof a little back and stay aboard?” (Ferguson 1976a).

Ferguson explained that he wished to stay in Mormonism for reasons valid to him, and he valued his social participation in the Church. The broad-minded Ferguson advised the Lawrences:

Belonging, with my eyes wide open, is actually fun, less expensive than formerly, and no strain at all. I am now very selective in the meetings I attend, the functions I attend, the amounts I contribute etc. etc. and I have a perfectly happy time. I never get up and bear testimony—but I don't mind listening to others who do. I am much more tolerant of other religions and other thinking and feel fine about things in general. You might give my suggestions a trial run—and if you find you have to burn all the bridges between yourselves and the Church, then go ahead and ask for excommunication. The day will probably come—but it is far off—when the leadership of the Church will change the excommunication rules and delete as grounds non-belief in the 2 books mentioned [the Book of Abraham and the Book of Mormon] and in Joseph Smith as a prophet etc. . . . but if you wait for that day, you probably will have died. It is a long way off—tithing would drop too much for one thing. (Ferguson 1976a)

Ferguson told them not to worry about the tithing being paid by the members, since he thought the LDS church was as free from monetary corruption as any human organization and almost all the money went back to the members in one form or another. He then recommended a short reading list to the Lawrences: *Mormonism: Shadow or Reality* (Tanner and Tanner 1972), *The True Believer* (Hoffer 1951), *No Man Knows My History* (Brodie 1971), and “The Early Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision” (Jessee 1969). Since these items significantly affected Ferguson, he evidently felt that they would be valuable for the Lawrences to read.

In March 1976 Ferguson received a letter from John W. Fitzgerald about Dee Jay Nelson and N. Eldon Tanner's reputed refusal to publish Nelson's translation of the Joseph Smith Egyptian papyri. Ferguson replied: “I wonder what really goes on in the minds of Church leadership who know of the data concerning the Book of Abraham, the new data on the First Vision, etc. . . . It would tend to devastate the Church if a top leader were to announce the facts” (Ferguson 1976c; cf. Fitzgerald 1976).

On 3 December 1979 Ferguson wrote a letter to James Still of Salem, Oregon, in which he said that he had “lost faith in Joseph Smith as one having a pipeline to deity” and had consequently concluded that no one ever had such a pipeline. Still he perceived that some religions were better than others: “I believe that judaism was an improvement on polytheism; Christianity was an improvement on Judaism (to some

degree and in some departments only); that protestantism is an improvement on Catholicism; that Mormonism is an improvement on protestantism. So I give Joseph Smith credit as an innovator and as a smart fellow” (Ferguson 1979).

He explained that he attended meetings, sang in the ward choir, and very much enjoyed his Church friends. In fact, Ferguson considered Mormonism “the best fraternity”<sup>5</sup> he was aware of—“too good to try to shoot it down—and it is too big and prosperous to shoot down anyway (as [the] Tanners ought to figure out)” (Ferguson 1979).

Ferguson apparently still found some of his former evidence significant. He defended his honest use of the English translation of *Ixtlilxochitl*, which he had not altered to better fit the Book of Mormon account. Though he could offer no explanation as to how it could have come about, Ferguson speculated that “Joseph Smith may have had *Ixtlilxochitl* and *View of the Hebrews* from which to work” in the production of the Book of Mormon (Ferguson 1979). Though he wondered “how Joseph Smith got his hands on *Ixtlil*,” he had been able to establish that Oliver Cowdery was a member of Ethan Smith’s congregation in Poultney, Vermont, before meeting Joseph Smith (Ferguson 1979).

Still had asked whether there was any possibility of getting back the tithing he had paid to the Church. Ferguson gave him some legal advice and told him that under the law a delivered gift could not be recalled: “Pay your money to a church & take your chances that the church is true or on the right track” (Still 1979b).

Another letter illuminates Ferguson’s point of view in the early 1980s. On 15 September 1981 Ferguson wrote to Burt Stride of San Jose, California, agreeing with him in loving the Church while not accepting many of its doctrines. Ferguson had concluded that “Mormonism, although from the mind of a 25-year old frontiersman, is probably the best brand of religion on the market today,” and then listed what he liked about the Church:

It is a bargain—free of fraud (monetary fraud, that is) in that money put in comes back to the people in the form of chapels, temples (modern-day awe-inspiring architecture and furnishings like the castles and cathedrals of old), welfare, great choirs, a great university, etc., etc. . . . The money is not going into the pockets of an elite. The people probably get a greater return for their money than in any other major organization in the world! Further—the program of the LDS Relief Society is one of the most advanced, most benevolent, most serving, most educational and worthwhile programs in the history of mankind. The LDS priesthood program is excellent, though somewhat dull—lots of room for improvement, but it beats anything found in any other religion. The youth programs of the LDS Church are little short of fantastic. The missionary program puts tens of thousands of young LDS in close and intimate touch with cultures and people all over the

world. They return home as citizens of the world. The health program of the Church is one of the modern wonders.

Ferguson said the Church had “the best available brand of man-made religion,” and that he did not ever plan to leave it. With all these positive aspects of Mormonism, Ferguson still felt that “the evidence against the validity of certain of the basic supernaturals in the Church” had grown to such a degree that it would be unwise for Church leaders to risk a public debate on these issues (Ferguson 1981).

On 4 January 1983, a little more than two months before his death, Ferguson met Ronald Barney at the LDS Historical Department. Barney told Ferguson he knew of his various publications and asked if he knew how Jerald and Sandra Tanner were using his 13 March 1971 letter to James Boyack. This letter contains Ferguson’s earliest known denial of the authenticity of the Book of Abraham. Barney recorded in his journal that Ferguson “began to shift in his chair, got pale and acted as if I was a General Authority that had caught him committing adultery. He apologized all over the place, said the Tanners were creeps, etc.” After Barney expressed his concern for open discussion, Ferguson disclosed his current beliefs: “After having once been once [sic] a defender of the faith he now totally rejects the divine intervention of God in the workings of the affairs of men” (Barney 1983). Also at this time Ferguson said that he “liked the church very much” and saw no reason to leave as others do, since he “didn’t see God in any of the churches” (Barney 1984; cf. Ferguson 1980).

A few days later on 10 January 1983, Ferguson wrote to Barney, providing the details of his historical investigations into possible connections between Oliver Cowdery and Ethan Smith, author of *View of the Hebrews*, a suggested possible source of influence on Joseph Smith:

Since Oliver Cowdery was born in 1806 and was in Poultney from 1809 to 1825, he was resident in Poultney from 3 years of age until he was 19 years of age—16 years in all. And these years encompassed the publication of *View of the Hebrews*, in 1822 [1823] and 1825. His three little half sisters, born in Poultney, were all baptized in Ethan Smith’s church. Thus, the family had a close tie with Ethan Smith.

Ferguson was also working on the even less likely connection between Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon in the late 1820s. He had notified Barney of the whereabouts of letters by a grandson of Sidney Rigdon and hoped to receive copies of them soon. Barney recorded in his journal that Ferguson was diligently “trying to find material on Rigdon to prove his theory that Rigdon was the genius behind the

church and the actual author of the Book of Mormon" (Barney 1983).

Thomas Stuart Ferguson's last known letter was written 1 February 1983 to Ron Barney. Ferguson reminded him of his interest in the material about Rigdon and thanked him for bringing to his attention some recent articles in *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* (Van Wagoner and Walker 1982; Russell 1982). The last known paragraph written by Ferguson illustrates his persisting inquisitiveness: "I am continuing my research. It is fun and stimulating. I will look forward to meeting with you on my next trip to Salt Lake City" (Ferguson 1983b).

These final two letters, together with Barney's journal and reminiscence, confirm Ferguson's critical views just two months before his death. This crucial testimony functions like a kingpin to tie the last fifteen years together and is comparable to the Wesley P. Lloyd diary, which reports the non-historical view of the Book of Mormon held by B. H. Roberts just two months before he died (Roberts 1985, 22-24).

These items have additional importance because *The Messiah in Ancient America* includes, as an appendix, a biographical account of Ferguson mingled with a history of the New World Archaeological Foundation. The author is not identified, but the appendix ends "with his [Ferguson's] testimony of the Book of Mormon. In 1982, the year before he died, he included a photo and testimony in several copies of the Books of Mormon that he distributed to non-Mormons." The tribute then quotes a two-paragraph testimony:

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 . . . Jesus Christ. And it seems to us that there is no message that is needed . . . 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. (Warren and Ferguson 1987, 283)

This testimonial is typed, includes a photograph of Ferguson and his wife, and speaks as "we," thus suggesting that it was part of the family-to-family Book of Mormon program (Ferguson and Ferguson 1982). However, Ferguson's last two letters and Barney's journal and reminiscence make it clear that this testimony should not be adopted as Ferguson's final position on the Book of Mormon.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> This is not the place to review *The Messiah in Ancient America*, but since the title page presents Thomas Stuart Ferguson as a coauthor with Bruce W. Warren one must examine this posthumous attribution of authorship (Warren and Ferguson 1987). Paul

## THE CONTRIBUTION OF TOM FERGUSON

Ferguson was a man of contrasts. His early enthusiasm for the Book of Mormon, exemplified in his 1957 assessment: "To me, the Book of Mormon is like a sleeping volcano, ready to burst forth with knowledge of greatest import for the whole world" (1957a), changed in the last decade and a half of his life into a skeptical view that placed the source of all Book of Mormon activities in the creative mind of Joseph Smith.

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R. Cheesman in the foreword to the book states that due to the additions of Bruce W. Warren the book "should reinstate Thomas Stuart Ferguson as a source of enrichment in the fields of study concerning Mesoamerica and the *Book of Mormon*" (Warren and Ferguson 1987, xi). Why would the "additions" of one author improve one's opinion of the other? Why does Ferguson need to be "reinstated"? Bruce W. Warren in the preface states that Ferguson "had begun to revise his book *One Fold and One Shepherd*" and Warren agreed to finish this revision. What evidence is there that Ferguson revised *One Fold and One Shepherd*, and what direction did this revision take? Warren also states that the new book was intended as "a tribute to Thomas Stuart Ferguson and his abiding testimony of the Book of Mormon and the divinity of the Messiah, Jesus the Christ" (Warren and Ferguson 1987, xiii). Since the clear evidence in his letters indicates that Ferguson denied the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the divinity of Jesus, it is deceptive for Warren to speak of his "abiding" testimony.

Ferguson wrote *One Fold and One Shepherd*, and page after page of verbatim extracts from this book are indeed contained in *The Messiah in Ancient America*. Sometimes meaningless statements in the latter can be explicated by reference to the original statement in the former (e.g., Warren and Ferguson 1987, 33, and Ferguson 1962b, 204). Warren often hints that both authors are writing *The Messiah in Ancient America*. Careful analysis sometimes delimits the reference to only Warren or Ferguson, but not both. In one passage concerning volcanoes, the use of "we" implies their united voice, but Warren wrote the entire section. In another instance the "we" is an anachronistic inclusion of Warren in a pre-1958 conversation between Ferguson and Floyd Cornaby, whom Warren has never met (Warren and Ferguson 1987, 44-45, 161; cf. Ferguson 1958b, 95). Warren's total association with Ferguson during the last fifteen years of his life consisted of a five-minute conversation in 1979. At the time of his death Ferguson had not written a single word in a manuscript of revision. His only work on the contemplated revision was about twenty ideas for updating, jotted on small 3M "Post-it" notes. One of these notes suggested including the influence of Ethan Smith's *View of the Hebrews* on the text of the Book of Mormon, but this controversial subject is never mentioned in Warren's revision, *The Messiah in Ancient America*, even though Ferguson's radical view on this point was independently supported by Ron Barney. So, while the new book contains thousands of Thomas Stuart Ferguson's words, they represent his position when *One Fold and One Shepherd* was published in 1958 or 1962, not his ideas in 1983.

If the book were intended to be a tribute to Ferguson, it should have been dedicated to his memory, rather than have his name printed on the title page as a coauthor. Wishful thinking and fond memories do not change the way things had changed in Ferguson's thinking. *The Messiah in Ancient America* attributes fresh authorship to Ferguson, and this kind of an attempted reinstatement of the pre-Book-of-Abraham-papyri Ferguson is a gross misrepresentation of his real views.

After many years of archaeological investigations, Ferguson, disappointed by not finding the long-hoped-for confirmation of the Book of Mormon, concluded that the book was “fictional” and that “what is in the ground will never conform to what is in the book” (Ferguson 1976b). Ferguson decided that he could not suspend judgment and remain forever tentative because the evidence was not all in. His skepticism, however, was not a cold cynicism, since he remained hopeful that convincing evidence might come forth and he wished that the situation were otherwise than what he perceived it to be. At the end of his 1975 study of Book of Mormon geographical problems, he voiced this hope: “I, for one, would be happy if Dee [Green] were wrong” about there being no Book of Mormon geography at all (Ferguson 1975a, 29).

Ferguson was friendly and outgoing. He possessed a dynamic personality and an enthusiasm that was contagious. Though he was an amateur and not an academic, he was an independent thinker who plunged into his cause. Ferguson was the indispensable force behind the founding of NWAf in 1952, and this is perhaps his most lasting contribution. The professional archaeological investigations of the now defunct NWAf into the origins of the high civilizations of Mesoamerica owe much to the initial work of Ferguson. Ferguson’s books and articles published from 1941 to 1962 demonstrate his love of the Book of Mormon and his early efforts to corroborate it, for he published only one non-Book-of-Mormon study during his lifetime (Ferguson 1948b; cf. F. Nelson 1987). During the 1950s and early 1960s he was a very popular speaker at firesides, institute gatherings, sacrament meetings, and education weeks. Perhaps, because of his longtime public stand, he found it difficult to publish a reversal during the last years of his life. He had put an immense amount of time, money, and energy into authenticating the Book of Mormon. The disappointment must have been acute; for the resulting changes in his attitude were monumental.

Although Ferguson rejected the historicity of the Book of Mormon and the Book of Abraham, he still advocated Mormon values. There is no evidence that ecclesiastical action was taken to either disfellowship or excommunicate him for his unorthodox beliefs. Perhaps Ferguson’s case shows the real danger—and futility—in trying to use archaeological evidence to prove theological dogma, since religious faith ought to be based on an inner conviction not on external evidence.

Given his disillusionment, one must give Ferguson credit for having resolved his dilemma to his personal satisfaction, for he was at peace with himself and often spoke of the need to consider the big picture. It would be grossly unfair to Ferguson to say that he completely lost faith in Mormonism. He continued his activity in the Church and justified

his behavior on various social, cultural, and moral grounds. He saw many things useful in religions, and Mormonism was to him the most useful. Though Ferguson doubted that Joseph Smith could translate Egyptian texts, though he repudiated the Book of Abraham, though he rejected the historicity of the Book of Mormon, though he questioned that Joseph Smith or anyone else had a pipeline to God—still he dearly loved his wife and children, considered the Church to be a wonderful fraternity, valued Church activity and fellowship, sang in his ward choir, appreciated the high moral principles of the Book of Mormon, became much more broad-minded and tolerant of other opinions, felt that religious principles served an important need in human life, found relaxation in working in the garden, and enjoyed life immensely. In fact Thomas Stuart Ferguson was playing tennis when a massive heart attack brought immediate death on 16 March 1983 at the age of sixty-seven. All who knew him were saddened at his passing.

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