

A Can of Worms

You're collapsed with ho, ho, ho, guzzling a cup of joe, and while you're at it, I dare you to put a hex on sex. No Mormon theme or symbol here, just a romp with language, which brings me to my point: I extol *Dialogue* for daring to diverge in its spring 1997 issue on the "new Mormon scholarship" and would like to comment specifically on "Don't Fence Me In: A Conversation about Mormon Fiction," where the interviewees say that frolicking with language and aesthetics in fiction is paramount to frolicking with Mormon themes. (Those who think the term "new Mormon scholarship" is an oxymoron, please control that twitch. Again, no symbolism here.)

I am no English major nor am I into literary criticism, I think deconstruction is youth who vandalize. Besides, according to Michael Austin, "only faithful Mormons can criticize Mormon literature as faithful Mormons" (*Dialogue*, Winter 1995, 144), and I'm not sure what constitutes a faithful Mormon or if I'm one (temple-recommend-worthy? wait a minute, I know of people with temple recommends who lie, cheat, beat their spouses, or commit adultery). I merely seek to express some observations.

Before I begin, I also think that Darrell Spencer, mentioned in the article that all the participants were his students, is one of the finest fiction-writing instructors, having been guided, encouraged, and restructured through those first pitiful drafts of fiction at the School of Spencer. Unknowingly he opened a new world for me when others had closed down.

To begin, I notice that Sean Ziebarth (SZ) categorized Mormon fiction into three groups: the Gerald

Lund, Jack Weyland group; the Eugene England, Doug Thayer, Levi Petersen group; and the group that if Mormon nuances creep in, it's coincidental and accidental, the group the interviewees say they fit. I see this categorization as a type of taxonomic nomenclature, a labeling and pigeonholing of sorts. It's a curious human habit that we naturally pigeon-hole while at the same time resist being pigeon-holed, as evidenced in these remarks, which I recognize have different teleological bases. David Seiter (DS) said that he "would hate to be pigeon-holed on a dust jacket," and SZ said, "Calling our work 'Mormon fiction' really puts it in danger. I didn't even want to do this interview for fear of being pigeon-holed, for fear of scrutiny, even though I haven't published a book yet." In another quote, DS said, "Redemption can be rich subject matter; it's interesting stuff. I'm fighting this classification, the labeling of redemption as a necessarily 'Mormon' part of our fiction." From one perspective, these remarks indicate how grouping and labeling seem to preoccupy Mormon literature, Mormon fiction writers and readers (and Mormon literary critics), as well as fiction readers, fiction writers, and literature at large. Michael Austin seems to have matriculated Mormon literature nomenclature to an art form (*Dialogue*, Winter 1995, 131). Do we spend undue time and energy on classifying and desire or resistance at being classified? Great art is great art. For me, the simpleton that I am, a rose is a rose and would smell as sweet if called by any other name, but then I'm no literary critic.

Students of Spencer learn that a brush stroke is only a brush stroke, that fiction is only fiction, words and

language on a page, and that only reality is reality. In other words, art is not reality. In other words, according to DS, fiction is not to teach people how to live, reducing it to a vehicle. Sam Cannon (SC) said, "The way I think about fiction and doctrine is dichotomized really; they are two separate things." SZ agreed, saying that he reads doctrine through fiction, not fiction through doctrine. Joanna Brooks (JB) said that she believes "words can be inspiring and inspirational without having any actual reference to real life and material evidence." On the other end of the spectrum, SZ's first two groups "are very concerned with message and meaning—significant themes and symbols," according to DS.

I see that *Dialogue's* mission statement is for the expression and examination of Mormon culture and the relevance of religion to secular life—to bring the LDS faith into dialogue with the larger world of religious thought and human experience and to foster artistic and scholarly achievement based on the LDS cultural heritage. In reference to these objectives, I searched high and low for traces, whispers, even a breath of LDS culture in the stories by SC and SZ, two finely wrought pieces finely fraught with aesthetics and language. But did I miss the LDS subconscious and unconscious in these stories? Don't get me wrong—there is plenty of human doctrine through fiction here, just not LDS doctrine—maybe it's Raymond Carver or John Barth doctrine instead.

I harbor no qualms about this fiction, only that this fiction is found in our finer secular publications: *Esquire*, *The New Yorker*, *Harper's*, the Pushcart Prizes, the *Best American Short Stories* (this is a subliminal and sublime compliment, SC and SZ). My question is:

does Mormon culture need a forum for literary fiction with explicit or implicit LDS themes, symbols, and signs? If we do, what more expansive, professional publication than *Dialogue* to effectuate this forum?

Or does Mormon literature seek to mesh into mainstream literary fiction as Philip Roth and Salman Rushdie have? This question then opens a can of worms—what is Mormon literature, why isn't it recognized for its literary value in the wider world, and how can it get there from here? Maybe we just need really smart, savvy advertising, marketing, a *New York Times* book reviewer who is Mormon (faithful Mormon), and Oprah Winfrey's Book Club to solve all our literary problems.

In the meantime, the cans of worms keep opening.

I'm one lone human who attempts to look at art for art's sake, the process and act of consummation without the innuendoes, and believes that great art can be appreciated, magnified, and inspirational without my being a Pablo Picasso, Igor Stravinsky, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jewish, Muslim, or Mormon. Faithful Mormon even. (I'm thinking I should write a response to Austin's article but JB already has written a fine counter-exchange in *Dialogue's* spring 1997 issue.)

At any rate, I celebrate the fiction editor and all the editors for expanding boundaries in this issue, like raptors, birds of prey, that do not hover on land too long, spending as much as two-thirds of their lives in flight, sometimes flying over two continents. Talk about expanding.

Sarah L. Smith
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Response to Brigham D. Madsen,
No. 1

In his article, "Reflections on LDS Disbelief in the Book of Mormon," in the fall 1997 issue of *Dialogue*, Mr. Brigham Madsen reveals his prejudices of the Book of Mormon and Joseph Smith more clearly than his ability to marshal cogent arguments attempting to refute the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

He first takes the position that since B. H. Roberts apparently refuted the book's historicity, therefore other LDS church members of a lesser stature should follow his lead in refuting it. Indeed, we are informed that there are at least "thousands of disbelievers" even today apparently already following Roberts's example. These may be truthful statements but hardly a good reason for doubting the historicity of the Book of Mormon.

He then uses Roberts's example of the anti-Christ to support his contention that Joseph Smith was the book's author. Are not all anti-Christ's basically cut from the same cloth? What is so difficult or unusual about believing that indeed they all are "of one breed and brand"? That hardly proves Joseph Smith was its author.

He then makes the bold statement that according to "the Book of Mormon narrative New World settlement by the Nephites around 600 BCE [was] the means by which the New World was occupied by the ancestors of the American Indians." Who says so? Certainly not the Book of Mormon. Although Joseph Smith himself apparently believed that "the remnant" of the Lamanite people "are the Indians that now inhabit this country" (*The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, comp.

and ed. by Dean Jessee, p. 215), and probably many, if not most, members of the LDS church also believe this, a critical analysis of the Book of Mormon itself combined with our current understanding of modern archeological data of the ancient Americas actually lead one to conclude that the Nephite and Lamanite civilizations were quite geographically limited and probably accounted for only a very small percentage of all of the New World inhabitants at that time. Therefore, the majority of modern Native Americans are most likely descendants of other, non-Book of Mormon peoples. This conclusion certainly does not mitigate the historicity of the book. The Book of Mormon never claims to be an all-encompassing history of the entire Western Hemisphere. Nothing in the book discounts the likelihood that other civilizations were already in existence in the Americas when Lehi's small group arrived there. The fact that Joseph Smith and other prominent nineteenth-century LDS church leaders probably believed and taught that all Native Americans were descendants of the Lamanite people and that the Book of Mormon history geographically encompassed the entire Western Hemisphere, instead of a much smaller area most likely located in Mesoamerica, actually strengthens the historicity of the book: even Joseph Smith did not probably completely comprehend all that this extraordinarily complex book contains or implies, let alone author it (within sixty working days without any subsequent, substantial changes)!

In regards to Madsen's domesticated animals argument, since when did the absence of archeological evidence conclusively prove something

never existed? In fact, Madsen himself points out how Roberts was limited in his ability to scientifically evaluate the Book of Mormon because of the scarcity of archeological information in his day and that has subsequently been discovered since his death. Surely Mr. Madsen is not suggesting that we now have all the archeological evidence we will ever have and need to conclusively prove or disprove domestication of animals in ancient America.

Next, Mr. Madsen quotes a writer who has discerned a "peculiar dictation sequence" within the Book of Mormon that "points to Smith as the narrator's chief designer." Surely Mr. Madsen is aware of the results of many wordprint studies on the Book of Mormon (John Hilton and Kenneth Jenkins, "On Maximizing Author Identification by Measuring 5000 Word Texts," Provo, UT: FARMS, 1987), some by non-LDS researchers, all demonstrating with a high degree of statistical probability that there were indeed multiple authors of the Book of Mormon. If we can accept the facts concerning the actual transcription and printing process of the Book of Mormon, over a relatively short period of time, as historically accurate, then how does Mr. Madsen propose that multiple authors wrote that book in the early nineteenth century? Is it any easier to believe that Joseph Smith was so brilliant he could actually fake his fictional writing in such a way as to fool twentieth-century state-of-the-art computer stylometry?

Finally, Mr. Madsen reveals his own misgivings and prejudices about Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon most clearly by asking if there were "really gold plates and ministering angels." This seems to be the crux of the issue: he, and many others like

him, simply cannot accept the truth of spiritual manifestations, either in modern times or in times past. But this is certainly not a new thing. History has repeatedly shown that people usually rejected God's prophets and their teachings: Christ was crucified at the hands of non-believers, and many of the ancient Jewish prophets were either denounced or ignored by their own people. But then spiritual manifestations can only be recognized and understood by those receptive of the same inspiration, and such things need not be proven scientifically or, as Mr. Madsen phrases it, disproved by "some horrible historical discovery [that] would expose ... Joseph Smith" and the Book of Mormon as fraudulent.

In the end, the Book of Mormon contains a wonderful spiritual message for those who "have ears to hear and eyes to see," and which I and millions of others have accepted as true. Not only do we believe the divine origin of the Book of Mormon exactly as Joseph Smith explained, but more importantly we believe in its doctrinal message and accept it as another testament of Jesus Christ.

I also wish to respond to a second article in the same issue by Ronald V. Huggins entitled "Did the Author of 3 Nephi Know the Gospel of Matthew?" The answer is a simple "yes," God inspired the recording of both accounts. No uninspired human can state unequivocally that "it is no longer possible to regard 3 Nephi 12-14 as a record of an actual sermon that was delivered before first-century Nephites by the resurrected Jesus." How Joseph Smith actually translated the gold plates has never been made known. It's not difficult to accept he was inspired to use the Matthew version of the sermon in

our King James Bible to translate what Jesus actually said to the Nephites, the same way he may well have been inspired to use Isaiah's book when translating much of 2 Nephi. Members of the LDS church believe Matthew was inspired by that same spirit when he penned his work, regardless of whatever source material he used, and presumably Mr. Huggins does also. Therefore, I would agree with his last sentence with only one but significant change: "Rather, the Nephi Sermon on the Mount was derived from Matthew, after which certain minor changes were made [as inspired by the Holy Ghost]."

Ed Kingsley
Henderson, Nevada

Response to Brigham D. Madsen,
No. 2

I was angered by your recent (Fall 1997) article by Brigham D. Madsen on the "nonhistoricity" of the Book of Mormon (hereafter abbreviated B of M). I have no objection to his "reflecting" upon a "fictional B of M," but I'm appalled at what appears to be his anti-Mormon "legal brief" in complete support of (1) a fictional B of M, (2) disastrous honest intellectual inquiry by B. H. Roberts into contemporary (1909-21) archaeological support for the B of M, (3) conclusory finality against "traditional" scientific research into historical, tangible, archaeological, philological, etc., support for the B of M à la Hugh Nibley and "traditionalist" defenders of the B of M. The irony is that "recent" archaeology, philology, etc., appear to confirm not only the HISTORICITY, not the "fiction" of the B of M, but also the "fictional" basis of orthodox Christianity itself, thereby rendering a "Res-

toration" against provably apostate orthodox Christianity more likely and necessary.

Why are we bowing all of a sudden to standard anti-Mormon arguments? Who blew the bugles telling us to surrender? Madsen, Roberts? Why are we capitulating NOW to "archaic" anti-M arguments when the new documentary discoveries at Nag Hammadi and elsewhere are demonstrating Joseph Smith to have "restored" original principles of Jesus' gospel, e.g., human pre-existence as pre-mortal "children of Divine Parents" with Jesus as our pre-existent elder "Brother," and recent archaeology has revealed authentic "ancient Hebrew" inscriptions carbon-14 dated to 100 A.D.—AUTHENTIC B OF M TIMES—and certified accurate by world-renown non-Mormon Semitists? Shouldn't intellectual Mormon Christians NOW be attacking orthodox Christian and other error with renewed vigor rather than fleeing the battlefield? I see the proper *Sunstone* symposia and growing *Dialogue* publications NOT as exasperated Mormon intellectuals "fed up" with oppressive church leadership and capitulating to popular scientific and/or historical opinions, but rather as occasions of real scientific and historical expression of solid historical and scientific foundations for Mormon Christian theology and the B of M specifically.

Madsen traces the 1909 Roberts's *New Witness for God* and Roberts's "dramatic change of mind" in 1921 *Studies of the Book of Mormon*, wherein he "concluded that his hero [Smith] was less than a prophet." Then, leaving his subject, B. H. Roberts, Madsen steps boldly forward to review "seventy-five years" worth of most recent New World archaeology, reciting

ONLY the CONCLUSIONS of some non-Mormon scientists, and failing to mention at all the Bat Creek, Tennessee, authentic stone inscription written in Hebrew about 100 A.D.—a significant archaeological datum wholly in favor of B of M ancient Hebrew marine excursions from Palestine to Tennessee about 100 A.D. Madsen concludes his “modern archaeological review” with the damning: “Much to the disquietude of many well-read and reflective Mormons today, the overwhelming evidence of these finds during the last fifty years casts grave doubts, if not outright disbelief, about the ‘Book of Mormon as history’” (91). Spoken like a true anti-Mormon, but completely overlooking Bat Creek and other recent archaeological evidence I shall recite hereinafter plainly disputing Madsen’s exclusively “Asiatic origins” across the Bering Strait landbridge—the very theory lampooned as “biased” by my Cyrus H. Gordon pronouncement, *infra*. Roberts may have been “sick at heart himself because of his discoveries based on the scholarly developments of his day.” But what has THAT to do with the “scholarly developments” OF OUR OWN DAY? Madsen is apparently unwilling to do what Roberts himself reluctantly suggested in the quotation, middle of page 93, i.e.: “boldly acknowledge the difficulties ..., confess that the conclusions of the authorities are against us, but notwithstanding all that, ... take our position on the Book of Mormon and place its revealed truths against the declarations of men, however learned, and await the vindication of the revealed truth.” What’s wrong with “awaiting” new scientific and/or historical evidence which may be forthcoming in the future, although absent at earlier times? If Roman Ca-

tholicism can “await” many centuries before receiving its scientific quietus at the hands of Copernicus et al., can we not “await” a mere seventy-five years for scientific and historical confirmation of Mormon theology and the B of M which is already proceeding apace? Writes Madsen, “Many members of the Mormon church teeter on the edge of the precipice of Book of Mormon historicity. They hang onto their beliefs and loyalty despite harassments and sometimes ludicrous pronouncements from church leaders until suddenly they discover what many suspected all along—‘all that he [Joseph Smith] did as a religious teacher is not only useless, but mischievous beyond human comprehending’” (95). (“Awaiting,” as we suggest herein, must necessarily delay such “sudden” conclusions based upon deficient science and incomplete historical development. Doesn’t “faith” demand as much?)

I suggest we refuse to conclude, as apparently did Madsen, that there exist presently “overwhelming scientific proofs of [the] fictional character” of the Book of Mormon. We simply research anew and again in light of the book’s many “Old World” characteristics and “truly ancient” scientific evidences. New World archaeology remains in its infancy. Even Madsen admits that archaeology itself didn’t have serious scientific foundations until 1949 with the invention of carbon-14 dating (91). Why the rush to judgment, especially a catastrophically disastrous and wholly unnecessary judgment which may turn out to be entirely incorrect in light of modern scientific developments undreamt of before now?

I recite here two recent manuscript and/or archaeological discover-

ies which lend full credence to the B of M as an ancient authentic Semitic text and/or Smith's claim to "restore" original teachings of Christ. The first is the "Bat Creek" stone inscription in ancient Hebrew apparently deposited during B of M times (about 100 A.D.) after sailing from Palestine to North America.

Archaeological Evidence Supporting "Ancient Hebrew Marine Excursions" as Depicted in the B of M. It would appear that the "real reason" the Smithsonian Institution has "failed to consider" the B of M seriously is its own pervasive bias against any notion of "floating" settlement, oceanic immigration, or mariner excursion depicted in the B of M. Their own institutional bias limits them to consideration of ONLY the Bering Strait landbridge as the sole source of pre-Columbian immigration to the New World.

In an article published by the eminent non-Mormon authority Cyrus H. Gordon, "A Hebrew Inscription Authenticated" (in J. M. Lundquist and S. D. Ricks, eds., *By Study and Also By Faith*, Vol. 1, Deseret Book, 1990, 69-80; see also Gordon's, "The Bat Creek Inscription," in *The Book of Descendants of Dr. Benjamin Lee and Dorothy Gordon*, Ventor, NJ, Ventor, 1972, 5-18), wherein Gordon speaks of the so-called "Bat Creek Tennessee Old Hebrew inscription" discovered in 1889 by a Smithsonian Institution expedition headed by Cyrus Thomas at Bat Creek Mound #3, Loudon County, Tennessee, which was "state of the art" carbon-14 dated to be from 32 A.D. to 769 A.D. (a scientific dating which was refused to be undertaken earlier because Thomas stoutly refused to characterize the text as Old Hebrew, mistakenly attributing it to local Cherokee "mound building" Indians), Cyrus Gordon establishes the

"milestone" in his view of conclusively established scientific evidence supporting ancient Jewish immigration from Old World to Tennessee about 100 A.D. For the details of the carbon-14 dating and other aspects of the dig, see J. Huston McCullough, "The Bat Creek Inscription: Cherokee or Hebrew?" *Tennessee Anthropologist* 13/2 (Fall 1988). In the first cited reference above, Cyrus Gordon relates:

The stone was carved either ca. A.D. 100 in the Old World, or aboard ship, or in America by someone trained in the tradition of that [Old Hebrew] script, some time after the refugees landed in what is now the eastern United States. By the time of its interment in Bat Creek Mound #3, it might have been passed down as an heirloom for several generations. But the carbon-14 test proves that the burial took place over seven centuries prior to Columbus' discovery in 1492. The letter-forms imply cultural contact between American and Palestine ca. A.D. 100. The inscription cannot be a modern forgery on the one hand, nor can it be pre-Christian on the other. CYRUS THOMAS HAD AN AX TO GRIND. His theory was that the Mound Indians (including everybody buried at sites like Bat Creek) were the same people as the local Indians (notably the Cherokees) of modern times. He PUBLISHED THE INSCRIPTION UPSIDE-DOWN and called it Cherokee (in the script invented by Sequoyah around 1821). Neither Thomas nor those who have agreed with him have attempted to translate any of the text. A few amateurs, in the midtwentieth century, matched up two or three of the letters correctly by comparing them with published Phoenician alphabet charts. My friend, Dr. Joseph B. Mahan, Jr. consulted me on the Bat Creek Inscription in 1970. He

was convinced that the letters were Phoenician, after he had compared them with an alphabet chart in the Cambridge Ancient History.

No one had been able to make any sense of the text either as Phoenician/Hebrew or as Cherokee. I was the first Semitist to study the text and read the sequence LYHWD [] "for Judea." I favored attributing the migration to the Bar Kokhba Rebellion, partly because three different Bar Kokhba coins had been found at three widely separated sites, at quite different times, in the neighboring state of Kentucky. One of the coins might possibly be a modern copy, but the other two cannot easily be accounted for that way. There are traces of Jewish influence in pre-Columbian America. We may single out the Tepatlaxco (Veracruz) Stele (ca. 100-300) showing a Mayan wearing phylacteries; the arm windings are seven in number and are followed by finger windings. This monument is noteworthy because no scholar, in any field, has ever questioned its authenticity or pre-Columbian date. To be sure, the AMERINDIAN EXPERTS DID NOT DETECT THE OLD WORLD ORIGIN OF THE RITUAL DEPICTED AND VERY FEW ARE EVEN NOW AWARE OF IT. The Bat Creek Inscription is important because it is the first scientifically authenticated pre-Columbian text in an Old World script or language found in America, and, at that, in a flawless archaeological context. It proves that some Old World [NOT MERELY "OLD WORLD," BUT SPEAKING THE "OLD HEBREW" LANGUAGE!] people not could, but ACTUALLY DID, CROSS THE ATLANTIC TO AMERICA before the Vikings and Columbus ("A Hebrew Inscription Authenticated," 70-71, emphasis added).

That's pretty good "substantive" archaeology from Cyrus Gordon. In-

deed, it is scientifically proven and absolutely conclusive evidence of the actuality of ancient Hebrew marine excursions between Palestine and Tennessee around 100 A.D. But I'm concerned not only with the fact that in his view the 1889 Smithsonian expedition director, Cyrus Thomas, "had an ax to grind" against Gordon's (now dominant, we suppose) view of ancient and numerous marine excursions between Old World and New World continents. Not only did Thomas have such an anti-mariner bias in 1889, so also did the head of the Smithsonian Institution throughout most of the twentieth century, who likewise shared that (now conclusively destroyed—and wholly by non-Mormon scholars with impeccable credentials!) erroneous bias. Continues Gordon,

It is instructive to outline the CHANGES IN "AUTHORITATIVE" OPINION DURING THE LAST HALF CENTURY. In the 1930's, leading anthropologists and historians were insisting that the earliest remains of man in the Western Hemisphere were less than two thousand years old. Now the evidence is pushing mankind in America further and further back into remote pre-Christian millennia. Between 1935 and 1938, when I was stationed at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, I often visited the SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION in nearby Washington, where I met the elderly and influential dean of American archaeology, Ales Hrdlicka. His DOGMA was that Old World man entered Pre-Columbian America by ONLY ONE ROUTE: across the Bering Strait. UNLESS A YOUNG ANTHROPOLOGIST SUBSCRIBED TO THAT VIEW, IT WAS VIRTUALLY IMPOSSIBLE FOR HIM TO GET A MUSEUM OR UNIVERSITY JOB IN AMERICAN ANTHROPOLOGY OR AR-

CHAEOLGY. THIS EXPLAINS SOME OF THE INFLEXIBILITY IN THAT FIELD DOWN TO THE PRESENT. Gradually evidence for Pacific crossings found its way into respectable circles, but until now the denial of Atlantic crossings before Columbus and the Vikings is still common in academia. McCullough has demonstrated that AS LONG AS THE BAT GREEK INSCRIPTION WAS CONSIDERED CHEROKEE, NO ONE QUESTIONED ITS AUTHENTICITY. It was only after I found it to be Hebrew that the pundits began to brand it as a forgery. But the laboratory tests in 1988 show that all the contents of the undisturbed tomb were interred long before the Vikings and Columbus reached America, while the letterforms establish the Imperial Roman date of the script. Similarly, the lead content of the brass bracelets supports the Roman date, once the modern date is ruled out. ... Not long ago, New World civilization was regarded as quite independent of developments in the Old World. The fact that no pre-Columbian inscription in an Old World script or language was regarded as authentic in respectable academic circles enabled the independent inventonists to maintain that pre-Columbian civilizations in America had arisen in isolation from the rest of the world. The carbon-14 dating of the Bat Creek wood fragments ushers in a new era in which anyone who is not an obscurantist will have to accept not just the possibility but also the actuality of specific contact between the Eastern and Western hemispheres long before Columbus and the Vikings. THE FULL STORY MAY TAKE A LONG TIME TO UNFOLD, BUT THE FACT OF GLOBAL DIFFUSION IS HERE TO STAY. Moreover, interrelations are two-way streets. Apparent pre-Columbian influences of the Western Hemisphere on the Eastern have been pointed out

(mainly, but far from exclusively, by amateurish enthusiasts) and disregarded, if not discredited. THE HISTORIC FACTS OF WEST-TO-EAST AS WELL AS EAST-TO-WEST DIFFUSION ACROSS BOTH OCEANS WILL FORCE BLIND DENIAL TO GIVE WAY TO OPEN-MINDEDNESS. THE AUTHENTICATION OF THE BAT CREEK INSCRIPTION IS A MILESTONE IN THE PROCESS OF FORMULATING A CREDIBLE UNIFIED GLOBAL HISTORY (*ibid.*, 76-78, emphasis added).

I single out the "Smithsonian Institution" for criticism (as Gordon himself did) herein because most anti-Mormons have relied upon and used repeatedly (with or without the latter's knowledge and consent) a 1-page letter vintage 1950s, if recollection serves me, upon Smithsonian Institution letterhead exclaiming there to exist "no substantial archaeological" (I paraphrase) evidence in New World archaeology supporting Mormon Christian claims. In light of Gordon's scathing indictment of Smithsonian Institution structural bias against such Mormon Christian claims as mentioned above, we can now hardly take that criticism as accurate or valid.

New Manuscript Evidence Supporting Mormon Christian Claims of an Apostasy of Early Christianity. Let's begin with important revelations given to Joseph Smith in the 1840s, e.g., pre-existence of all humans as real pre-mortal, tangible, material "Children of Heavenly Father" (and his wife, we don't hear much about her in a patriarch-dominated Hebrew society, culture, and scriptures), then check back into the history of early Christian literature to see if in fact any literary evidence exists to corroborate "independently" what Joseph has revealed as purported

divine revelation to him, i.e., is there ANY early Christian documentary evidence to support Smith's purported revelation?

And when we check with the earliest Christian documents, what do we find, e.g., with respect to this important doctrine of human pre-birth pre-existence as tangible children of Heavenly Father? Interestingly we find TONS of early Christian literature precisely in point—early Christian literature which was intentionally EXCLUDED from the New Testament for reasons obvious to anyone not a Catholic or a believer in the Greek-dominated "creeds." Here are a few examples of Jesus' own words verifying his direct teaching of human pre-existence before such a doctrine was largely excluded from the formation process of the New Testament, ultimately excluding them from the Bible:

(49) Jesus said: Blessed (*makarios*) are the solitary (*monakos*) and elect, for you shall find the Kingdom; because you come from it, (and) you shall go there again (*palin*).

(50) Jesus said: If they say to you: "From where have you originated?", say to them: "We have come from the Light, where the Light has originated through itself. It [stood] and it revealed itself in their image (*eikon*)." If they say to you: "(Who) are you?" [or "It is you"], say: "We are His sons and we are the elect of the Living Father". If they ask you: "What is the sign of your Father in you?", say to them: "It is a movement and a rest" (*anapausis*).

(83) Jesus said: The images (*eikon*) are manifest to man and Light which is within them is hidden in the Images (*eikon*) of the Light of the Father. He will manifest himself and His Image

(*eikon*) is concealed by His Light.

(84) Jesus said: When you see your likeness, you rejoice. But (*de*) when (*otan*) you see your images (*eikon*) which came into existence before you, (which) neither (*oute*) die nor (*oute*) are manifested, how much will you [be able to] bear!

(19) Jesus said: Blessed (*makarios*) is he who was before he came into being. ...

WHAT WILL THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN "CREEDS" DO WITH ALL HUMAN BEINGS' HAVING A "PRE-EXISTENT LOGOS" BEFORE THEY WERE BORN INTO FLESH HERE BELOW? WHAT DOES THE LATTER DO TO THE PURPORTEDLY SINGULAR AND UNIQUE "LOGOS" OF CHRIST? (A DOCTRINE JESUS CONCURRED IN, by the way. SEE JOHN 10:34, QUOTING PS. 82:6. WE ARE ALL "CHILDREN OF THE MOST HIGH," JESUS INCLUDED.)

Now the really "interesting" part of this whole historical episode is the fact that the newly discovered Gospel According to Thomas was COMPLETELY UNKNOWN during Smith's entire lifetime, being first discovered in Coptic version at Nag Hammadi, Egypt, in 1945, over 100 years after Smith's death. Even the earliest Greek fragments of the Gospel of Thomas were not discovered until after Smith's death. Could Smith in truth have "restored" ancient Christian teaching from the mouth of Jesus which was ERRONEOUSLY EXCLUDED from the Bible? Yes. Otherwise, how does one explain Smith's remarkable prescience? How could Smith have "known" Jesus' important doctrine of "human pre-existence" unless God in fact had revealed directly

to Smith that "restored" doctrine once taught by Jesus himself, but almost completely omitted from the Bible?

Gerry L. Ensley
Los Alamitos, California

Response to Brigham D. Madsen,
No. 3

In the fall 1997 issue Brigham D. Madsen goes on at some length to demonstrate that the Nephites could not be the sole progenitors of all Native American populations. There is, however, nothing in the Book of Mormon that even suggests that the Americas were unpopulated when the Nephites arrived—indeed, just the opposite. The Lamanites went native—and very quickly were physically quite different in appearance from the Nephites.

The study of pre-Columbian history is fascinating, with more being learned every day. The Clovis culture, for instance, mentioned by Professor Madsen as the oldest known, has now been displaced by an unequivocally older culture (*Science*, 1997, 576, 754). I, for one, am not ready to dismiss the Book of Mormon based on the limited information that we currently have.

Douglass F. Taber
Newark, Delaware

Response to Brigham D. Madsen,
No. 4

Brigham Madsen's article, "Reflections on LDS Disbelief in the Book of Mormon as History," in the fall 1997 issue was quite a surprise. Doubt the LDS church because the Book of Mormon is not a history book? Then I must

doubt Christianity and Judaism because the Bible is not a geology text.

Like the Bible, the Book of Mormon certainly raises questions if we must twist logic and accept it for what it is not. Scripture is only intended to help people hold onto their faith in God and to convince others of the importance of that faith.

Because of this, we look the other way when the Bible shows us the science of the day—Joshua stopping the sun and corners to the Earth.

And while we're at it, which Creation story do you like, Story A or Story B? Figure out exactly the length of the Flood from the various accounts, and, by the way, just how did Noah collect seals and walruses, whales and polar bears, anyway?

So if the Book of Mormon can be torn apart because it does not follow current scientific thought and findings, then rip it to shreds, along with the Bible. (Was there truly a census at the time of the birth of Jesus?)

The LDS church says the Book of Mormon is another witness for Christ, not another history book or science text or anthropology study. The Bible is the first witness, not a zoology textbook.

Yes, the Book of Mormon mentions horses before anyone can document horses in the area some believe the Book of Mormon people settled. The Bible has patriarchs riding camels long before they were domesticated. (Maybe the world's first rodeo occurred when Jacob "set his sons and his wives upon camels.")

One point about the horses. Lehi and Nephi certainly were aware of horses. Could they have brought a couple with them? Or maybe the scribe just wanted to add a dash of excitement to his tales.

And if the anti-Christ's in the Book of Mormon all seem the same, how about the three she-ain't-my-wife-she's-my-sister routines in Genesis (chaps. 12, 20, and 26). Two of those fooled the same king. Yeah, right. That king, by the way, is identified as a king of the Philistines long before Philistines ever lived in the region.

But if the three Book of Mormon characters did come from one brain, perhaps it was the brain of the person who abridged the records. To him, they may have seemed enough alike that in shortening the record he created a blend and moved on. After all, this was less a character analysis than a documentation that these kinds of people exist and they all eventually suffer similar fates.

The other point that surprised me was Madsen's unwavering faith in his scientific information.

While he acknowledges that "the literature on the peopling of America is so enormous and highly specialized that even experts have a hard time time keeping up with the latest research," he quotes chapter and verse from books written ten years ago.

It may be generally accepted that people were enjoying the New Mexico sunshine 12,000 to 11,000 years ago, but a recent finding in Wisconsin may predate the Clovis sites by 1,000 years. And if all these people dropped in on North America through the door of our refrigerator up north, why has no one found any human bones up there older than about 9,000 years? We should find something older than the Clovis sites farther south, unless they all refused to die until they hit the promised (south) land. Also, what has been found in Alaska suggests the possibility that a sea route may have been preferred to an overland trek, a route Madsen says all experts agree on. Well, maybe all experts used to agree.

Does any of this make the Book of Mormon any more true? Of course not. Does it make it any less true? Not at all. Does it mean we dump all scientific thought into the Bering Strait? No.

One last point. I have never understood that the LDS church (although some members probably believe it) suggests that all native people in North, Central, and South America are accounted for in the Book of Mormon. (Officially, the church has never even said these are the lands referred to in the Book of Mormon.) Just as the Bible is not an account of all peoples, neither is the Book of Mormon. The Bible focuses on a covenant people and their downfall. The Book of Mormon is a record of another downfall.

I suspect that there were thousands of people outside the chapters of the Book of Mormon who arrived in the region at various times and from various places. To Old Testament writers, the Middle East was the world and the covenant people its only inhabitants except when those people interacted with others. A bit narrow-minded, perhaps, but they didn't want all those "others" to get in the way of a good story. Likewise, I believe the Old Testament-era writers who gave us the Book of Mormon were determined to relate a specific story and anyone else out there had to wait to be recognized.

Just a word about B. H. Roberts, a remarkable man and one who questioned, questioned, questioned. God bless him for that, and I'm sure he will. But questions by Roberts and conclusions by Roberts don't constitute dogma. Roberts would be the first to worry about people who worship at the feet of "experts."

Gary Rummeler
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Widow's Weeds

Mary Lythgoe Bradford

Black
is the absence of color
to which the eye adjusts.
Black magnifies the face of
the beloved.

Lavender
is the polite word for purple,
the color of bruises
the color of intoxication,
and of healing.

Grey
is the color of first light
and last light.
The next step after grey
is white.