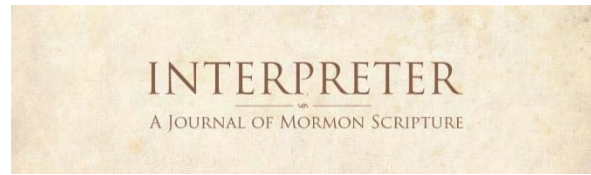




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John L. Sorenson's Complete Legacy: Reviewing *Mormon's Codex*

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John L. Sorenson's Complete Legacy: Reviewing Mormon's Codex

Brant A. Gardner
and
Mark Alan Wright

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JOHN L. SORENSON'S COMPLETE LEGACY: REVIEWING *MORMON'S CODEx*

Brant A. Gardner and Mark Alan Wright

Mormon's Codex: An Ancient American Book is unquestionably a monument to an impressive career defending, defining, and explaining the Book of Mormon. John L. Sorenson has been for the New World setting of the Book of Mormon what Hugh Nibley was for the Old World setting. From his earliest 1952 publications using anthropology and geography to defend the Book of Mormon to the 2013 publication of *Mormon's Codex*, Sorenson has been the dominant force in shaping scholarly discussions about the Book of Mormon in its New World setting.¹ With an impressive 714 pages of text with footnotes, *Mormon's Codex* is physically an appropriate capstone to his long publishing career.

Sorenson's name has become synonymous with a specific geographic correlation between the Book of Mormon and a Mesoamerican geography. Although his is certainly not the only one, the strength of his position is such that it is practically impossible to discuss Book of Mormon geography without referencing his model.² Premier among all other elements of Sorenson's legacy in Book of Mormon studies is the effectiveness of that model. *Mormon's Codex* makes minor modifications

1 David J. Whittaker, comp., "A Bibliography of the Published and Unpublished Works of John Leon Sorenson," *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World: Studies in Honor of John L. Sorenson*, ed. Davis Bitton (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1998), 480.

2 Most interesting is the process of discussing an alternate geography by contrasting it with Sorenson's. Ralph A. Olsen has proposed a Malay site for the Book of Mormon, and says, "In particular, I've focused on the problems associated with the Mesoamerican setting proposed by John L. Sorenson in *Ancient American Setting* (and in many other books and articles), which is currently the hypothesis driving most geographical studies conducted by the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS)." Ralph A. Olsen, "A Malay Site for Book of Mormon Events," *Sunstone*, 131 (March 2004): 34, note 6.

to some of his correlations, but the general thesis continues to be as strong today as it was perhaps a half century or more ago.³

Important to his legacy is the shrinking of the potential Book of Mormon lands from the entire Western hemisphere to a region roughly comparable to the geographic scope of the history of the Hebrews in the Old World. In addition to convincingly arguing for a more limited geography, Sorenson proposed specific sites that might have taken part in the Book of Mormon story. Those archaeological sites were in the approximate correct interrelationship with other locations according to the text, and the sites all dated from the time periods when the Book of Mormon indicates there should be a city in that location. The strength of his correlations has been such that while there may not be agreement on the specifics of some of his site-correlations, better correlations have not been proposed. The general geography has been widely accepted even when some doubt about specific locations might be expressed. The Sorenson limited geography for the Book of Mormon is an important foundation of and monument to his legacy.

The second important aspect of Sorenson's legacy is what he did with the geography after establishing a plausible relationship with the real world. He expanded beyond geography and into the culture and history of that geography to compare it with the Book of Mormon. The first part of the lasting legacy is that it is now a requirement that proposed geographies deal with the human historical element along with the physical features. Any geography that might be argued as plausible but cannot provide similar plausible correlations to the people living in that geography during Book of Mormon times cannot be accepted as a potential location for Book of Mormon events. Sorenson's premise led to a new approach to Book of Mormon studies and influenced others such as the authors of this review to direct their own academic pursuits to those same studies.

For decades, Sorenson's 1985 publication, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*,⁴ has been the only single-volume book that we have been willing to recommend to those interested in how the

3 While Sorenson's publication of the geography came in 1985 with *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, it was in place in the manuscript for that book at least a decade earlier. At least the general outline of the geography appears to date back to the 1950s.

4 John L. Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1985).

Book of Mormon relates to the New World. Importantly, that publication has been the only recommended single book for nearly forty years. Of course, there has been substantial new information about Mesoamerica discovered in the years since the book was written.⁵ After so much time and with the availability of additional data, an update has been sorely needed.

Mormon's Codex is very much an updated version of the earlier book rather than a new work. Although the structure of the two books differs, the same general topics are treated. In many cases, what were sections inside of chapters in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* have become standalone chapters in *Mormon's Codex*. As one would hope and expect, a quick perusal of the dates for the publications cited in the 2013 book show a large number that are more recent than those in the 1985 book. However, the expansion takes the form of additional evidence for the foundations laid in his *Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Other than the addition of the chapter on transoceanic voyages, little new ground is plowed.

At its best, *Mormon's Codex* amplifies support for the best arguments found in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Many of those are found in "Part 3: Correspondences from Archaeology and History." This is the strongest section of the book. While we have some reservations on various specifics, the overall arguments provide a good picture of how one might see the Book of Mormon as having taken place in a Mesoamerican geographical and cultural setting. Chapter 3, "The Book of Mormon in Culture History Terms," is an excellent overview and should not be skipped. Chapter 4, "The Early Culture History of Mesoamerica," also provides a good overview of Mesoamerican cultural history without specific correlations to the Book of Mormon.⁶ Because so many of Sorenson's ideas have stood the test of time, his prominence

⁵ *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* was essentially written a decade prior to its publication, though some new references were added closer to its publication date. As a point of comparison, the early 1970s not only saw the essentially completed manuscript for *An Ancient American Setting* but also saw the beginnings of the widespread efforts to use the understanding of the phonetic elements of the Maya glyphs. The explosion of information which has followed the translation of many Maya texts was unavailable when Sorenson published his 1985 book. Those translations have dramatically revolutionized our understanding of the Maya.

⁶ A more recent overview of Mesoamerican cultures can be found in Mark Alan Wright, "The Cultural Tapestry of Mesoamerica," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 22/2 (2013): 4-21.

in the field is unlikely to be challenged in the foreseeable future. The breadth of his work and the remarkable timespan that work covers may never be equaled.

Nevertheless, even Sorenson has not been immune to starting down trails that have led to dead ends. While the beginnings of these trails can be seen in his early works and are apparent to the careful reader of *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, some of those misfires have become more obvious and lamentable in *Mormon's Codex*. We hasten to add that while we suggest a necessary pruning of some of the many branches of Sorenson's thought, this in no way diminishes the importance of the many ideas he puts forth that continue to withstand the test of time and further research.

Cautions in Reading Mormon's Codex

The first important caution when reading *Mormon's Codex* is simply that it really is Sorenson's Codex. It is a monument to the expanse of his vision, but it is also limited by an insistence on focusing on only his own vision. *Mormon's Codex* shows Sorenson continuing to comb sources for more evidence to support the theses laid out in his earlier works, but he has paid little or no attention to those LDS scholars who have built upon his foundation. This makes *Mormon's Codex* a monument to Sorenson, not necessarily to the state of current Book of Mormon studies about its place in the ancient world.

One of the continuing geographic issues for a Mesoamerican correlation is the presence of two Mesoamerican rivers that are candidates for the Book of Mormon Sidon: the Grijalva and the Usumacinta. While Sorenson argues for the Grijalva, others strongly defend the Usumacinta.⁷ *Mormon's Codex* does not recognize that discussion and

7 See V. Garth Norman, *Book of Mormon Geography — Mesoamerican Historic Geography*. A graphic of the map is available at <http://www.ancientamerica.org/library/media/HTML/7hvlmli5/bookofmormon20MAP.htm>. A review of this geographic model is provided in Lawrence L. Poulsen, "'The Light is Better Over Here,' Review of 'Book of Mormon Geography — Mesoamerican Historic Geography' by V. Garth Norman," *FARMS Review* 19/2 (2007): 11-20; F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon: Settlements and Routes in Ancient America* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1988), 121; John E. Clark, "A Key for Evaluating Nephite Geographies (Review of F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*)," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 1 (1989): 20-70; William J. Hamblin, "A Stumble Forward? (Review of F. Richard Hauck, *Deciphering the Geography of the Book of Mormon*)," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon*, 1 (1989): 71-77; Jerry L. Ainsworth, *The Lives and Travels*

makes no attempt to resolve it. *Mormon's Codex* presents Sorenson's opinion without defending it against any possible contrary evidence. Not only does Sorenson neglect to engage LDS scholars with a different position, but he also totally ignores LDS scholar Lawrence Poulsen's work that provides more in depth support for Sorenson's Grijalva/Sidon identification.⁸ In this oversight, Sorenson misses the opportunity to strengthen his argument.

An even more controversial aspect of Sorenson's correlation has been the necessity to see "north" in the Book of Mormon as something other than the cardinal direction. *Mormon's Codex* simply finds newer quotations supporting the thesis just as he proposed it in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. Sorenson misses the opportunity to interact with LDS scholars who have at least attempted to provide a stronger cultural underpinning for Book of Mormon directions in a Mesoamerican setting.⁹ Perhaps because he was a lone voice for so many years, Sorenson has failed to consider the merits of the work of other LDS scholars publishing on the same issues.

The second important limitation in *Mormon's Codex* is the continuation of a fundamentally flawed methodology. Sorenson's approach to the cultural data in the Book of Mormon has long rested upon the assumption that Book of Mormon peoples were the source of perceived cultural similarities between Mesoamerica and the Ancient Middle East. Although the causal nature of the relationships was

of Mormon and Moroni (PeaceMakers Publishing, 2000), 81; Jerry L. Ainsworth, "Response to Allens' [sic] Article on River Sidon," Book of Mormon Archeological Forum, accessed February 2, 2015, http://www.bmaf.org/articles/response_allens_river_sidon__ainsworth; Kirk Magleby, "Book of Mormon Model," Book of Mormon Resources, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://bookofmormonresources.blogspot.com/2012/07/book-of-mormon-model.html>.

⁸ Lawrence Poulsen, "The River Sidon," accessed February 2, 2015, <http://bomgeography.poulsenll.org/grijalvasidon.html>; Lawrence Pousen, "The Tale of Two Rivers," accessed February 2, 2015, <http://bomgeography.poulsenll.org/tworivers.html>.

⁹ See Lawrence Poulsen, "Book of Mormon Geography," paper presented at the FAIR (now renamed FairMormon) Conference, August 2008, accessed February 2, 2014, <http://www.fairmormon.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/2008-Larry-Poulsen.pdf>. See also Brant A. Gardner, "From the East to the West: The Problem of Directions in the Book of Mormon," *Interpreter: A Journal of Mormon Scripture*, 3 (2013): 119-53. While this version was likely too late to be included in *Mormon's Codex*, it is essentially a version of a paper of the same name presented at the FAIR Conference in August 2013 at which Sorenson presented an outline of the information that would be included in *Mormon's Codex*.

toned down in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, the undercurrent was there and Sorenson's earlier work that was the foundation for what he wrote in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* was more explicit. At one point, Sorenson states, "The phenomena in the following statement were nearly all shared three ways — in the Book of Mormon (as shown in specific verses, cited in the original paper), in Mesoamerican beliefs, and in Near Eastern thought during Old Testament times."¹⁰ From that original paper, we have the more direct statement that feeds Sorenson's ideas that flow through *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* and will reemerge in their more explicit form in *Mormon's Codex*. The premise re-emphasized reads: "A list of cultural traits is presented which could be found without surprise in a translated Mesoamerican document of codex form. As phrased, these elements are also found in the Book of Mormon or else are attributable to the ancient Near Eastern cultural background which it claims for itself."¹¹

The documentation for these connections has been lists of traits that are described in terms that fit both the Old World and New World context and assert their relevance by the number of such items in the list. That methodology was explicit in an early article prepared for a non-LDS audience.¹² There is a reason that in the four decades Sorenson has been describing such parallels that they have not been widely accepted. It is a methodology that too easily leads to false positives. A non-Book of Mormon related example can be seen in two books Dennis R. MacDonald wrote suggesting the New Testament echoes Homer.¹³ M.D. Hooker notes the methodological issue behind any work suggesting similarities between two different texts (relevant also to the comparison of a text to culture):

10 Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 58.

11 John L. Sorenson, "The Book of Mormon As a Mesoamerican Codex," *Newsletter and Proceedings of the S.E.H.A.*, 139 (December, 1976), 4.

12 In "The Significance of an Apparent Relationship between the Ancient Near East and Mesoamerica," in *Man across the Sea: Problems of Pre-Columbian Contacts*. eds. Carrol L. Riley, J. Charles Kelley, Campbell W. Pennington, and Robert L. Rands (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 227-41, Sorenson provides parallel columns: the first for the described cultural trait, the second a column for Mesoamerica, and the third a column for the Near East.

13 Dennis R. MacDonald, *The Homeric Epics and the Gospel of Mark* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000) and Dennis R. MacDonald, *Does the New Testament Imitate Homer? Four Cases from the Acts of the Apostles* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

To be sure, some of MacDonald's parallels are intriguing, but they cannot on their own provide an explanation of what Mark is doing. Odd details in Mark's narrative do sometimes 'echo' events in Homer's story (like the feast where participants sat in nine units of 'five hundred men') and sometimes provide contrasts (as with the storm, in which Odysseus was awakened but was helpless to do anything). But are these parallels and contrasts deliberate? Or are they accidental? ... After all, as MacDonald admits, 'feasting and sleeping [and] journeys are common in ancient writings; these and other similarities do not require mimesis.' ... One is left wondering why — if MacDonald is right — Mark should have chosen to depict Jesus in this way, sometimes in imitation of Odysseus and sometimes in contrast to him. What would Mark have hoped to achieve? ... MacDonald's suggestion is that he 'crafted a myth to make the memory of Jesus relevant to the catastrophes of his day,' and that he was 'adapting cultural monuments to address new realities' (p. 190). So was Mark's Gospel simply a re-telling of Homeric myth? ... To show that there are similarities in plot and theme between two authors is one thing, to prove dependence is quite another. That there are certain parallels between two narratives is hardly surprising, for similar themes reappear constantly in stories told by very different people. But suggestions that there is deliberate mimesis can easily topple into parallelomania.¹⁴

It would appear that Sorenson acknowledges that any methodology relying upon parallels is currently deemed suspect. Perhaps for that reason he is much more explicit about methodology in *Mormon's Codex*. He suggests:

A promising model for pursuing the question of the Book of Mormon's connection to ancient Mesoamerica was published in 2001. Archaeologist William Dever used it in *What did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* He ... builds his argument by identifying "convergences," specific

14 M.D. Hooker, *Journal of Theological Studies*, 53/1: (196-98); British punctuation revised. Douglas F. Salmon applies the same methodological issues to the explication of LDS scriptures. Douglas F. Salmon, "Parallelomania and the Study of Latter-day Scripture: Confirmation, Coincidence, or the Collective Unconscious?" *Dialogue* 33/2 (2000): 130.

points of agreement between statements in the biblical text and findings by archaeologists. When the sacred written source is supported on a given point by excavational evidence, no explanation for this fact makes sense except that the archaeological datum and the text both refer to the same cultural moment and that the author of the record could not have written as he did without intimate, contemporary knowledge of the area documented in his account of the facts for that time period educed by archaeology.¹⁵

In spite of his admiration for Dever's methodology, Sorenson simply reworks Dever until Sorenson's methodology can continue to be parallel but with a different name. Sorenson suggests: "Dever's term *convergences* has many synonyms — correspondences, parallels, analogies, similarities, agreements, conformities, counterparts, and congruencies. Each has a slightly different shade of meaning. *Convergence* may suggest distinct processes that end up with similar results; *parallel* connotes a general or unfocused degree of similarity; *analogy* points to likeness in form without any particular historical connection implied between the features compared. The comparisons upon which this book relies will usually be called correspondences, *in the dictionary sense of "a particular similarity."*¹⁶

What Dever defined was a means of making comparisons between a text and archaeology that depended upon a close alignment of features and time.¹⁷ In Sorenson's adaptation, a methodological argument becomes a semantic shift from *parallel* to *correspondence*, without a

15 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 7-8. The ellipses represent two and a half paragraphs that were skipped. Sorenson's introduction to Dever is now closer to Sorenson's description of Dever's methodology. Note that this is Sorenson's description, not Dever's words. The authors might restate Dever's methodology differently. Nevertheless, the restatement preserves the need for detailed convergences, where Sorenson's actual use of Dever's methodology is reduced to borrowing the idea of using a different label for what is essentially Sorenson's long-standing use of parallels as a methodological foundation.

16 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 16.

17 William G. Dever notes: "Of course one may object at this point that seeking such 'convergences' was just what the now-discredited older 'biblical archaeology' sought to do. The critical difference between that and what I propose here has to do with the independent but parallel investigation of the two sources of data for history-writing, and the subsequent critical dialogue between them that scholars must undertake." William G. Dever, *What Did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2001), 106.

corresponding shift in essential methodology. It is simply a synonym for parallels, albeit ones that Sorenson suggests might have “a particular similarity.” Fortunately, there are still some of the parallels that hold up even under more rigorous conditions, but *Mormon's Codex* won't help the reader discern between the stronger and the weaker.

The third limitation of *Mormon's Codex* is that it continues to bolster ideas that might have been at least plausible when Sorenson was writing what became *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* but subsequently gathered evidence demonstrates that the original thesis was incorrect. Rather than remove these arguments, Sorenson's update simply searches for more statements that appear to bolster the original thesis. We will examine those that are the focus of whole chapters.

Chapter 9: Transoceanic Voyages

This chapter summarizes an important aspect of Sorenson's academic career. He has long been a champion of transoceanic voyages. In 2009, he and Carl L. Johannessen published a large compendium of evidence of pre-Columbian biological and botanical contact with Old World locations.¹⁸ This chapter pays homage to Sorenson's long interest and work on the topic. The information should be analyzed on its own merits. The problem with this chapter is not necessarily the issue of transoceanic voyages, but what the chapter is doing in this book. The evidence he discusses has no direct relationship to the Book of Mormon. Put simply, the evidence from the right time is from the wrong place, and that which is from the right place is from the wrong time.

Chapter 10: Language

Sorenson is an anthropologist, not a linguist. There is no indication in his writings that he has a deep understanding of historical linguistics or the relevant literature on New World languages. Consequently, he attempts to continue the idea proposed in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon* that there might have been Old World languages in the New World by adding newer sources he believes support his original

18 John L. Sorenson and Carl L. Johannessen, *World Trade and Biological Exchanges Before 1491* (2004; rpt., New York and Bloomington: iUniverse, 2009). In the 456 pages of text, this book provides a literature review of books and articles discussing such contacts, including bibliographic information and short summaries.

thesis.¹⁹ Sorenson wasn't particularly careful with his sources then, citing the now discredited Barry Fell.²⁰ *Mormon's Codex* continues to cite controversial theories. He favorably cites Merritt Ruhlen's massive early language families that are not only controversial but also would only have been applicable far earlier than the Book of Mormon timeframe.²¹ Most disappointing is Sorenson's favorable citation of Michael Xu's suggestions about early Chinese writing in the Americas, a proposal that has been thoroughly discredited.²² We suggest that readers skip this chapter.

Chapter 12: Human Biology

This chapter highlights an important contradiction in Sorenson's thought process. In recent decades, scholars have been able to use DNA reconstructions to establish large patterns of migration among peoples. Thomas W. Murphy suggested that because these studies indicated an Asian origin for New World peoples that there was no room for the Book of Mormon's Near Eastern immigrants.²³ Sorenson responds to that argument in a section entitled "The Indeterminate Nature of Molecular Genetic Data and the Origins of Amerindians."²⁴ The thrust of the section is to explain why these studies of overall genetic patterns cannot be determinative of specific smaller genetic admixtures into populations. This is consonant with the work Sorenson has done to show the limited number of people in Lehi's party who might have supplied their Near Eastern genes into the much larger pool of peoples inheriting the Asian DNA.²⁵ For example, Sorenson discusses "a study of over 131,000 Icelanders and their ancestors back to 1789 ... [which] showed that the majority of people living today in Iceland had ancestors 'that could not be detected based on the Y-chromosome and mitochondrial DNA tests being performed and yet the genealogical records exist showing that

19 Sorenson, *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*, 74-81.

20 Ibid., 80.

21 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 174. Ruhlen knows that his theories are controversial. See Merritt Ruhlen, *The Origin of Language: Tracing the Evolution of the Mother Tongue* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994), 154.

22 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 178-79, 511-12. See Karl Taube, *Olmec Art at Dumbarton Oaks* (Washington, D.C.: Trustees for Harvard University, 2004), 1 note 1.

23 Thomas W. Murphy, "Lamanite Genesis, Genealogy, and Genetics," 52-59.

24 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 247-54.

25 John L. Sorenson, "The Composition of Lehi's Family," in *Nephite Culture and Society*, ed. Matthew R. Sorenson (Salt Lake City: New Sage Books, 1997), 2-24.

these people lived and were real ancestors.”²⁶ From the viewpoint of genetic studies, this is the proper understanding of the relationship of the macro migration trends in relation to micro immigration that might have taken place.

What Sorenson misses is that this argument fundamentally undercuts the rest of what he attempts to do in this same chapter. He opens the chapter with the statement: “Maintaining the position that transoceanic migrants arrived in Mesoamerica demands that we find evidence that ancient humans in that area had biological characteristics that match those of peoples from the Old World.”²⁷ This leads him to look for what he deems European features among Mesoamerican populations, even though his DNA argument is essentially that we shouldn't find them. This appears to be the result of retaining his previous desire to see Book of Mormon peoples as a significant cultural and genetic presence in Mesoamerica.

We particularly note his section entitled “Varied Peoples as Shown in Mesoamerican Art,” which attempts to use artistic representations to suggest there were peoples of fundamentally differing skin pigmentations, include the presumably European-inherited “white.”²⁸ Sorenson makes the mistake of assuming that painted colors necessarily reflect skin pigmentation. Studies of Mesoamerican art show that many of these presumed pigmentation differences are the result of the practice of painting the skin.²⁹ We recommend that readers skip the section on varied peoples as shown in Mesoamerican art.

Chapter 20: Ideology and Religion

In this chapter Sorenson makes explicit his continuation of the parallel list methodology from early years, citing his article in *Man Across the Sea* and “The Book of Mormon as a Mesoamerican Codex.”³⁰ Of the latter he says. “It presented a first version of the argument elaborated in this book. Some 75 correspondences were described and documented under three headings: (1) present in the ancient Near East, (2) referred to in the Book of Mormon, and (3) present in pre-Columbian Mesoamerican cultures.

26 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 250-51.

27 Ibid., 233.

28 Ibid., 236-42.

29 Stephen Houston, David Stuart, and Karl Taube, *The Memory of Bones: Body, Being, and Experience among the Classic Maya* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 22-23.

30 Sorenson, *Mormon's Codex*, 452-53.

In recent years further detailed similarities have been identified.”³¹ The current chapter continues the methodology with more examples. Parallels, even when called correspondences, are too often created by the way the correspondences are described. Frequently, describing the items differently would remove similarities, and also frequently the descriptions simply ignore important differences between the items listed as parallel or corresponding. A particularly important example is Sorenson’s elaboration of his support for the parallels between Quetzalcoatl and Jesus Christ.³² Perhaps because Sorenson has isolated himself from the work of other LDS scholars, he has missed a wider study of the Quetzalcoatl material that explicitly denies the correlation.³³ This entire chapter rests too heavily on an inadequate methodology and should be read only with caution.

In Summary

Mormon’s Codex is intended to summarize a long and important labor explicating the Book of Mormon. It is unquestionably a monument to that career. As with the earlier book it updates, there are important ideas that form the foundation of much of the current work on the relationship between the Book of Mormon and a real world place and time. It represents Sorenson’s best thinking on these topics, but not necessarily the best work currently available in the LDS scholarly community.

Sorenson once provided a brief jacket cover comment for a book which read: “The careful reader of this work is bound to discover a good deal of valuable new information.”³⁴ It was a cautious endorsement because although there were some good things in the book, it required a background in Mesoamerican studies that most careful readers didn’t possess in order to find the “valuable new information.” We can wholeheartedly apply the same recommendation to Sorenson’s *Mormon’s Codex*. There is much in this book that adds new information to the sound arguments made in *An Ancient American Setting for the Book of Mormon*. There is also much that demands a careful reading.

31 Ibid., 453.

32 Ibid., 468-99; 472-78.

33 See Brant A. Gardner, *Second Witness: Analytical and Contextual Commentary on the Book of Mormon* (Draper, UT: Greg Kofford Books, 2007), 5:353-95.

34 Bruce W. Warren and Thomas Stuart Ferguson, *The Messiah in Ancient America* (Provo, UT: Book of Mormon Research Foundation, 1987), back cover.

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