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More Book of Mormon Evidence

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Abstract: The inhabitants of ancient America had Christian traditions in pre-Columbian times and their ancestors crossed the Pacific Ocean in boats, landing somewhere on the coast of present day Mexico.

More Book of Mormon Evidence

By Dr. F. S. Harris, President of the Brigham Young University

INFORMATION concerning Book of Mormon lands is always interesting to those who believe that this book contains a record of the early inhabitants of America.

There have come to my attention recently, two items that are of more than passing interest in this connection. One comes from Professor Carl Maria Kaufmann, who this year is publishing at Munich, in Germany, a book entitled, *Amerika and Urchristentum*. Concerning this book, Leo Frobenius, one of the leading ethnologists of Germany, prophesies that it will create a sensation in the learned world.

Professor Kaufmann has an article in the June 12 number of the *Frankfurter Zeitung Wokenblatt* on Pre-Columbian Christianity in America. This article is summarized in the *Living Age*, for July 19, 1924. In this article, he asserts that his researches convince him that Christianity was understood in America before the voyage of Columbus. The following is a translation from his article:

"Primitive Christianity in America! It sounds like a fairy tale, a figment of the imagination, a flat denial of all that history has hitherto taught us. None the less, the fragmentary remnants of a primitive Christian epoch in America survive to our own day. They have withstood the storms and destruction of a decade and a half of centuries, and are still recognizable despite the blind and brutal efforts of later propagandists of the faith to destroy every record of the culture that preceded their arrival. Today or tomorrow may reveal still further evidence, concealed under the dust and humus of ancient ruins hidden in dense tropical forests, to add to our present knowledge.

"When Spain subdued the more highly

developed races of Central and South America, many records of their earlier civilization had already disappeared. The Christian symbols of the Spaniards impressed the native as something foreign, as alien adoptions to which he must accommodate himself as best he could. Yet many survivals of much older Christian observances had remained a continuous tradition in Peruvian and Mayan ceremonial. Orant remained orant, even under the later Incas, and the cross retained a place in the religious cults of Yucatan and Mexico long after its original significance as a symbol of a Supreme Being, brought to America from an older world, had been forgotten. Nothing could be blinder than to reject these hints, merely because the absence of literary remains among the people in whose midst they persisted leaves many facts regarding them in the realm of conjecture.

"Besides the cross in its different forms, pictures of the dove and of the fish, in association with the cross, were very common as orant symbols in the art language bequeathed America by primitive Christianity. Native pottery, terra cotta, and textiles repeat these motifs in profusion. Orants are depicted on Peruvian pottery, for instance on jars from Trujillo, which to even the superficial observer bear a striking resemblance to Egyptian New Year's jars. Indeed, they copy these so truthfully that they would at once arouse the interest of an excavator fortunate enough to discover them in any of the ancient centres of Christian pilgrimage where similar articles are commonly found.

"I have discovered thousands of these pottery jars at Menapolis with the picture of the Menas orant. From this centre they were carried far beyond the boundaries of the Roman Empire to the remotest part of the then unknown world, to the far north, to the far east, and to the very heart of the Negro kingdoms of Africa upon the Blue Nile, and in Dongola. Nor need we confine ourselves to this single comparison. A remarkable similarity is discernible between certain Menas votive statuettes, especially Libyan female ex-votos, and corresponding figures of ancient American origin.

"I believe traces of Christianity penetrated to Central and South America be-

tween 500 and 1000 A. D., and probably nearer the earlier than the later date. I should place the first preaching of this doctrine in Peru in the fifth or, at the latest, in the sixth century of the Christian era, and plan to present evidence of this in a work which will reproduce all the pertinent monuments of the Peruvian and Mayan civilizations of that period, with intermediate material, particularly from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Columbia.

"In this connection, we must lay stress upon an error into which both earlier and later scholars have fallen, when they accuse the missionary priests of the Spanish Conquest of crude falsification; I mean, not of forging antiquities and monuments, but of consciously and systematically falsifying Indian tradition. They assert that the Jesuits in particular presumed to refine and modify the original polytheism of the natives in both South and North America, in an effort first to represent the native beliefs as originally monotheistic, so as to secure readier acceptance of the Christian conception of the Deity, and second to smooth the way for the conversion of the Indians by a skillful system of suggestive questioning.

"The bewilderment of the missionaries when they discovered among the heathen natives not only old, forgotten Christian symbols, but even the legend that their chief Deity, *Perus Huiracocha*, had come from a land across the ocean and that he was a tall, emaciated man with a long beard, naturally suggested that catechetical device. Even Rudolf Tichudi, who refuses to attach weight to this Indian tradition, finds it very remarkable that the natives handed down the memory of a migration of

strangers into Central Peru, who taught a new doctrine—strangers who, after the conquest by the Spaniards, survived in Indian folklore as apostles and saints.

"Evidences of this tradition were recorded about the year 1585, at the direction of the Corregider Don Luis de Monzon, in the *Relaciones geograficas de Indias*."

Those who are familiar with the Book of Mormon will have no difficulty in seeing why the ancient inhabitants possessed some knowledge of Christianity.

Another article to which I should like to direct attention is entitled, *Archaeological Adventures in Honduras*, by Edmund S. Whitman, published in *Our World*, for October, 1924, pp. 25-29.

This author brings forth evidence that the ancient civilization of the Mayan Indians must have come from Asia. He assumes that those who brought this civilization "set sail from their seaports and were carried 'willy-nilly' across the Pacific by the trade winds, landing eventually somewhere between South America and Lower California, and it is reasonable to believe, on the southwest coast of Mexico."

These deductions are at least interesting to Book of Mormon students.



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